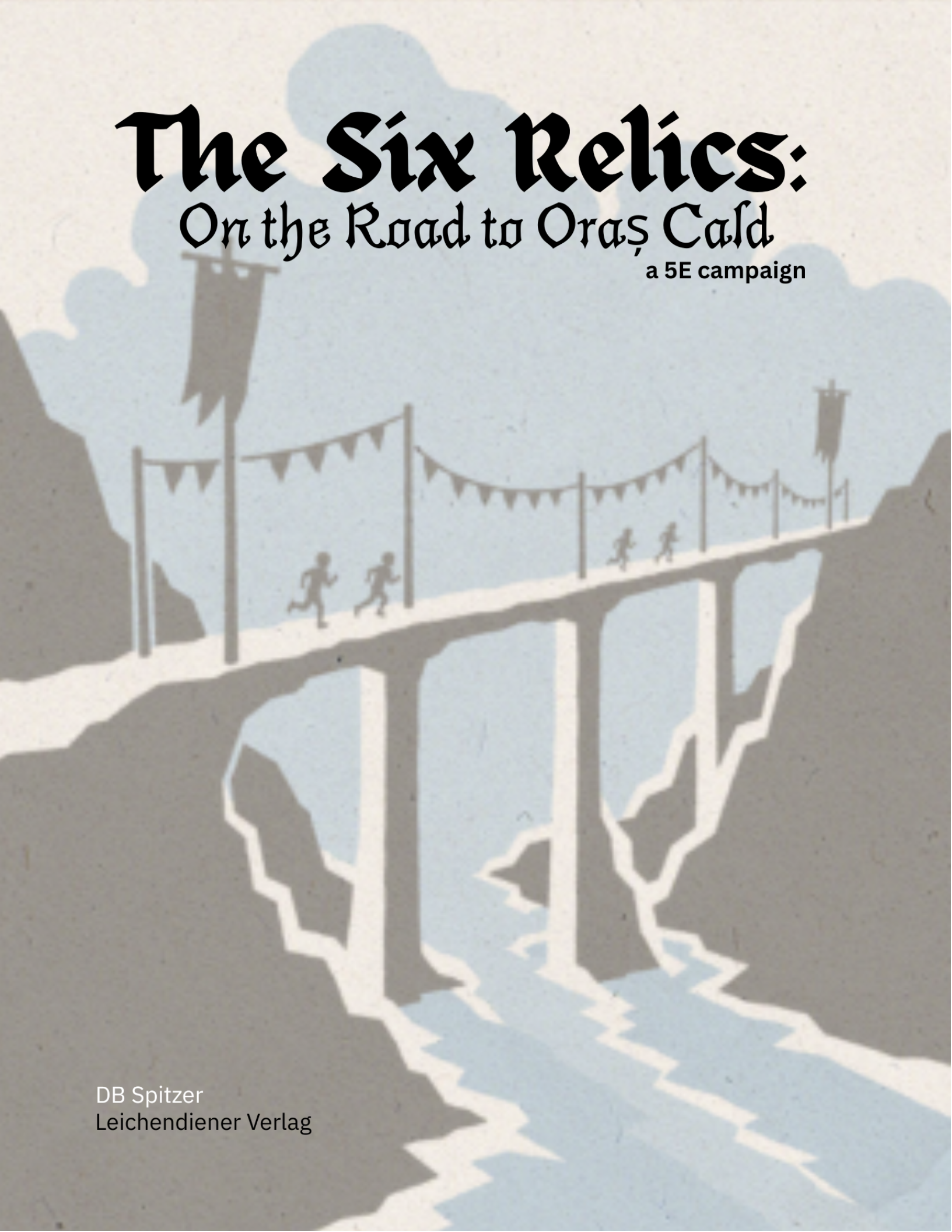


# The Six Relics:

## On the Road to Oras Cald

a 5E campaign

DB Spitzer  
Leichendiener Verlag



## ***The Six Relics: On the Road to Oraş Cald***

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## CHAPTER 1 — THE CUP THAT WOULD NOT BREAK

*A Story from the Night Before the Red Door*

### I. The Old Priory Road

The road to Giftschränk Priory had been built by people who did not trust straight lines or followed goats. It left the eastern river district through a gate too narrow for two carts to pass, climbed between warehouse walls blackened by generations of coal smoke, then bent away from the city in three unnecessary turns. Beyond the last turn, the road crossed a low field of reeds and steaming overflow channels.

The Priory stood beside a black geothermal pond.

Old stone walls followed the pond's irregular shore. Iron hooks projected from the masonry. Its windows were shuttered even at midday, and its bell tower rose above the mist like a warning finger. Warm water escaped the pond through grated channels, ran beneath the bridge road, and disappeared into the reed beds.

The woman in the red mask came along that road after sunset with a crate on a narrow handcart and three men following her at a distance.

The three men were not with her.

She knew this because the first man had copied her pace for six streets, the second had changed hats twice without changing his boots, and the third had been dead for at least an hour.

The dead man was tied upright to a patient brown mule. His companions had wrapped a scarf around his lower face and pulled his hat low, but death was difficult to disguise on a cold road. A living rider shifted in the saddle, cursed at stones, and scratched. The dead man did none of those things. He merely nodded each time the mule stepped into a rut.

The woman in red did not look back again.

Her cloak was hooded, heavy, and the same dark red as old sealing wax. Rain had soaked the shoulders nearly black. Beneath the hood she wore a smooth scarlet mask with narrow eyeholes and a shallow line down its center.

The mask made her face unreadable.

The box made her slow.

It was a merchant's crate, two feet long and almost as wide, built from pale boards joined too carefully for common freight. Four iron bands had once locked its lid. Two had been cut. A blue customs seal remained on one corner, split cleanly through the image of a crowned woman. The crate smelled of wet straw, river mud, and faint hot clay.

It also chimed when the cart struck a stone.

Not loudly. A little chorus sounded inside the box, delicate and precise, as though a distant table had been laid for guests who had not yet arrived.

The two living men heard it.

They urged their horses forward.

The woman in red reached beneath her cloak and laid one hand on the grip of a short sword. She did not draw it. The road ahead had begun to steam, and beyond the mist she could see two women waiting beside the broad stone bridge outside the Priory wall.

One was very tall, grey-skinned, and handsome in the manner of a mountain seen in winter. She wore a dark traveling coat and carried a covered metal pitcher beneath one arm. A folding stool hung from her free hand. Her black hair was pinned away from her face, and pointed ears. Even at rest she stood with the balanced posture of someone prepared to carry a collapsing roof.

The other woman was small, pale, and so deliberately ordinary that the eye slid away from her.

Her coat looked cheap until the wind lifted one edge and revealed close-woven waterproof cloth, reinforced seams, and fitted inner panels. She wore a plain cap, plain gloves, and plain boots. Her uniform had too many buttons, loops, concealed openings, and hidden pockets to have been designed by anyone who truly valued plainness. One might mistake her as an elf on the rare second glance.

Nothing about her clothing was ornamental.

Everything about it had a purpose.

The woman in red had been told the small woman was an importer named Sava Dren.

She had been told the tall woman was a bartender/bodyguard named Ianca Mereș.

She had not been told why an importer and a bartender had chosen the road outside Giftschränk Priory for a midnight delivery.

The Priory bell gave one low note.

It was not an alarm. It was a reminder. Somewhere behind the wall, a warden was counting the hour and informing every dangerous object in the vaults that it remained watched.

The dead rider's mule shied.

The living men drew closer.

The woman in red kept one hand on the cart and continued walking.

"You are late," Sava called.

Her voice was quiet. It carried anyway.

The woman in red glanced at the eastern sky. The last grey light had gone.

"I was followed."

Ianca tilted her head, listening to the road behind the courier.

"Three," she said.

"Two," Sava corrected.

The dead rider chose that moment to slide from his saddle.

He struck the road face-first. His hat rolled into a steaming drainage channel. The mule walked on without him.

Ianca considered the body.

"Two and a parcel," she said.

Sava's expression did not change. "You brought them to a containment house."

"I brought the box to the address I was given."

"This is not an address."

"It has a bridge, a wall, and a bell. That is more address than some people provide."

For the first time, Ianca smiled. It was brief and did not make her less severe.

The riders slowed when they saw the women at the bridge. One looked toward the Priory gate. The other looked toward the reeds.

Neither noticed the first of the Scarlet Step.

A man lay beneath the bridge in a waterproof cloak with a crossbow resting on a stone ledge. Another crouched behind a broken milestone. Two more waited among the reeds. Three had taken positions on the Priory-side slope, dressed as laborers repairing a drainage trench. A woman sat on the wall of an abandoned lime shed, swinging one muddy boot like a bored traveler. Two men argued beside a stalled cart while each watched a different direction.

Nineteen Scarlet Step agents waited around the bridge.

With the woman in red, there were twenty members of the Scarlet Step on the road.

She knew every assigned position.

Sava knew where eleven were.

Ianca had noticed all nineteen agents before the woman in red arrived.

The riders stopped fifty paces away.

The dead man's mule continued between them, wandered to the roadside, and began eating wet grass.

"Go back," said a voice from somewhere in the reeds.

The riders looked at one another.

One tried to laugh. "We have no business with you."

"Then your business is behind you."

The riders turned their horses.

They did not hurry until they reached the first bend. Then both animals broke into a run.

No one pursued them.

Sava watched until the road was empty.

"You were still late," she said.

The woman in red pushed the cart onto the bridge.

The mugs inside the crate chimed again.

This time, something behind the Priory wall answered with a sound like a long breath drawn through metal.

## II. The Champion and the Red Mask

Caldovian arrived without a coat suitable for the weather.

He wore a narrow black jacket beneath a dark green traveling cloak, good boots already wet at the toes, fitted gloves, and a red ribbon tied around his left wrist. At his throat was a white enamel brooch marked by a narrow blue line that wandered slightly from top to bottom: the Path, or the Wound, depending upon which priest was explaining it.

The Path of Glorious Life called Caldovian, "a champion of the Elra".

Many priests used the phrase with clenched teeth.

He came down the road alone, though no one who knew Caldovian would have mistaken solitude for a lack of company.

Vara turned her mask toward him.

Caldovian stopped beside the handcart and bowed. "Mistress Vay."

Vara did not remove her mask. She did not need to. Vara Vay had chosen to recover the crate herself.

No Scarlet Step thief had earned this meeting. No cell leader had risen high enough to claim an audience. Vara had entered this orbit because sacred cargo had vanished, because nineteen of her people were already hidden around the bridge, and because Caldovian had become interested.

The mask concealed Vara's expression. It did not make her attention less exact.

Caldovian counted everyone who was watching him.

He was slender, graceful, and visibly cold. The sword at his side looked too heavy for him, although he carried it with practiced ease. He smiled when he saw Sava.

Sava did not smile back.

"Mistress Dren," he said.

"No."

"I have not asked anything yet."

"You came."

"That was not a question."

"It was the first mistake."

Caldovian put one hand over his heart. "And here I had hoped to make a favorable impression."

"You have made several impressions. Most are in other people's paperwork."

Ianca looked at Vara. "He is trying to gain favor with the importer."

"I am standing here," Caldovian said.

"Yes," said Ianca. "That is how I know."

Vara's gaze remained on Sava. "He invited himself."

"I offered useful cultural and logistical assistance."

"He invited himself," Vara repeated.

Sava turned to Vara. "Did anyone touch the cargo after you recovered it?"

"I touched the handles."

"Inside."

"No."

"The people who stole it?"

"They opened it."

"That was not the question."

Vara rested both hands on the cart. Rain ticked softly on her hood.

"They removed two objects from the lower compartment. They left the cups. They left the packing. They left the outer box in a ravine north of the coast road. I recovered it before sunrise and kept it sealed after that."

At the words two objects, Sava became still.

It was not the stillness of surprise. It was the stillness of a mechanism reaching the end of its travel.

Ianca's eyes moved to the cut iron bands.

Vara watched Sava rather than the crate.

Caldovian stopped smiling.

"What two objects?" he asked.

Sava turned her head a fraction. "Import documents."

"Documents rarely require a hidden compartment."

"Good ones do."

"Were they magical?"

"Everything becomes magical when a bard believes he has been excluded from the conversation."

Caldovian glanced at Vara. "You see why I am interested in her favor."

"No," Vara said. "I see why you are not receiving it."

Vara reached beneath her cloak and produced a folded manifest sealed inside oiled paper. She held it out to Sava.

Sava did not take it immediately.

"Read the missing lines," she said.

Vara's scarlet mask reflected the bridge lantern.

"Two devotional articles. Elran. Sealed. No public display."

The Priory bell gave another low note.

Caldovian's expression changed so quickly that anyone watching only his mouth might have missed it. The humor remained. The attention beneath it sharpened.

"Elra," he said.

Sava looked at him.

"The goddess," he added lightly. "Fleshy, gorgeous, famously intolerant of dull ceremonies. I have performed in three cities where her priests tried to improve my wardrobe and personality."

"Did it work?" lanca asked.

"Nothing permanent."

Sava took the manifest. She read it without moving her lips, folded it along its original creases, and placed it into an inner pocket.

"The thieves," she said. "Who were they?"

"They called themselves nothing while I was listening. The people who found the abandoned cart called them Glass Coast heretics."

"That phrase means six different things depending upon who is being paid," Vara said.

"In this case it means people who broke an Elran seal, took the devotional goods, and left the ordinary freight."

Sava looked at the crate.

"The ordinary freight," Caldovian repeated. "You have made the cups sound wounded."

"They are cups."

"That is no defense."

lanca shifted the metal pitcher beneath her arm. Its lid gave a small click.

"Open the box."

Sava looked toward the Priory gate.

"Not inside," lanca said. "Not under their wards. Here."

"The rain."

"The ceramics will survive rain."

"The packing may not."

"Then the importer should have selected better packing."

Sava stared up at the taller woman.

lanca's face remained composed.

Caldovian leaned toward Vara. "I believe they are friends."

"Do not make them notice you," Vara said.

"Too late," said Sava.

### **III. The Empty Shapes**

The lid had been built to open without nails.

That was the first sign the crate was not ordinary freight.

Vara released two hidden catches beneath the iron bands, pressed her thumbs into shallow notches at each end, and lifted. The top rose on fitted wooden pins so precisely cut that the rain had not penetrated the seam.

Warm air escaped.

Not hot air. Not steam. The breath from the crate carried the dry warmth of a kiln long after the fire had gone out.

Inside lay three rows of ceramic mugs, each wrapped in pale straw and thin grey cloth. A wooden lattice separated them. Beneath the lattice, visible through narrow openings, was a second layer of packing.

The mugs did not match one another.

They belonged together anyway.

One was dark blue mottled with silver, like moonlight broken on water. Another carried bands of orange, green, and white that shifted when the lantern moved. A third was black at the rim and deep red at the base, with a field of tiny golden marks between. Some had angular handles. Some had round ones. One handle curled like a branch but fitted the hand so perfectly that the ornament never interfered with use.

Every surface was thin, flawless, and slightly translucent at the edges.

Ianca set down her pitcher and stool.

She did not touch the crate. She bent over it and listened.

"Twenty-four," she said.

Vara looked at the rows. "There are twenty-four spaces."

"There are twenty-four cups."

"You can see them."

"I can hear them."

Caldovian bent closer.

Sava put one gloved finger against his chest and moved him back without looking at him.

He raised both hands. "I respect procedure."

"You respect an audience."

"An audience is a form of procedure."

Vara stepped to the cart. "What are we checking?"

"Damage, replacement, contamination, concealment, substitution, devotional residue, tracking preparations, and whether the thieves discovered the lower compartment by accident."

"That is a long answer from someone who imports cups."

"Good imports require long answers."

Vara's mouth shifted almost imperceptibly. On another person it might have been amusement.

Sava removed her gloves. Her hands were pale, small, and marked by a single old burn across two fingers. She selected a thin tool from one sleeve and slid it between the lattice and the box wall.

Vara watched the road.

The nineteen hidden agents remained hidden. She could feel their attention without locating all of them. Beyond the bridge, the Priory crouched beside its steaming pond with blind chapel windows and iron-hooked saints. Somewhere inside, metal struck stone once, paused, and struck again.

Sava lifted the lattice.

The mugs chimed.

The sound was not random. Each vessel produced a different clear note as the wood shifted around it. Together they made a chord so balanced that Caldovian inhaled as if someone had begun a song.

Vara's eyes narrowed.

Ianca said, "Careful."

Sava froze.

"The seventh support is under tension."

Sava examined it, found a small wedge caught beneath one crosspiece, and removed it with the tip of her tool. The lattice rose without touching the cups.

"Thank you," Sava said.

"You are welcome."

Their politeness had edges.

Beneath the cups lay a fitted tray lined with black felt.

Two spaces had been cut into the felt.

Both were empty.

One was a shallow circular hollow, no wider than a large coin. A pale metallic scuff marked one edge: electum, the light Caldovi metal that foreigners sometimes called aluminum. The impression was slightly bent, as though the missing coin had never lain flat.

The second hollow was shaped for a palm mirror. Its handle had rested in a narrow channel. Its frame had left an oval pressure mark in the felt.

Red sealing wax remained in the corners. A few grains of bright blue glass glittered against the black cloth.

The Crooked Coin had been there.

So had the Mirror of the Unlived Moment.

Sava knew both shapes.

She did not name either one.

No holy object remained.

Only absence had been packed carefully.

Caldovian leaned forward again, slowly enough that Sava allowed it.

"May I?"

"No."

"I was asking whether I may look."

"You are looking."

"Closer."

"No."

He looked closer anyway without crossing the boundary made by her outstretched hand.

"The round object was wrapped separately," he said. "The oval one had a handle. The thieves knew what they wanted. They did not tear the tray apart searching."

Sava's eyes moved to the felt.

Ianca glanced at Caldovian.

Vara said, "He is often useful immediately before he becomes unbearable."

"A narrow window," Caldovian agreed. "Best appreciated quickly."

Vara said, "The cart was found with the lid open and the tray beside it. The cups were still packed. Nothing else was taken."

"Money?" Vara asked.

"A lockbox beneath the driver's bench had been opened. The coins were left."

"Food?"

"Taken."

"Weapons?"

"Two crossbows missing."

"Animals?"

"Gone."

"Bodies?"

"None."

Vara considered this. "The driver lived long enough to move, or someone took him alive."

"Or he was never there," Sava said.

"The cart had blood on the rail."

"Blood proves blood."

"It generally suggests a person."

"That is why forgery works."

Caldovian rubbed his gloved hands together for warmth. "Do we know what the articles were?"

Sava lowered the lattice into place.

"No," she said.

The answer came too quickly.

Vara noticed.

Caldovian noticed Vara noticing.

lanca picked up her pitcher.

Vara watched all three and decided the missing objects mattered much more than the box, the cups, the payment, or the riders who had followed her.

Sava replaced her gloves. "The mugs are intact."

"You have not examined them," Caldovian said.

"They are intact."

"One might be cracked."

"They are not."

"One might have been replaced by a clever imitation."

"It was not."

"One might contain a curse."

Sava looked at him. "That is why we met outside Giftschränk Priory."

The Priory bell gave a third note.

This time the metallic breath behind the wall became a whisper.

The whisper began with an F.

No one commented on it.

#### **IV. The Price of Recovery**

Vara conducted negotiations the way other people closed doors.

She did not begin with price. She began by deciding which exits remained available.

"I recovered the property," Vara said. "I was followed. The recovery was outside the original agreement."

Sava adjusted the edge of the felt tray. "The shipment was not complete."

"The portion discarded by the thieves was complete."

"The contract specified delivery."

"The contract specified recovery of one marked crate if it entered local channels. It did not specify retrieving devotional objects from armed heretics on the Glass Coast."

"You use the phrase as though it explains them."

"I use the phrase because your manifest used no names."

Sava's eyes cooled. "My manifest did not use that phrase."

"No. Your manifest used numbers. Numbers are excellent for avoiding responsibility."

Caldovian took half a step between them, not enough to block either woman's view.

"This seems an ideal moment for a graceful compromise."

"Leave," Sava said.

"Not that compromise."

Vara did not look at him. "Caldovian."

He moved aside.

Vara kept her masked face toward the road. She had carried messages between people who preferred silence, threats, bribes, or blood. Sava used all four without raising her voice. Vara preferred to choose which one the other person noticed.

Ianca poured something from the covered pitcher into a plain metal cup.

Steam rose. The smell was black tea, bitter herbs, and citrus peel.

She offered it to Sava.

Sava took the cup without looking.

Vara noticed.

Vara never drank from a cup she had not seen poured. Sava apparently had different rules, or trusted the bartender more than she trusted anyone else on the bridge.

"What was removed?" Vara asked.

"Two imported articles."

"Sacred to Elra."

"That is what the manifest says."

"You wrote the manifest."

"My clerks wrote it."

"Your clerks know what passed through my district. I do not. That increases the price."

Sava drank the tea. Her face gave no sign whether it was good.

"The objects were legally imported," she said.

"Legal objects are stolen every day. Illegality is not what makes recovery expensive."

"Your organization moves illegal goods."

"My organization moves goods people have made expensive to move."

Caldovian looked toward Vara. "That is almost the official motto."

Vara turned her head.

"It is not the official motto," he said.

"There is no official motto."

"That explains why the embroidery order was cancelled."

Sava's gaze flicked to the red ribbon at his wrist. "Why is he here?"

"He believes you will owe him a favor if he helps."

"I believe every successful relationship begins with mutual usefulness."

"You believe every room begins when you enter it."

"Not every room. Some begin while people are waiting for me."

Ianca poured a second cup and handed it to Vara.

Vara hesitated.

"It is tea," Ianca said.

"I know."

"Then you are more informed than most customers."

Vara took it. Heat passed through her wet gloves. She had not realized how cold her hands were until they began to hurt.

Vara said, "My recovery fee doubles. My organization's fee increases by half. I keep access to any names, routes, or buyers discovered during the search for the missing articles."

Sava said, "No search has been commissioned."

"Then I keep the information if I find it by accident."

"Your accidents are heavily staffed."

"Competence can appear crowded."

"Twenty?"

For the first time that night, Vara's eyes sharpened with genuine interest.

The hidden agents did not move.

Caldovian slowly turned his head toward the reeds, the stalled cart, the lime shed, and the slope.

"Twenty," he repeated. "I had fourteen."

"You had nine," Ianca said.

"Nine I was certain of. Five I considered likely."

"You counted the mule."

Sava handed the empty cup back to Ianca. "You brought twenty armed people to deliver ceramics."

Vara said, "I brought twenty armed people because someone stole sacred objects, abandoned valuable freight, left no bodies, and the client wants to meet me at a magical containment house."

"You did not know the objects were sacred."

"I knew the shipment mattered to you."

The two women watched each other.

Caldovian smiled faintly. Not because the exchange amused him. He had just learned something valuable about both of them.

Sava noticed the smile.

"Do not," she said.

"I have done nothing."

"You have begun remembering."

"I do that constantly."

"Then stop."

Ianca nested the metal cup beneath the lid of her pitcher.

"The mugs should be counted by hand."

Sava turned to her. "You already counted them."

"He will continue asking until someone touches one."

Caldovian looked pleased. "At last, professional understanding."

"No," Ianca said. "Containment."

## **V. Twenty-Four Cups**

The first mug Sava removed was green.

Not one green. Many greens moved beneath a clear glaze: pine needles, deep river water, moss on old stone, the pale inside of a cut herb stem. The colors had been laid in narrow overlapping planes, but no ridge could be felt beneath the fingers.

Sava held the mug by the base, not the handle.

Ianca tapped the rim with one fingernail.

The mug chimed.

The note was pure, lower than expected, and lasted several seconds. The surface of the tea in Vara's metal cup trembled in sympathy.

Caldovian closed his eyes to listen.

"F minor," he said.

"Closer to E-flat," Ianca said.

"The road is cold."

"Pitch does not accept weather as an excuse."

"Performers do." Shivered Caldovian.

Sava placed the green cup on the flat stone parapet.

The second mug was cream colored with blue and red lines that crossed, separated, and crossed again. Its note was higher. The third was dark violet with a silver handle and rang with two tones so close together that the beating between them seemed to move around the listeners.

One by one, Sava lifted the cups.

Ianca tapped each one.

Vara counted silently.

Vara watched.

Caldovian listened as though the box contained a choir that had agreed to sing only one voice at a time.

The mugs were beautiful, but not in the jeweled, impractical manner of ceremonial objects. Their beauty came from exact proportion. Each handle fitted the hand. Each lip was thin without feeling fragile.

Each base settled flat on the stone without rocking. The glazes made every vessel unique while preserving a shared discipline of shape.

They had been made to be used.

That seemed almost insulting.

A cup so beautiful should have demanded a shrine, a locked case, a priest, or at least a room in which people were required to lower their voices. These cups expected hot water, tired hands, morning arguments, and the ordinary stains of years.

Vara understood why the thieves had left them.

People who stole holy objects often believed themselves above cups.

Sava reached the eighth mug.

It was the most beautiful thing Vara Vay had ever seen.

Vara had seen crowns on heads that did not deserve them. She had seen the private galleries of merchants who purchased paintings by threatening the artists' families. She had carried stolen reliquaries, cut gems, old swords, forbidden manuscripts, musical instruments, and a silver mechanical bird that could imitate any song after hearing it once.

She had never confused beauty with goodness.

Beauty was leverage. It opened doors, raised prices, made witnesses unreliable, and persuaded fools that cruelty had purpose.

The eighth mug was different.

Its body was made from layered ceramic in colors that should not have remained distinct after firing: black, white, rust red, deep blue, amber, green, and a narrow line of pink so pale it appeared only when the cup turned.

The colors did not form a picture. They folded around one another like roads on a map of a country that could not exist.

The handle was black on the outside and bright blue within. The rim was white, but a hair-thin red line ran beneath it.

When lanca tapped the mug, it gave a clear descending pair of notes.

The second note seemed to come from farther away than the first.

Vara looked at it too long.

Only Caldovian noticed.

That made it worse.

"Mistress Vay," he said softly.

Vara's eyes moved to him.

His expression was not mocking.

It was delighted.

"No," she said.

"I said only your name."

"You were about to make the moment unbearable."

"I was about to say it suits you."

"That is worse."

Sava held the mug toward Vara.

"Take it."

Vara did not move. "Why?"

"Recovery fee."

"We have not agreed on the fee."

"Then call it evidence that the ordinary freight was recovered intact."

"You said it was not ordinary."

"He said that."

Caldovian inclined his head. "I remain available for attribution."

Vara looked at the cup again.

She knew gifts were hooks. She knew payment created records. She knew every object carried into her private rooms became a potential message, weapon, tracking device, or weakness. She knew Sava had selected the cup after watching her watch it.

She also knew refusal would be a kind of confession.

Vara took the mug.

It was lighter than it looked.

The handle settled against her fingers as though it had been shaped from a measurement taken in advance. The ceramic was warm from the crate. Not warm enough to be alarming. Warm enough to seem alive.

"I will have it tested," Vara said.

"Of course," Sava replied.

"By three people who do not know one another."

"That seems excessive for a cup."

"You brought it."

"A fair answer."

Caldovian leaned closer, careful not to touch the mug. "May I hear it again?"

Vara tapped the rim with one fingernail.

The mug chimed.

Somewhere in the reeds, one of the hidden agents shifted before remembering to remain still.

Vara heard that too.

"Anyone who mentions this," she said to the darkness, "will spend a month moving night soil through the south tunnels."

The reeds became perfectly silent.

Caldovian smiled. "It truly does suit you."

"You are going to the south tunnels first."

"I have delicate lungs."

"Then you will finish quickly."

Sava removed the ninth cup.

The count continued.

## **VI. One for Caldovian**

By the twenty-fourth mug, the rain had stopped.

Mist lay low over the bridge. Water dripped from the Priory wall and returned to the geothermal pond in silver threads. The cups stood in two careful rows on the parapet, their colors bright against the dark stone.

Twenty-three remained after Vara's payment.

Caldovian had praised nineteen of them, compared three to musical modes, suggested that one should be filled only with plum wine, and nearly touched a white-and-gold cup before Sava slapped his hand away with two fingers.

He accepted the correction with a bow.

Sava accepted the bow as another offense.

"You should give him one," Ianca said.

Sava looked at her.

Ianca's face was perfectly serious.

Caldovian brightened. "The bartender understands diplomacy."

"The bartender understands that you will otherwise discuss cups until dawn."

"That is also diplomacy."

Vara held her mug beneath her cloak. She would continue to do this for the next few days.

"Give him the ugliest one."

"There is no ugliest one," Caldovian said.

"Then the loudest."

"You are concerned I may enjoy it."

"I am certain you will make us all enjoy it."

Sava studied the rows.

Her pale face showed no amusement, but something in her posture changed. Vara recognized the moment before a professional decided to make an example.

Sava selected a small cup near the end.

It was smoky grey with a band of blue around the base. When she lifted it, tiny colors appeared within the grey: red, gold, green, and violet, hidden until the surface caught the lantern.

Caldovian extended both hands.

"Mistress Dren, I am moved."

Sava drew her arm back and threw the mug at the stone road as hard as she could.

The movement was sudden, compact, and much stronger than anyone expected from such a small woman.

The mug struck the bridge.

It did not break.

It bounced.

The first impact produced a deep, offended chime. The cup rose nearly to Sava's shoulder, turned once in the air, struck the road again, and gave a higher note. It bounced a second time, skipped between Caldovian's boots, and rolled in a precise circle before settling upright.

Silence held the bridge.

Then the mug chimed one final delicate note.

Caldovian looked down at it.

Ianca looked at Sava.

Vara closed her eyes for one second.

Vara was grateful for her mask.

Sava stared at the unbroken cup.

She had been angry before.

Now she was personally betrayed.

"That," Caldovian said carefully, "was magnificent."

"Do not."

"I am not laughing."

"You doing it with your stupid eyes."

"Only because it would be dangerous to do it openly."

Sava stepped toward the mug.

Caldovian moved faster.

For a man who seemed one hard wind away from illness, he could cross a short distance with astonishing speed. He bent, scooped up the cup, and straightened before Sava's reinforced boot heel reached it.

The sudden movement cost him. Color left his face. One hand touched the parapet.

Vara saw.

Ianca saw.

Sava saw and remained unimpressed.

Caldovian took one careful breath, then held the mug up by its handle.

"A gift should survive the intentions of the giver."

"I did not give it to you."

"You named me before releasing it. That establishes ceremonial direction."

"I attempted to destroy it."

"Many of my closest relationships begin that way."

Vara opened her eyes. "Give it back."

Caldovian looked wounded. "You told her to give me one."

"I was wrong."

"History will not support such a dangerous admission."

Sava held out her hand.

The mug sat in Caldovian's gloved fingers, smoky grey, modest, apparently unharmed. He inspected the rim.

Not a chip.

Not a scratch.

The blue band at its base shone in the lantern light.

"How much?" he asked.

"No."

"Everything has a price."

Vara said, "That is not true."

Caldovian glanced at her cup beneath the cloak.

Vara's expression changed.

"Everything that can be spoken of politely has a price," he amended.

Sava's hand remained extended.

"Return it."

"Will you throw it again?"

"Possibly at you."

"Then it remains safest in my custody."

Ianca returned the remaining mugs to the crate.

"The vessel appears to have selected a temporary inconvenience."

"Do not encourage him," Sava said.

"I am describing the observed result."

"The observed result is that imported property has been stolen in front of me."

Vara said, "No. You threw it onto a public road after announcing that it was for him. I would not prosecute that case."

"You do not prosecute."

"I make people regret requiring legal vocabulary."

Caldovian tucked the mug inside his cloak with exaggerated care.

"I will treasure it."

"That is the threat," Sava said.

He looked genuinely pleased. "You understand me already."

"I understand fire. That does not mean I invite it indoors."

The Priory bell rang again.

This time it rang twice.

The hidden agents shifted their attention toward the wall.

Behind the gate, someone shouted an order.

A chain dropped.

Iron struck iron.

The long smoky breath rose once more, louder now, and the beginning of the word became unmistakable.

Fffff-

Then it stopped.

Caldovian's hand closed around the mug beneath his cloak.

"What," he asked, "do they keep in there?"

Sava looked at him with flat disbelief.

"Nothing you should meet."

"That answer has never once improved a situation."

## **VII. The Priory Objects**

The gate opened just wide enough for one person.

A broad Priory warden in a dark watch coat stepped through and pulled the gate shut behind him. He wore no visible holy symbol. A short iron baton hung from his belt beside a ring of keys. His face had the exhausted severity of a man responsible for other people's curiosity.

"Move the gathering," he said.

Vara looked at the road, the bridge, and the empty field. "We are outside your wall."

"You are outside our wall with a crate that has just produced twenty-four separate resonances."

"Twenty-three," Caldovian said. "One is now private."

The warden looked at him.

"Of course it is."

"You know me?"

"No. I recognize a problem that introduces itself."

Ianca hid a smile by lifting the metal pitcher.

Sava began returning cups to the crate. "We will leave."

"Quickly."

"Is something unstable?" Caldovian asked.

The warden looked at Vara. "Is he yours?"

"Not in any legally useful sense."

"Madam, I did not ask about law."

"Then no."

Caldovian put a hand to his chest. "I am wounded twice."

"You may become wounded in a less metaphorical sense if you remain on the bridge."

Vara helped Ianca lower the wooden lattice over the rows. The mugs chimed softly as they settled into their fitted spaces.

The sound from inside the Priory changed.

Something struck metal once.

Then again.

The warden turned his head toward the gate.

"That is new," he said.

No one on the bridge liked the way he said it.

Caldovian did.

His attention moved beyond the wall with almost visible force.

"A relic?" he asked.

"Move."

"A curse?"

"Move."

"An alchemical pressure fault?"

"Move."

"A sword?"

The warden's eyes returned to him.

It was a small reaction.

It was enough.

Vara said, "Caldovian."

He smiled at the warden. "Thank you."

"I told you nothing."

"People are often most informative while refusing."

Sava secured the first hidden catch on the crate. "This is why no one gives you favors."

"On the contrary. People give me favors constantly. They simply regret the wording later."

The warden stepped closer.

"Whatever transaction you are conducting, conduct it elsewhere. No spellcasting. No open flame. No enchanted signals. No musical testing. No devotional invocation. No breaking objects against the road."

Sava tightened the second catch.

"That last rule has arrived too late."

"What broke?"

"Nothing!" lanca said.

The warden looked at the road, saw no fragments, and decided he did not want the explanation.

Behind the wall, a woman shouted, "Kiln team to the south chain!"

Boots ran across stone.

The warden opened the gate.

Before entering, he pointed the iron baton at Caldovian.

"Do not come inside."

Caldovian gave him a courteous bow. "I would never enter a guarded magical containment house after being explicitly forbidden."

Vara said, "He means he will find a different reason."

"I know what he means."

The gate closed.

The lock turned.

Caldovian watched the wall for several seconds.

"A sword," he said.

Sava lifted one end of the crate. "A noise. A foom noise."

"A contained noise with a warden who reacts to the word sword."

"You react to the word applause. It does not make you a theater."

"That is a much more complicated philosophical dispute."

lanca took the other end of the crate. The two women lifted together. Despite the weight, the box remained level.

Vara said, "The payment."

Sava looked at her.

"The recovery. The followers."

"Your fee will be transferred tomorrow."

"Half tonight."

"Tomorrow."

"Then the box remains on my road."

"This is not your road."

"Twenty people disagree."

The reeds rustled.

Sava's expression did not change, but Vara saw her count the darkness again.

Ianca said, "Pay half."

Sava turned her head.

"The Priory is about to become louder," Ianca continued. "The cups should not remain outside. The riders may return with more people. Vara is cold. The bard is learning. None of these conditions improve with delay."

Caldovian nodded. "The bartender is a natural diplomat."

"I am trying to remove you from a bridge."

"The foundation of diplomacy."

Sava reached into a hidden pocket and produced a flat packet wrapped in waxed cloth. She handed it to Vara.

Vara weighed it without opening it.

"Light."

"Half."

"Half of the original fee."

"Half of the revised fee."

Vara tucked the packet inside her cloak.

"I will count it later."

Sava said, "The other half arrives when my clerk confirms the box."

"Your clerk will confirm what you tell her to confirm."

"That is why she remains employed."

Vara touched the beautiful mug beneath her cloak.

The motion was unconscious and lasted less than a second.

Sava noticed.

She said nothing.

The Priory bell began to ring a rapid pattern.

Not an alarm for the city.

An alarm for the people already inside.

Vara gave no visible signal.

The Scarlet Step moved anyway.

A man climbed from beneath the bridge and folded his crossbow under his cloak. The laborers abandoned the drainage trench. The woman on the lime shed wall dropped lightly to the ground. The arguing men stopped arguing and pushed their supposedly stalled cart into motion. Figures separated from the reeds, the roadside ditch, the dead orchard, and the darkness behind the old milling complex.

Nineteen people became visible one at a time.

None wore scarlet openly.

That was the purpose of the Scarlet Step. The color was a promise, a warning, and a joke, but rarely a uniform. One agent wore a red thread around a button. Another had scarlet stitching inside a cuff. A third had painted one boot heel. Most displayed nothing at all.

They gathered without forming a crowd.

Vara counted her people.

Nineteen.

With herself, twenty.

She took the handle of the empty handcart.

Sava and Ianca had lifted the crate clear. Without its burden, the cart suddenly seemed flimsy, as though the box had been the only thing giving it purpose.

Vara said, "We are finished."

"You are," Sava replied.

Caldovian remained near the Priory wall.

He was listening to the alarm pattern.

Vara watched him.

"No."

"I said nothing."

"You are about to ask to stay."

"I was about to observe that we are already here."

"We are leaving."

"The Priory may need assistance."

"The Priory has people whose profession is surviving the things inside it."

"Every profession benefits from a gifted amateur."

"No profession has ever benefited from that sentence."

Sava shifted her grip on the crate. "Let him stay."

Caldovian turned, surprised by the apparent support.

"They may keep him," Sava finished.

"Mistress Dren, your confidence in my social abilities is moving."

"It is confidence in locks."

Ianca looked toward the bell tower.

"You should all leave."

Her accent changed.

It had been soft and foreign all evening, a careful mixture of mountain vowels and merchant-city consonants. Now, while speaking about danger, it became flatter and more exact.

Caldovian noticed.

He noticed everything people wished he would not.

Ianca noticed him noticing.

"Bard," she said, and the accent returned, "the road."

For once, he obeyed without a joke.

## **VIII. The Road Back**

The group began moving west toward the city.

Vara pulled the empty cart near the middle of the column, with two agents ahead and four behind. The others dispersed along both sides of the road, far enough apart to look unrelated. Caldovian walked beside her with one hand beneath his cloak around the smoky grey mug.

After twenty paces he looked back.

Sava and Ianca remained on the bridge carrying the crate between them.

The tall grey bartender looked almost silver in the mist. The small importer seemed to disappear whenever the eye moved away from her, then return in a different place without visibly crossing the distance.

Caldovian slowed.

Vara caught his sleeve and pulled him forward.

"You are not collecting them."

"I do not collect people."

"You collect relationships until they become obligations."

"That is an unkind description of friendship."

"It is an accurate description of debt."

He looked at her. "You kept the cup."

"Payment."

"It is the most beautiful cup you have ever seen."

Vara's fingers tightened once on his sleeve.

"Do not say that again."

"I am right."

"That does not protect you."

"It rarely has."

She released him.

They walked several steps in silence.

The Priory bell continued behind them.

Caldovian took out the mug.

The smoky glaze caught the lanterns carried by Vara's people. Colors appeared beneath the grey and vanished again. He tapped the rim lightly with one fingernail.

The cup gave a clear note.

Agents up and down the road glanced toward him.

Vara said, "Do not summon anything."

"It is a cup."

"Tonight that is not a useful defense."

"Do you think it is enchanted?"

"Yes."

"Because it survived?"

"Because Sava wanted it broken."

Caldovian considered this. "That is not evidence of enchantment."

"It is evidence of danger."

He held the mug by the handle and watched the colors.

"She dislikes me."

"She has judgment."

"I can improve the relationship."

"You cannot leave a closed door alone."

"Closed doors are unfinished sentences."

"Some are walls with handles."

"That is almost poetic."

"If you repeat it, I will deny saying it."

The road curved.

The bridge disappeared behind reeds and mist.

Caldovian still looked back.

"Imports," he said.

Vara gave him a long, flat glance. "What?"

"She claims she works in imports."

"Perhaps she does."

"No importer throws a priceless cup at a road because she dislikes a bard."

"You have not met enough importers."

"The bartender repaired the crate support by sound."

"Bartenders hear broken things."

"She counted all twenty of us."

"Good bartenders count everyone who may begin a fight."

"You are defending them."

"I am preventing you from turning curiosity into a mission."

Caldovian smiled.

"Too late."

Vara stopped walking.

The other agents continued for three steps before the front ranks noticed and halted in sequence.

Vara stood close enough that only Caldovian could hear her.

"You will not follow them. You will not enter the Priory. You will not ask my people to investigate the shipment. You will not visit the Glass Coast. You will not write a song about the cup. You will not give the cup a name."

Caldovian listened with solemn attention.

"That is a remarkable number of restrictions for an ordinary evening."

"Repeat them."

"Do not follow the importer or bartender. Do not enter the famously interesting containment house. Do not investigate the stolen sacred objects. Do not visit the coast. Do not write the obvious song. Do not name the cup."

"Good."

"May I drink from it?"

Vara resumed walking.

"At least once," she said, "I would like poison to solve a problem for me."

## **IX. Beside the Geothermal Pond**

Sava and lanca waited until the last red-threaded shadow disappeared around the bend.

Then Sava said, "He kept it."

"You threw it at him."

"I threw it at the road."

"He was standing on the road."

"The road was the target."

"The cup disagreed."

Sava's jaw tightened.

The crate rested between them on the bridge. The mugs inside had gone quiet. Mist moved over the parapet in long white bands as the geothermal pond released heat into the cold air.

Ianca lifted her end.

"We should move."

Sava lifted hers. "I know."

"You are still looking where he went."

"I am considering whether the cup can be recovered without encouraging him."

"No."

"That was quick."

"He will value pursuit more than possession."

Sava began walking. "You sound familiar with him."

"I serve drinks in the entertainment district. Everyone is familiar with him."

"That is not the same thing."

"It is close enough for tonight."

They carried the crate off the bridge and followed a narrow maintenance path along the Priory wall.

The path ran beside the geothermal pond. Its black water was almost invisible beneath the steam. Stone channels carried controlled overflow away from the shore and beneath the road. Iron grates protected the hottest vents. Mineral deposits striped the lower wall in white, rust, and pale green.

Sava's ordinary boots did not slip.

Ianca walked as though the uneven path had been measured for her stride.

Behind the wall, the alarm changed again.

Three short bells. One long. A pause. Then three more.

Sava said, "What does that mean?"

"Pressure loss."

"In the pond system?"

"No."

"Then why do you know?"

Ianca adjusted her grip. "Bartenders hear many bells."

Sava gave her a look almost identical to the one Vara had given Caldovian.

"Do not become amusing."

"It is the mist."

They reached a point where the path dipped below the bridge approach. Steam thickened until the Priory wall became a pale suggestion and the road lanterns disappeared.

The air smelled of wet stone, iron, sulfur, and minerals.

Sava's uniform shed moisture rather than absorbing it. Droplets gathered along the seams and rolled away. The plain fabric looked grey in the vapor.

Ianca stopped beside a heavy iron overflow grate fixed into the pond wall.

"Down."

They lowered the crate onto a dry stone ledge.

Sava examined the lid.

"The Crooked Coin and the Mirror."

"Yes," Ianca said.

"The compartment was opened by people who knew where to cut."

"Yes."

"They left the cups because they did not understand them."

Ianca looked at the box. "Or because they understood exactly what they wanted."

"Same result."

"Different danger."

Sava crouched and ran one finger over the broken blue seal.

"Glass Coast heretics."

The words carried no reverence or disgust. She said them as a clerk might say damaged inventory.

Ianca leaned toward the grate.

Steam moved around her face.

"Do not do that here," Sava said.

"Listen?"

"Whatever you call it when stone and pipes become a conversation."

"Pressure work."

"You are a poor liar."

"Only to people I do not need to convince."

Sava sat back on her heels.

"Was the shipment expected?"

Ianca did not answer at once.

Condensation formed a narrow wavering line on the iron grate. It ran downward against the angle of the metal and stopped.

For an instant it resembled the blue symbol of the Path, drawn in water rather than paint.

Ianca wiped it away with her thumb.

"The cups were expected."

"That is not what I asked."

"It is what I can answer."

"Mother Solice will want a chain of custody before dawn."

"She will want the truth."

"That is what a chain of custody is supposed to be."

"And Elra?"

Sava looked toward the invisible road.

"Elra will want to know why the bard has a cup."

Ianca's mouth moved slightly.

Sava pointed at her. "Do not laugh."

"I am not."

"You are arranging laughter behind your teeth."

Ianca turned her face away.

Sava looked at the crate again.

"You objected when I tried to break one."

"I warned you the ceramic was exceptional."

"You did not warn me it would bounce."

"I did not expect you to throw it."

"It seemed efficient."

"It produced a champion of Elra with a treasured object."

"That was not efficient."

"No."

"He will show it to everyone."

"Yes."

"He will claim it has a destiny."

"Probably."

"He will compose a name."

"Vara prohibited that."

"Then he has already named it."

The alarm stopped.

The sudden silence was worse.

Both women stood.

From behind the Priory wall came a deep inhalation.

Not a human breath.

Not bellows.

The sound seemed to draw air through stone, iron, hot water, and the bones of the hill.

Ianca put one hand on the crate.

The mugs began to hum.

## **X. FOOM**

Inside Giftschränk Priory, a frightened junior warden had made a reasonable mistake.

He cast a diagnostic charm no stronger than a candle flame through a narrow warding aperture. The spell was meant to test whether the ceramic resonance outside had entered the south containment chain.

It was a tiny spell.

Fume did not care.

The sword had already swallowed twelve spells.

It swallowed the thirteenth.

The sound arrived before the force.

## **FOOOOM!**

It was deep, sudden, and complete. Not an explosion exactly. Explosions tore the air and continued outward. This sound seemed to replace the air for one impossible instant, making the world into a struck drum.

The Priory wall flashed blue-white through the steam.

Every loose rock on the maintenance path rose from the ground.

Pebbles lifted first, then chips of mortar, fist-sized stones, and one flat slab that had been serving as a step beside the pond. They rose together to the height of Sava's knees and hung there, turning slowly in the vapor.

The crate rose too.

Sava seized one handle.

Ianca caught the other.

The box hovered between them, suddenly weightless, while twenty-two mugs inside rang at once.

The chord was enormous.

It moved through the steam like light through colored glass. Every mug contributed a note. Two notes were absent from the crate but not from the music.

Vara's cup answered from the road.

Caldovian's cup answered beside it.

Their distant tones completed the chord.

Sava's boots left the ground.

Only an inch.

It was enough to make her furious.

"Put me down," she said to the universe.

The universe did not comply.

lanca rose several inches. Her coat drifted around her legs. Her hair lifted from her shoulders. She kept one hand on the crate and drove the other through the iron loops of the pond grate.

Her arm locked.

The grate groaned.

The crate stopped drifting toward the black water.

Sava moved with the abrupt precision of a striking monk. A narrow anchor line came from one of her hidden sleeves. She snapped it around the crate handle, looped it through a second iron fitting, and pulled the knot tight before the floating stone slab completed half a turn.

"You carry an anchor line?" lanca asked.

"I work in imports."

"Of course."

"This is not pressure," Sava said.

"No."

"You said pressure loss."

"There has been a change."

"A change."

"I am revising the assessment."

The stones began to orbit.

Slowly at first.

A pebble passed between Sava and lanca. A broken piece of mortar circled the crate. The flat slab turned edgewise and drifted toward the pond.

The Priory bell rang wildly.

Voices shouted behind the wall.

A section of mist folded inward. The black pond appeared for an instant, perfectly smooth beneath the chaos.

Then the water rose.

A broad column lifted without spilling, carrying reflected blue light upward through the steam.

Ianca swore.

The word was not Common, Elvish, or any steppe dialect Vara would have recognized had she still been there. It was short, precise, and pronounced with the authority of someone filing a formal complaint against reality.

Sava looked at her.

"You said you were revising the assessment."

"The revision is unfavorable."

The weight returned all at once.

Sava landed on both feet.

Ianca landed on one and absorbed the impact without releasing the grate.

The crate struck the ledge. Sava's line went taut. Ianca caught the second handle and kept the box from sliding into the geothermal pond.

The rocks fell.

They struck stone in a hundred small impacts. The flat slab crashed down half a yard from Sava's boot. Mortar rained from the wall. The water column collapsed with a heavy splash that vanished into the steam.

The mugs continued chiming.

Their sound faded one note at a time.

On the road, Caldovian's smoky grey cup gave one last clear tone in his hand.

Vara stopped walking.

The nineteen Scarlet Step agents stopped around her.

Vara looked back and saw the mist above Giftschränk Priory shining with blue light.

Caldovian stared toward it, pale and delighted and afraid.

"No," Vara said.

He had not moved.

"I know."

"You are thinking loudly."

The distant bell rang.

Caldovian held the cup close to his ear.

"It answered."

"It is ceramic."

"So was the rest of the choir."

"We are going to the Red Door."

"The Priory may need help."

"The Priory needs you to remain a story told elsewhere."

Another blue flash lit the low clouds.

Caldovian's attention remained fixed on the hidden walls.

Vara took his arm.

This time he did not pull away.

Beside the pond, Sava opened the crate.

Every mug was intact.

The lattice had not shifted. The felt tray remained beneath the cups. The two empty spaces where the Crooked Coin and the Mirror of the Unlived Moment had rested looked darker than before.

Ianca picked up a small stone that had fallen into the box.

She tapped it against the rim of the green mug.

The cup chimed E-flat.

"Do not," Sava said.

Ianca put the stone in her pocket.

"All the rocks floated."

"Not all."

"All the rocks in the area."

"The wall remained."

"The wall is architecture."

"Architecture is organized rock."

Ianca looked at Sava.

Sava looked back.

"Your words are like a whip made of feces."

"Your breath is like a whip made of feces."

Steam thickened around them until both women became shadows and the crate became a dark rectangle between pale clouds.

"We should go," Ianca said.

"Where?"

Ianca lifted her end of the box.

"Into the steam."

Sava took the other handle.

Together, the mountain-grey bartender and the small pale importer carried the recovered mugs along the edge of the geothermal pond and into the white vapor.

The steam closed behind them.

Before dawn, Caldovian's smoky grey cup sat on the bar at the Red Door.

By the following evening, a group of new adventurers would arrive beneath the inn's scarlet-painted entrance.

They would not know about the crate, the missing relics, Vara Vay beneath the red mask, the nineteen agents hidden around the bridge, the importer who had tried to break a priceless cup, or the bartender who insisted every rock had floated.

They would know Caldovian.

That would be enough to begin.

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## CHAPTER 2 — Using This Campaign

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### The Campaign in One Sentence

A celebrated bard befriends a group of adventurers and turns the party's attempts to protect six culturally important magical relics into the machinery of his transformation into a living artifact.

### What This Book Promises

The Six Relics: On the Road to Oraş Cald is a 5e-compatible campaign for characters of levels 3 through 9. It combines urban conspiracy, criminal logistics, civic fantasy, religious conflict, personal betrayal, and magical objects that remain desirable after the danger becomes obvious.

The campaign gives the players three strong reasons to care. First, every relic is useful. No relic exists only to unlock the finale. Second, the people around the relics have understandable claims, obligations, and grudges. Third, Caldovian begins as a charming ally rather than a distant villain. The eventual betrayal should feel earned because friendship, admiration, irritation, and dependence have had time to grow.

### How to Use This Chapter

Read this chapter before preparing the first adventure. It explains the campaign's structure, advancement, clue design, custody conflicts, failure procedures, and final confrontation. The adventure chapters provide the specific scenes, locations, clocks, and statistics.

The opening fiction, “The Cup That Would Not Break,” is optional at the table. A Game Master may read it privately, share it after the first session, or use it as a tonal model. The player characters do not need to know its events before arriving at the Red Door.

### Campaign Principles

Keep the relics attractive. Keep Caldovian helpful. Let institutions be competent without allowing an institution to solve the party's work. Treat religious absurdity seriously. Make ordinary labor matter. Permit social, investigative, practical, criminal, and violent solutions. Never allow the loss of one clue, one relic, or one nonplayer character to end the campaign. Treat the “Importer and Bartender” more like Shakespearean clowns, witnesses to a bizarre conspiracy, and/or as clue dispensers if the Players are having troubles. They do not lead or inform the story.

### What the Characters See

*The visible campaign and the hidden machinery*

### The Visible Story

The characters meet Caldovian at the Red Door as an informed, generous, theatrical performer. A theft involving the Bracers of Two Tongues pulls the party into conflict with the Scarlet Step. Later crises appear separate: Fume becomes unstable, a house has no usable entrance, a funerary reliquary becomes the center of a murder frame, and two more relics vanish into a heretical dispute.

Caldovian helps. He finds introductions, explains customs, identifies symbols, spends money, offers sincere sympathy, and sometimes places himself in danger. Much of this kindness is real. A false friendship is less interesting than a genuine relationship exploited by a man who believes every relationship belongs inside his masterpiece.

### The Game Master's Truth

The six relics were created by different cultures across roughly forty-five centuries of Elran history. No original maker intended a matched set. Shared cultural lineage and accumulated meaning allow the relics to recognize and answer one another.

Caldovian has identified six compatible functions and intends to combine those functions in an Unbound Circle. He wants to become a humanoid magical relic and return to Caldov as a living

masterpiece. He also wants the Scarlet Step as a personal army, the guild treasury as operating capital, and Vara Vay's public death as the symbolic heart of the transformation.

Caldovian does not understand the relics as well as Caldovian believes. The Reliquary preserves a final heartbeat, not a soul. The Crooked Coin postpones failure rather than erasing it. The Mirror reveals an immediate consequence rather than a complete future. Fume recognizes no master. Elra's affection is genuine, impulsive, and morally useless.

### **The Campaign's Answer**

Caldovian believes meaning comes from spectacle, beauty, danger, and an audience. The campaign does not argue that spectacle has no value. The campaign argues that meaning also lives in custody, records, roads, kitchens, gates, furnaces, repairs, promises, and the people who keep a city functioning after the applause ends.

The strongest victory in Oraş Cald is practical and undramatic. The party turns Caldovian's ritual inward, protects the city, denies Elra an irresistible spectacle, and refuses to give Caldovian the beautiful ending he wants.

## **Running the Tone**

*Urban conspiracy, civic fantasy, and dangerous comedy*

### **Primary Tone**

Book One is not primarily a horror campaign. Death, undeath, cults, and magical accidents appear, but the dominant experience is investigation under social pressure. The Border City should feel mixed, crowded, layered, and alive. Faiths, institutions, immigrant communities, criminal cells, workshops, kitchens, bathhouses, theaters, and warehouses overlap without becoming a collection of novelty shops.

Oraş Cald changes the texture. The capital is old, practical, municipal, and distinctly Caldovi. Officials receive the party through customs, public safety, repairs, measurements, roads, records, and continuity. The apparent anticlimax is deliberate. Ordinary civic work teaches the party how to defeat the city-sized ritual.

### **Humor**

Humor comes from character and consequence, not from treating the world as disposable.

Caldovian makes danger sound elegant and turns every refusal into part of a conversation. Sava and lanca use brutal private familiarity while remaining competent in public. Elra is divine appetite, beauty, anger, and noise. Mother Solice is mummified dignity, silence, restraint, and civic duty. Officials document impossible events because abandoning procedure would make the impossible event worse.

Allow jokes to land. Do not use a joke to erase fear, grief, responsibility, or cultural meaning.

### **Scenes, Not Scripts**

Adventure text describes situations rather than a session that has already happened. Present what is true, what each participant wants, what changes with time, and what evidence can be found. Do not force imagined player dialogue. Do not require a specific emotional reaction. Do not let a powerful nonplayer character complete the central objective while the party watches.

A good scene offers at least two useful approaches. A locked chamber may be entered by permission, forgery, engineering, theft, social leverage, or force. A custody dispute may be resolved by law, compromise, concealment, exposure, relocation, or combat. Each approach should change relationships and future resources.

## **The Border Between Comedy and Cruelty**

Caldovian may be funny while causing harm. Elra may be delightful while becoming dangerous. Cornelia may be admirable while defending a destructive doctrine. Keep both halves visible. The campaign works best when the table can laugh and still understand who will pay for the joke.

## **Before the Red Door**

*Session zero, characters, and table agreements*

### **Content and Consent**

Discuss the campaign's subjects before play. Important material includes religious coercion, cult behavior, murder, attempted public execution, body custody, undeath, possession, alcohol, criminal activity, betrayal by a trusted ally, dangerous magic, and the possibility that a beloved nonplayer character may die.

Use the table's preferred safety tools. A pause, rewind, scene cut, or private message should never require justification. Replace or soften material that conflicts with a player's limits. The campaign does not depend upon graphic injury, sexual violence, cruelty toward children, or prolonged descriptions of suffering. Nor should it..

### **Character Creation**

Characters begin at 3rd level. Any class can contribute. Social skill, investigation, stealth, mobility, practical tools, healing, protection, and direct combat all receive meaningful use.

Ask every player to choose two connections:

- A reason to trust Caldovian at first.
- A reason to care about custody, public safety, cultural property, or the people who perform ordinary civic work.
- A relationship with a Border City business, neighborhood, faith, or institution.
- A past encounter with the Scarlet Step, honest or criminal.
- A personal belief about whether a dangerous object should be used, contained, destroyed, or returned.
- A person who would recognize the character at the Red Door.

No character must worship Elra. Elran characters should choose whether devotion leans toward Elra's glorious life, Mother Solice's civic duty, or an uneasy balance between both divine faces.

### **Party Cohesion**

The first adventure assumes the characters can remain together after the initial theft. Establish one shared bond before play: employment, friendship, mutual debt, neighborhood responsibility, a previous journey, or a common patron.

A character may distrust Caldovian immediately. Distrust should create investigation rather than a demand to end the campaign before evidence exists. Caldovian is careful enough to survive ordinary suspicion and useful enough that continued contact makes sense.

### **Starting Equipment and Expectations**

Standard 3rd-level equipment is sufficient. Tool proficiencies matter. Vehicles, documents, uniforms, rope, repair supplies, lanterns, food, and ordinary weapons may solve problems that a spell cannot.

Tell the players that the campaign rewards attention to names, claims, custody, routes, and physical systems. Also tell the players that no note-taking mistake will make the campaign unwinnable. Important revelations return through several routes.

## **Advancement and the Seven Adventures**

*Milestones, pacing, and expected levels*

### **Milestone Advancement**

Use milestone advancement. Award a level after the party resolves the central crisis of Adventures 1 through 6. The characters begin Adventure 1 at 3rd level and enter the final adventure at 9th level. The finale completes the campaign at 9th level.

A central crisis is resolved when the immediate danger has changed decisively and the campaign can move forward. Perfect recovery is not required. A relic may remain stolen, an antagonist may escape, and an institution may refuse cooperation. Failure changes the next adventure; failure does not erase advancement.

### **Campaign Progression**

Adventure 1, *The Bard at the Red Door*: levels 3–4. The Bracers of Two Tongues introduce Caldovian, Vara Vay, the Scarlet Step, and the question of rightful custody.

Adventure 2, *That FOOM Sword*: levels 4–5. Fume turns containment into a public problem and demonstrates that desirable power can remain impossible to own safely.

Adventure 3, *The House Without an Entrance*: levels 5–6. The Key Without a House places passage, permission, forged authority, and criminal logistics at the center of play.

Adventure 4, *The Last Beat of the Scarlet Lady*: levels 6–7. The Obsidian Reliquary becomes part of a murder frame involving Vara Vay, funerary law, and public identity.

Adventure 5, *The Coin at the Unlived Hour*: levels 7–8. The Crooked Coin and Mirror of the Unlived Moment enter a conflict among Cornelia, the House of the Mother, Sava, lanca, and the party.

Adventure 6, *The Circle of Embers*: levels 8–9. Caldovian's Red Door production becomes a clock, a coup, an Elra impersonation crisis, and cover for escape.

Adventure 7, *Oraş Cald*: level 9. The party reaches the capital, learns the civic anchors, forms the Hollow Circle, and confronts Caldovian's transformation.

### **Pacing**

Most adventures support two to four sessions, depending upon investigation and combat. Do not pad an adventure after the central situation has become clear. Move to the consequence, update custody and relationships, and begin the next pressure.

Between adventures, give the characters time for recovery, shopping, research, correspondence, and personal scenes. Downtime should reveal consequences rather than introduce unrelated side quests.

## **Relics, Custody, and Failure**

*Let the characters want the dangerous objects*

### **The Six Relics**

The principal relics are the Bracers of Two Tongues, Fume, the Key Without a House, the Obsidian Reliquary, the Crooked Coin, and the Mirror of the Unlived Moment. The relics share Elran cultural lineage but were not created as a set.

Most relics exist under cultural trust, institutional custody, or inherited obligation. A relic can be useful to the party and still belong to someone else. Unauthorized removal remains theft even when the thief has a persuasive reason. Fume is the major exception: containment matters more than ordinary ownership.

### **Make Custody Playable**

Do not reduce custody to a lecture from an authority figure. Put competing claims in motion.

A priest may possess historical authority but lack a safe vault. A Priory warden may offer secure containment but no cultural legitimacy. A criminal courier may have saved a relic when every legal custodian failed. A player character may be the only person capable of using an item without immediate disaster. Each claim should provide a benefit, a risk, and a person who remembers the party's decision.

### **Shared Recognition**

When linked relics come within 60 feet, each relic may recognize the others through warmth, vibration, sound, reflected movement, or another specific sign. Recognition informs the scene; recognition does not force attunement, reveal every property, or grant Caldovian control.

Use recognition to create temptation and urgency. A relic can expose a concealed relic, answer from inside a vault, or alert Fume without explaining the full reason.

### **Missing Relics and Substitutes**

The campaign continues when Caldovian fails to obtain a relic or when the party destroys, hides, or relocates one. Caldovian prepares imperfect substitutes based on the missing function. A substitute weakens or distorts the Unbound Circle but never cancels the finale.

Record which true relics and substitutes Caldovian carries into Oraş Cald. The final Circle effects use that record. Earlier success should matter without turning one successful theft prevention into automatic victory.

### **Fume**

Fume absorbs spells unpredictably. When Fume is full and consumes another spell, the spell is negated and Fume produces an automatic FOOM before ending at 11 charges. Use the printed d20 interaction chart and d100 FOOM table exactly. Do not select a convenient result unless an adventure explicitly calls for a fixed event.

A FOOM may alter the situation drastically. Preserve the result, protect campaign-critical information through alternate clues, and let characters respond. Fume's danger should feel real because the Game Master also accepts uncertainty.

### **The Crooked Coin**

The Crooked Coin postpones failure through Luck Debt. The Coin may alter a d20 connected to Fume but cannot choose, reroll, or soften the d100 FOOM result. Track debt openly enough that players understand a cost exists, but do not reveal an exact future collection unless a rule instructs the Game Master to do so.

### **Clues, Factions, and Moving Parts**

*How the conspiracy survives unexpected choices*

### **Three Routes to Every Necessary Revelation**

Any revelation required for the campaign should have at least three routes. Use different forms whenever possible: a witness, a document, a physical sign, a magical response, an institutional record, a criminal contact, or an antagonist's mistake.

Do not hide progress behind one ability check. A failed check may cost time, money, trust, secrecy, or safety. A failed check should not erase the only path forward.

### **Clocks and Consequences**

Each adventure contains pressures that move when the party rests, delays, or chooses another front. Advance a clock because a faction acts, not because the Game Master wants to punish discussion.

Show consequences. A forged document enters a registry. A rumor reaches Vara Vay. A Priory lock is changed. Cornelia acquires another advantage. Caldovian offers help at exactly the moment help will create obligation.

## **Nonplayer Characters**

Every major nonplayer character has an objective, a method, a limit, and a response to failure. Use those elements before consulting combat statistics.

Caldovian is helpful until help no longer serves the masterpiece. Vara Vay protects the visible Scarlet Step and believes she is the true Vara. Lysa Quill is the long-term replacement prepared to inherit Vara Vay's public identity. The Lady on the Xebec remains hidden behind Ra'av and the syndicate's deeper continuity. Sava uses law, discipline, and procedure. Ianca uses structural knowledge, strength, and practical protection. Cornelia is brilliant inside a room and dangerously shallow across a campaign.

## **The Handshake of the Red Fist**

Handshake is not one warehouse, headquarters, or secret district. It is a decentralized collection of ordinary offices, warehouses, carriers, repair yards, workshops, and legal businesses. Most employees perform normal work. Selected transactions, records, shipments, repairs, and purchases are illegal.

An office liquidates assets. Criminal buyers purchase the assets. Another seller moves the goods. A legal importer receives a shipment with clean documents. A stolen carriage becomes parts used to repair twelve working carriages. Fencing jewels is a small part of the operation.

Most Handshake profit comes from silk rope, masterwork thieves' tools, red thread, and dark armor. The party may expose a route, break a relationship, seize a shipment, or turn an operator. No single raid can reveal or destroy the whole network.

## **Keep the Party Central**

Sava, Ianca, Vara Vay, Mother Solice, and other powerful figures may hold off a threat, create an opening, provide information, or demand a choice. No powerful ally should finish the party's central objective. When two major figures clash, give the characters the decisive pursuit, rescue, theft, containment, or reversal.

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### **Preparing the Finale**

*The practical victory and the book at the table*

### **The Three Civic Anchors**

The Public Furnace, Hall of Measures, and Necessary Gate are not decorative locations. During the final adventure, ordinary repair work teaches the characters how each anchor functions. Caldovian turns the anchors outward to create the Unbound Circle. The party can reverse all three stakes and turn the system inward.

The resulting Hollow Circle suppresses the six relics, any ritual substitutes, and Caldovian's transformation. The Hollow Circle does not cancel ordinary spellcasting and does not win the confrontation by itself.

### **Elra Attention**

Track Elra's interest from 0 to 6 during the finale. Public spectacle, divine impersonation, sacred symbolism, dramatic relic effects, and a beautiful death increase attention. Privacy, practical containment, ordinary tools, civic procedure, and an unimpressive ending reduce attention.

Elra is divine anger, appetite, flesh, beauty, and noise. Mother Solice is divine restraint, mummified dignity, continuity, and civic duty. Neither goddess is merely an explanation for a game mechanic. Both divine faces should shape how followers interpret the same event.

### **Defeating Caldovian**

Caldovian wants an ending worthy of a song. Death inside a beautiful public ritual may complete the meaning Caldovian has built and attract Elra's attention. The safest conclusion is quiet, contained, witnessed by few people, and stripped of symbolic grandeur.

A party may still choose a dramatic ending. Respect that choice and apply the consequences. Victory is not defined by following one correct script. Victory means protecting the city and deciding what kind of meaning survives Caldovian's performance.

## Using the Companion Mini-Books

Giftschrank Priory: Fume and the Wardens of the Quiet Ember, The Red Fist: The Scarlet Step, Handshake, and the Red Steppe, and The Path of Glorious Life: Elra, Mother Solice, and Player Options expand material in this campaign.

No companion book is required. The complete campaign repeats every rule, statistic, location detail, and character fact needed for play. A companion book provides additional drop-in material, alternate hooks, and player options without becoming required homework.

## Preparation Checklist

Before each adventure:

- Review the current custody of all six relics.
- Mark Caldovian's current access, suspicion, and relationship with each character.
- Advance only the faction clocks justified by previous events.
- Prepare at least three routes to the next indispensable revelation.
- Note which ally can create an opening without solving the objective.
- Choose visible consequences from the previous session.
- Keep one practical, nonmagical solution available.
- End preparation when the situation can respond to the players.

The campaign should feel intricate at the table without becoming fragile behind the screen. When a result surprises the Game Master, preserve the result and move the campaign forward. Never protect the outline by making the characters' choices meaningless.



## CHAPTER 3 — Setting, Faith, Factions, and the Six Relics

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### The World Around the Relics

The Six Relics moves between two cities and several cultures joined by roads, trade, migration, worship, and old violence. Most of the campaign unfolds in an unnamed Border City near the frozen north. The finale carries the characters to Oraş Cald, the practical Caldovian capital that Caldovian remembers as an audience and that survives by refusing to become one.

This chapter gives the Game Master the setting machinery behind the adventures. Chapter 4 presents player-facing locations. Later chapters provide complete NPC statistics, relic rules, maps, and encounter procedures.

### Four Sources of Pressure

Every major crisis draws strength from four overlapping sources.

The cities provide laws, roads, records, labor, neighborhoods, and physical systems. The faith provides cultural claims, divine attention, funerary rules, hospitality, and disagreement about resurrection. The criminal organizations provide routes, documents, protection, replaceable identities, and people willing to make a legal act serve an illegal purpose. The relics provide useful power that attracts custody disputes rather than ending such disputes.

No source exists only as background. A road determines who arrives first. A burial custom determines who may touch a body. A warehouse invoice reveals a criminal route. A relic answers another relic through heat, vibration, smoke, reflection, or language.

### What Is Public and What Is Hidden

Ordinary residents know that the Scarlet Step is a thieves' guild, Giftschränk Priory stores dangerous objects, Elra is a hazardous goddess to imitate, and Caldovian is a celebrated Elran performer. Few residents know that Handshake is a decentralized logistics system, that the Red Fist extends far beyond the visible guild, or that Vara Vay is herself replaceable.

Only a small circle understands the deeper connections among the six relics. Caldovian knows enough to become dangerous. Sava, Ianca, Mother Solice, the Priory, and several custodians each possess a different portion of the truth. No single authority begins with a complete picture.

### GM Principle

Treat setting information as leverage. A fact matters because someone can act upon it, misunderstand it, conceal it, sell it, record it, or invoke it as a claim. Lore should open choices rather than stop the session for explanation.

### The Border City

*A mixed city where every institution overlaps another*

### Character of the City

The Border City is cold, crowded, layered, theatrical, and old enough to contain several incompatible versions of its own history. It stands near the frozen north but does not suffer the deeper cold associated with Caldov. Warehouses, bathhouses, theaters, shrines, workshops, bridges, immigrant neighborhoods, public kitchens, offices, and criminal cells press against one another.

Names come from many languages and periods. A street may retain an old elven name, a business may use a family name, and a civic building may carry a practical title. Avoid turning the city into a collection of novelty shops. Humor belongs to people, contradictions, and procedure.

### What the City Rewards

The Border City rewards social flexibility. A character can solve one problem through a priest, another through a clerk, another through a fence, and another through a repair worker. Local authority is

fragmented but not meaningless. A temple can control a funeral without controlling a warehouse. A guild can dominate a neighborhood without controlling the gate records. A criminal leader can command twenty armed followers and still require a legal importer to move a shipment.

The city also rewards attention to ordinary objects. Seals, red thread, carriage fittings, rope fibers, breakfast receipts, bell patterns, and water stains can carry as much information as a spell.

### **Campaign Landmarks**

The Red Door is Caldovian's stage, social center, and future ritual site. Giftschrunk Priory stands outside the dense city beside a geothermal pond. The House of Roads and Measures handles routes, weights, permits, and civic obligations. Cheval Oratorie preserves a grand Elran version of horse history. The House of the Mother presents one important heretical current. Silver Steam serves breakfast to workers, travelers, and people who need a conversation to appear accidental. Păianjen și Pânză is known simply as a place for food and drink.

Chapter 4 provides player-facing descriptions. In this chapter, each location matters because it can grant access, create witnesses, establish custody, or place a claim into the public record.

### **City Response**

When a crisis becomes public, the city does not freeze. Guards close routes, kitchens feed displaced residents, priests claim bodies, clerks create records, criminals move profitable goods, and rumors change prices. Show several responses at once. Competence creates pressure because every capable institution has a different priority.

### **People on the Roads**

Caldovi culture values practical craft, engineered clothing, public systems, precise insults, and competence without required display. Northern steppe traditions remember Elra as war leader, appetite, ancestor, and breaker of empires. Horses carry family, labor, wealth, memory, and food traditions but are not sacred. Goats and crabs are sacred because Elra finds both animals delightful; some communities also honor geese.

Subterranean Rock Elf traditions emphasize moon, death, ancestry, burial, and the older name Alira. Glass Coast traditions preserve the destroyed empire, magical ascent, formal magic, and competing stories about the crowned woman on the Crooked Coin. Public sermons preserve contradictions rather than claiming one culture owns the complete history.

## **Oraș Cald**

*A capital built from continuity rather than spectacle*

### **The Practical Capital**

Oraș Cald is old, municipal, functional, and distinctly Caldovi. Buildings and businesses use plain names such as Food by Ianca, Wood Goods by Tean & Sons, and Oraș Cald Community Bath North. A visitor may mistake this plainness for a lack of imagination. In truth, the city places imagination in engineering, survival, legal continuity, and social memory.

The capital receives the characters through customs, official correspondence, road conditions, lodging, repairs, public kitchens, measurements, and scheduled access. No welcoming committee recognizes the party as the center of history.

### **Caldovian's Mistake**

Caldovian remembers Caldov as a place awaiting his return. Oraș Cald remembers Caldovian as one talented citizen among many, possibly troublesome, possibly beloved, and certainly not exempt from municipal requirements. He wants to enter as a living masterpiece. The city asks for declarations, route plans, permits, and proof that his performance will not damage a furnace.

This rejection is not comic humiliation alone. It attacks the premise of his transformation. A city is not a passive audience. A city is an agreement renewed by labor.

### **The Three Civic Anchors**

The Public Furnace supplies heat and industrial pressure. The Hall of Measures establishes trusted standards used throughout the capital. The Necessary Gate connects movement, emergency access, and lawful passage.

Each anchor has a physical mechanism, a public function, and a ritual meaning that Caldovian exploits. Repair work teaches the party how each structure operates. During the finale, the same knowledge allows the characters to reverse the three stakes and form the Hollow Circle.

### **Arulea and Continuity**

Arulea represents civic Elran devotion: accurate records, uninterrupted services, honest measures, and the ability to continue after a disaster. She is useful, competent, and dangerous when true information becomes an administrative weapon. Her role extends beyond Book One, so avoid reducing her to a helpful clerk or obvious villain.

### **Using Oraş Cald**

Do not rush the ordinary work. Shopping, repairs, bath schedules, inspections, and route questions are the mechanical education for the finale. Keep each task brief, playable, and connected to a civic anchor. The characters should understand the city by helping it function.

### **Elra**

*Fleshy beauty, appetite, noise, and divine anger*

### **The Gorgeous God**

Elra appears as an attractive pale-blue series of contrasting curves in feminine form. She is bodily, hungry, affectionate, jealous, brave, vain, generous, and dangerous. Her presence fills a room before any miracle occurs. Worshipers describe heat, food smells, music, blue light, sudden courage, and the feeling that private restraint has become an insult.

Elra is chaotic neutral. Her favor is genuine attention, not moral approval. She likes Caldovian irresponsibly. She likes Fume and cannot control it. She may save a stranger because a meal pleased her and ruin a ruler because a death bored her.

### **The Mortal and Divine History**

The oldest hidden account makes Elra the daughter of the first king of the northern steppes and a forgotten subterranean Rock Elf goddess of moon and death. An ancient elven sun god killed both parents in legend, and Elra's hatred of the sun survived every later version.

Elra lived first as a mortal demigod. She gathered followers, conquered the sun-worshipping empire that opposed her, prolonged life through forbidden art, and became a folk hero across incompatible cultures. On the Glass Coast, the deaths surrounding the fall of a later empire became part of her ascension. Mother Solice emerged from the mortal body and the divine obligation that remained.

### **What Elra Values**

Elra values courage, appetite, beauty, hospitality, bodily life, shared food, heat, performance, and direct consequences. A glorious life does not need fame. A cook feeding strangers, a worker repairing a bridge, a lover risking honesty, or a warrior protecting a retreat can all attract favor.

Elra dislikes undeath as an insult to life and death. Undead creatures broadly hate Elran worshipers. Her anger can destroy the person who provoked it and everyone standing close enough to become part of the lesson.

### **Signs of Notice**

Blue condensation, impossible appetite, heated metal, animals approaching without fear, sudden music, and a crowd turning toward one person can signal divine attention. Notice should create a choice or obligation. Avoid using Elra as a random reward machine.

## **Mother Solice**

*Mummified dignity, quiet authority, and civic duty*

### **The Other Side of the Coin**

Mother Solice is not Elra's servant. Both women are divine. Elra is fleshy and gorgeous; Solice is mummified dignity. Elra is loud; Solice is quiet. Elra answers with appetite, spectacle, and divine anger. Solice answers with administration, obligation, preservation, and civic duty.

Elra gives life heat and motion. Solice records names, binds wounds, settles estates, guards final words, maintains public necessities, and keeps the gate open after heroes leave.

### **The Necessary Undead**

Solice is Undead and a proto-lich. Magic recognizes her creature type. She does not breathe, age, sleep, or maintain an ordinary living metabolism. She has no conventional phylactery, creates no spawn, and remains a divine person rather than a trapped mortal soul.

The Path condemns undeath as a trespass against life and death while depending upon Solice. Orthodox theologians call her the Necessary Undead, the Continuing Office, or the Body That Remains. Heretics call this hypocrisy. Solice agrees and continues working.

### **Authority and Possession**

Solice acts through records, custodians, officials, dreams, exact instructions, and controlled possession. When she enters a mortal host, posture becomes immaculate and speech becomes economical. Possession is not casual hospitality. Solice uses it when distance, secrecy, or physical danger makes direct presence impractical.

Sava and lanca work for Solice while claiming agnosticism. Both women trust her competence more than either woman trusts divine appetite.

### **What Solice Values**

Solice values consent, final words, public continuity, difficult duty, accurate records, measured force, and necessary services. She opposes predatory undeath without pretending every moral rule remains clean. She does not excuse her own condition.

Solice's favor often looks like additional responsibility. A blessed character may receive authority to protect a body, repair a system, carry a record, or complete work no celebrated hero finds interesting.

### **Using the Pair**

Use Elra when a scene needs heat, appetite, beauty, courage, noise, or anger. Use Solice when a scene needs custody, restraint, administration, funerary order, or continuity. Use both when a glorious act leaves necessary work behind.

## **The Path of Glorious Life**

*Orthodoxy, ritual, resurrection, and dangerous imitation*

### **Name and Symbol**

The formal name is the Path of Glorious Life and Peaceful Death. Ordinary worshipers shorten this to the Path of Glorious Life.

The symbol is a narrow vertical, slightly wavering blue line on white. It can represent the Path followed through life or the Wound left by living. Followers greet one another by tracing the wavering line in the air with one hand.

### **Practical Worship**

The Path is a practical church. Temples attach to kitchens, roads, baths, furnaces, stables, hospitals, archives, workshops, and funerary grounds. Authority follows responsibility. A furnace keeper speaks first about the furnace. A custodian of final words speaks first about a body. A champion may inspire a crowd without outranking a worker who keeps the water clean.

Hospitality comes before judgment because hunger makes theology dishonest. Useful work, love, pleasure, shared survival, courage, and beauty all count as glory.

### **Death, Resurrection, and Undeath**

Orthodox practice varies on resurrection. Some priests permit return when consent is known and death interrupts unfinished obligations. Other priests require family, community, and funerary review. No orthodox rite treats a corpse as property or assumes wealth creates consent.

Undeath receives firmer condemnation. Intelligent Undead may still be judged as persons, enemies, or necessary evils, but the Path never calls undeath harmless. Mother Solice is the dangerous exception displayed openly rather than hidden.

### **The Dagger Chorus**

Whispering “Glory to Elra” within a gathering of twenty to one hundred prepared worshipers can begin a coordinated dagger fight. The Chorus is practiced, choreographed, communal, and performed with real blades. Cuts are expected. Death is not.

The ritual can become cover for a real murder. A death ends the Chorus immediately and turns the congregation against the apparent killer. Chapter 15 provides complete hazard rules.

### **Imitating Elra**

Painting the body blue, dressing as Elra, or claiming to be Elra invites possession or sacrifice. The two outcomes are equally likely. A possessed imitator commonly wakes with face and hands covered in animal grease and a body full of wine and meat. An imitator who suddenly cries “Glory to Elra” has been taken as a sacrifice and warning.

Imitation is permitted during the Festival of the Last Empire. The festival celebrates liberation from the fallen empire. Elra may appear, feast, and order worshipers to run the coastline or eat food outside familiar culture. Outside the festival, impersonation is never harmless theater.

### **Heresies and Regional Practice**

*One faith with several incompatible conclusions*

#### **Peaceful Life and Glorious Death**

Heretics reverse the orthodox formula. The best-known current is the House of the Mother, but the House does not represent every heresy.

The House rejects resurrection absolutely. No person should return, regardless of consent, innocence, rank, love, or usefulness. Members argue that negotiable death destroys courage, sacrifice, honor, and the meaning of a mortal life. This doctrine can produce tender care for mourners and atrocities against people who wish to return.

#### **Cornelia Van Ghoul**

Lady Cornelia Van Ghoul is the doctrine's most dangerous advocate in the campaign. She is a brilliant swordmaster and an immediate genius who can dominate a room or the next ten seconds. Her understanding weakens across days, institutions, and campaigns. She rejects every resurrection, not only resurrection for members of her sect.

#### **Regional Roads**

Northern steppe practice often treats Elra as a war goddess and ancestor. Sorcerers and barbarians lead many rites. Rock Elf practice emphasizes burial, moon, memory, and funerary custody; clerics and monks hold greater authority. Glass Coast worship contains many formal magic users and preserves stories of the empire destroyed during Elra's ascent. Caldovi communities often have few magic users but many bards, rogues, civic keepers, and workers who treat competent service as devotion.

## **Pilgrimage and Sacred Animals**

An annual Glass Coast pilgrimage carries goat-milk wine and regional bread along the coast. Worshipers run until Elra becomes bored or tired of watching. Goats and crabs are sacred. Geese receive sacred treatment in some communities. Horses remain culturally central without becoming sacred animals.

## **Private Irreverence**

“The big blue child” is a private insult used by Sava, lanca, or another person confident that Elra cannot hear. It is not a devotional title and should never appear in public liturgy.

Mother Solice permits imitation of her appearance but strikes a person blind for claiming her divinity. Solice regards costume as symbol and false divinity as an attack upon public trust.

## **Campaign Use**

Do not present orthodoxy as reasonable and heresy as madness. Every faction should contain care, self-interest, courage, and danger. The conflict becomes useful when a player agrees with one principle and fears the practical consequence.

## **Giftschrank Priory**

*A containment institution beside a geothermal pond*

### **A House for Consequences**

Giftschrank Priory began as a monastic quarantine house beside a geothermal pond. It now holds objects that cannot safely be used, sold, forgotten, or easily destroyed. The order retains monastic language because vows, repetition, and public responsibility help dangerous work survive changes in personnel.

Procedure is a form of care. Every transfer creates a record. Every room has marked exits. Similar triggers remain separated. Containment plans assume that an expert can become curious, frightened, bribed, possessed, or wrong.

### **The Geothermal Site**

The Priory uses pond heat for sealed pipes, conservation work, medical treatment, and the nonmagical Null Kiln. The pond is not tame. Pressure vents, mineral deposits, steam, black water, and overflow channels shape movement around the complex.

A warning bridge crosses the warm outlet. Flags communicate isolation, medical danger, and magical danger. Visitors wait outside the Quiet Vaults while wardens inventory possessions and verify authority.

### **Fume and Tessel Vane**

Fume is never treated as a heroic sword in Priory records. It is an industrial hazard with a blade attached. Tessel Vane serves as senior custodian and records every consumed spell, release, transfer, and request to borrow the artifact.

During an earlier failure, Tessel kept hold of a carrying frame rather than allow Fume to fall into a crowded workroom. She lost her left arm below the elbow. Tessel refuses to make the injury proof of holiness or destiny.

### **Caldovian, Enemy of Custody**

Caldovian rarely attacks the vault. He brings authentic information, sympathetic claimants, public witnesses, cultural arguments, and a solution that fails after reasonable people accept part of the responsibility. A thief can be locked outside. Caldovian persuades someone with lawful authority to open the gate.

The Priory fears him because he makes institutional failure look meaningful.

## Using the Priory

Use the Priory as patron, neutral arbiter, emergency shelter, hazardous archive, or opponent to a character who believes power creates ownership. Priory competence should make recovery harder without making the party irrelevant.

## The Scarlet Step

*A visible thieves' guild built to attract attention*

### What the City Sees

The Scarlet Step is the thieves' guild adventurers expect: pickpockets, burglars, performers, couriers, protection collectors, colorful cells, memorable thieves, and a famous leader. The guild's theater is useful. Rivals, guards, clients, and young recruits focus on visible crime while deeper logistics remain ordinary and distributed.

### Cells and Careers

Most members are young and remain for only a few years. Many expect to learn enough to establish an independent crew elsewhere. Small cells know enough to complete work and too little to explain the whole organization.

A cell receives jobs, warnings, tools, buyers, safe rooms, and protection through intermediaries. Success can produce better work without producing access to leadership. No member earns a meeting with Vara Vay through merit, rank, profit, or longevity. Vara enters a member's orbit when she has a reason.

### Vara Vay

Vara Vay is the visible guild mistress and a genuine criminal authority. She uses a red mask when anonymity, ritual, or direct field work requires it. Her actor-doubles support controlled sightings, travel, and rumor. The doubles do not make her authority false.

Vara is Caldovian's lover and accomplice in selected crimes. She regards him as brilliant, difficult, useful, and emotionally real. She does not know his complete plan or that he intends to make her public death the heart of his transformation.

### Discipline

The Step punishes crimes that damage wider business: robbing protected clients, exposing routes, keeping valuable goods, ignoring limits, or creating attention without profit. Discipline often arrives indirectly. Fences stop buying. Safe rooms vanish. Contradictory orders appear. A dangerous assignment or legal case removes the problem.

Killing recruits does little lasting harm. Mapping protection, helping members leave, exposing documents, disrupting routes, or making visible crime too expensive creates real damage.

### Color and Red Thread

Scarlet is a promise, warning, and joke, but rarely a uniform. One thief may wear a red thread around a button. Another may hide scarlet stitching inside a cuff. Public display should feel chosen rather than compulsory.

## Handshake and the Red Fist

*Illegal fragments hidden inside ordinary commerce*

### Handshake of the Red Fist

Handshake is a decentralized collection of offices, warehouses, repair yards, carriers, workshops, liquidators, importers, armorers, and other ordinary businesses. Most workers perform legitimate jobs. Selected transactions, records, repairs, purchases, and shipments are illegal.

There is no central Handshake warehouse to discover or raid. A successful investigation finds a route, a relationship, a false record, or one participating business. Another portion of the network continues without knowing what was lost.

### **How Distributed Crime Works**

An office liquidates assets. Criminal buyers purchase the assets. Another seller changes the goods or records. A legal importer receives a shipment that appears ordinary. A stolen carriage is dismantled and used to repair twelve legitimate working carriages.

Fencing jewels is a small part of the operation. Most Handshake profit comes from silk rope, masterwork thieves' tools, red thread, and dark armor. These goods can be sold openly, quietly modified, or moved through respectable businesses.

### **The Red Fist Syndicate**

The deeper syndicate grew from survivors of the Red Steppe, a northern raider force that failed to sack Oraş Cald. The survivors concluded that visible leaders and direct violence get people killed.

The founding principle remains: "Let somebody else risk a neck. Stay on the xebec, drink tea, and do not get stabbed."

The Red Fist profits from acquisition, storage, alteration, documents, transport, resale, protection, and silence. Contradictory orders and replaceable identities protect the network from a single confession.

### **Hurting the Network**

The party harms the Red Fist by comparing documents, exposing protected relationships, disrupting trusted routes, forcing independent sales, increasing insurance or guard costs, and making ordinary businesses refuse criminal fragments. A dramatic raid may still matter, but no raid reveals the whole system.

### **GM Warning**

Do not convert Handshake back into a hidden super-warehouse for convenience. The lack of one decisive target is the point. Give the characters smaller victories with visible economic and social consequences.

### **Hidden Continuity**

*Vara Vay, Lysa Quill, the Lady on the Xebec, and Ra'av*

#### **The Visible Vara**

Vara Vay is the woman nearly everyone means when speaking of Vara. She believes she is Vara because she is the visible office, guild mistress, lover, employer, and criminal authority. The deeper deception does not make her daily power imaginary.

Vara uses temporary actor-doubles. A double covers one appearance or creates uncertainty around a route. No double inherits the complete office.

#### **Lysa Quill**

Lysa Quill is the long-term replacement prepared to succeed Vara Vay. She is distinct from the temporary doubles. Her training covers manner, relationships, routines, authority, habits, public history, and the practical operation of the visible guild.

If Vara dies, disappears, or becomes unusable, Lysa can assume the office with minimal disruption. The Scarlet Step is meant to continue as though Vara never truly left. Lysa does not know the Lady on the Xebec is the deeper leader.

#### **The Lady on the Xebec**

The Lady on the Xebec is the hidden leader of the Red Fist Syndicate. Success does not earn access to her. The closer an operator moves toward the deeper network, the more intermediaries appear. Discovering her identity does not create an appointment.

She remains aboard a fortified xebec when acting openly as the Lady. Distance is doctrine. The old Red Steppe lesson is not to stand where the knife will arrive.

### **Ra'av**

In the Border City, the Lady appears as Ra'av, an elderly servant, historian, and grandmotherly institutional memory of the Scarlet Step. Members ask about dead criminals, old customs, songs, and previous Varas. People speak carelessly because Ra'av appears harmless and past usefulness.

Ra'av uses nonmagical mesmerism: attention, framing, conditioning, repetition, and suggestion that feels like a person's own reasonable conclusion. Her apparent service to Lysa is part of the disguise. Lysa has no xebec, harbor, river-trade, or smuggling connection.

### **Varo**

Varo is a replaceable operational identity associated with Handshake. The current Varo and the Lady are not biological siblings. The sibling story comes from Red Steppe mythology and gives distant operators a memorable false structure.

### **Pressure Map**

The Priory wants safe custody and complete records. The Path wants cultural respect, hospitality, meaningful life, peaceful death, and protection from undeath. The House of the Mother wants an end to every resurrection. The Scarlet Step wants visible success and loyalty to Vara Vay. Handshake and the Red Fist want routes, documents, resale, and continuity after any leader falls. Caldovian wants access, witnesses, six compatible functions, Vara's symbolic death, and a return to Caldov as a living masterpiece.

For each relic crisis, choose at least three claims that cannot all be satisfied. Give every claimant one fact, one blind spot, and one cost. A compromise should solve the immediate problem while creating a new obligation.

### **The Six Relics**

*Shared cultural lineage, separate makers, incompatible responsibilities*

### **Not an Original Set**

The six relics were created in honor of Elra by different cultures across roughly forty-five centuries. The Bracers of Two Tongues are about five thousand years old. The Crooked Coin is the newest of the six and is at least five centuries old.

No original maker intended a combined machine. Caldovian sees compatible functions and imposes a set upon objects that carry different histories, claims, and warnings.

### **Cultural Trust**

Most relics belong to shared Elran heritage held through institutional custody, community trust, inherited obligation, or negotiated use. A museum may own a case without owning the cultural right to decide every use. A priest may hold authority without possessing a safe vault. A character may become the only practical bearer without becoming the owner.

Fume is the exception. Containment matters more than ordinary ownership.

### **Recognition Within 60 Feet**

Linked relics recognize one another within 60 feet. Bracer inscriptions rearrange. Fume produces smoke or sound. The Key points toward an impossible seam. The Reliquary beats. The Coin balances. The Mirror reflects a moment early.

Recognition communicates relation, warning, need, disagreement, capacity, or immediate function. Recognition is not obedience, consent, attunement, or proof that Caldovian's interpretation is correct.

### **The Crown of Cinders**

The Crown of Cinders is a title and ritual state, not a seventh relic. The Coin of the Phoenix is a separate resurrection item important to the Glass Coast sequel. Neither object belongs in the six-function count.

### **The Six Functions**

The Bracers provide interpretation. Fume provides consumption and release. The Key provides passage. The Reliquary provides a preserved ending. The Coin provides borrowed success and deferred failure. The Mirror provides immediate consequence.

Caldovian needs functions, not exact objects. A missing relic weakens or distorts his ritual but does not cancel the finale.

### **Campaign Record**

Maintain a custody line for each relic: current bearer, legal claimant, cultural claimant, last verified location, last recognition event, and Caldovian's access. Update the record after every adventure.

### **Bracers of Two Tongues**

*Interpretation without compulsory agreement*

#### **Appearance**

One narrow bracer is pale silver and covered in flowing Old Elven. The other is broader, dark bronze, and inscribed in blunt Common. The inscriptions do not mirror one another. One speaks; the other answers, qualifies, interprets, or states the practical consequence.

#### **Origin**

Elra commissioned the pair to end a war by allowing human and elven negotiators to understand one another well enough to form an alliance. The Bracers do not force peace or agreement. The pair makes disagreement useful by revealing implication, obligation, social register, and likely responsibility.

#### **Campaign Function**

The Bracers introduce the campaign because the power feels constructive. The pair translates idiom, compares accounts, and interprets the immediate reactions of linked relics. Characters can want the Bracers without wanting domination or destruction.

Caldovian wants interpretation because his ritual requires six unrelated objects to answer as though a single purpose exists. He treats any answer as permission to continue.

#### **Custody Conflict**

One community may claim the silver bracer while another claims the bronze. A museum may hold legal title. A court may want the pair as evidence. A ruler may request diplomatic use. A scholar may argue that separating the pair is safer.

The strongest conflicts ask whether understanding creates duty. A bearer who learns what a relic needs cannot pretend ignorance, but knowledge alone does not grant authority.

#### **At the Table**

Use the Bracers to reveal differences rather than final truth. Two honest witnesses can remember the same event differently. A relic's warning may be accurate and still self-interested. The pair should improve play by creating better questions.

#### **Complete Rules**

Chapter 14 presents attunement, defense, languages, comparative understanding, relic interpretation, object statistics, and repair rules.

## **Fume**

*The weapon people still want after understanding the warning*

### **Appearance and Identity**

Fume is a slender dark longsword with deep blue and violet patterns. Grey smoke drifts through a black central channel even while the sword rests. As magic accumulates, the smoke thickens and sounds emerge: whispering, distant thunder, breaking glass, a drawn breath, or the beginning of a word.

The archaic command word means smoke and is pronounced “foom.” Witnesses hear the shout immediately before catastrophe, so the sword is widely called That FOOM Sword.

### **Smoke Drinker**

Fume is a +1 artifact longsword with finesse and versatile properties. Whenever a spell is cast within 30 feet, roll a d20. On a 1, Fume consumes the spell before its effect, the caster expends the resource, and Fume gains 1 charge regardless of spell level.

Fume holds 12 charges and regains none at dawn. While full, Fume continues hunting spells. If another spell is consumed, the spell is negated, an automatic FOOM occurs, and Fume ends at 11 charges.

### **FOOM**

A voluntary release spends 1 charge, determines the center with 2d6, and rolls on the d100 FOOM table. A beneficial effect still strikes the determined center. No wielder, god, priest, or Game Master convenience controls the result.

A bearer attuned to Fume and the Crooked Coin may replace the normal release with the Borrowed FOOM d20 table by accepting Luck Debt. The Coin can steer the d20 option but cannot choose, reroll, or soften a normal d100 result.

### **Secondary Danger**

Meaningful contact with an enchanted item carries a 0.01 percent chance that Fume permanently consumes one magical property. The contact cannot be farmed repeatedly for charges. Artifacts resist unless a specific rule permits damage or loss.

Elra likes Fume and cannot command it. Caldovian wants its function and underestimates how little distinction the sword makes between allies and fuel.

### **Custody**

Tessel Vane records every consumed spell and keeps the sword sheathed whenever possible. A full sword is not safe. A bearer should face practical changes in tactics, witnesses, fear, custody claims, and temptation rather than secret punishment for accepting the campaign's featured weapon.

### **Complete Rules**

Chapter 14 contains the Smoke Drinker d20 chart, center table, complete d100 FOOM table, Borrowed FOOM d20 chart, destruction procedure, and object statistics.

## **Passage and the Final Beat**

*The Key Without a House and the Obsidian Reliquary*

### **Key Without a House**

The Key is a long iron object with no repeated tooth and no sign of wear. Near a barrier, its shadow points toward a door, seam, tunnel, window, servant entrance, or practical route that may be invisible from the bearer's position.

The Key opens mundane locks without damage, creates temporary visible doorways through ordinary material, and can connect a doorway to a familiar passage within range. When a magical ward or sovereign boundary rejects it, the Key points toward the nearest mundane route.

Its governing principle is simple: passage is not permission. The Key bypasses barriers, not ownership, invitation, law, vows, or consequences.

## Using the Key

The Key makes physical design and social authority collide. A sealed royal gate may reject it while a servant door remains available. A house can exist in the tax record without possessing a lawful entrance. A prison may ask the Priory to authenticate a Key that has stopped opening locks and begun opening roads.

Caldovian wants passage stripped of consent. The campaign repeatedly asks the party to separate ability from right.

## Obsidian Reliquary

The Reliquary is a palm-sized black vessel with a seamless lid. When empty it is silent. When holding a final heartbeat, a faint pulse can be felt through the stone.

The vessel captures the final heartbeat of a creature that has died. The stored beat can prevent another creature from falling, produce one final sentence from the original corpse, or lend the body one minute of simple physical motion.

The Reliquary does not contain a soul. It does not resurrect. Last Answer can be mistaken, evasive, or false because the sentence comes from what the body knew at death rather than from perfect truth.

## Using the Reliquary

The Reliquary turns grief into custody. Who may release the heartbeat? Does saving a living stranger misuse a dead person's final bodily ending? Can a court compel one final answer? Is borrowed motion desecration when it allows a body to point toward a murderer?

Caldovian mistakes preserved ending for preserved self. This misunderstanding becomes central to his belief that a performance can outlive the person who performed it.

## Complete Rules

Chapter 14 provides charges, reactions, healing, Last Answer, Borrowed Motion, limits, and object statistics.

## Borrowed Success and the Unlived Moment

*The Crooked Coin, the Mirror, and the damaged set*

### Crooked Coin

The Crooked Coin is pale electum, a Caldovi metal also called aluminum. It is bent through the portrait of a crowned woman and lands on its edge more often than chance permits. Witnesses disagree about the ruler's face, age, and expression while examining the same side.

The Coin may be the only surviving proof that a southern coastal empire existed before Elra reduced it to glass and ash. Stories identify the crowned woman as an empress whose beauty rivaled Elra, Elra herself ruling a sacrificial kingdom, or an older sorceress whose ascent created the first lich or goddess of murder.

### Luck Debt

When a bearer fails a d20 test, the Coin can turn the die into a natural 20. The success is real. The bearer gains Luck Debt. At a dramatically fair later moment, one successful test becomes a natural 1, or the bearer settles the debt through a serious voluntary failure, forfeiture, confession, loss, or refusal.

Collection should be visible and proportionate. It should not arbitrarily harm unrelated innocents or erase a completed achievement.

### Mirror of the Unlived Moment

The Mirror is a dark palm mirror that never reflects the exact present. A raised hand appears a fraction early. A falling cup is already broken. An unopened door briefly shows the first person who will pass through it.

The Mirror improves initiative and immediate awareness, can force an attack to be reconsidered, and can reveal the first significant direct consequence of one proposed action within the next minute. It does not show secret motives, remote outcomes, a complete future, or the best choice.

### **The Damaged Set**

Caldovian can substitute a magical object, civic mechanism, performer, prepared vessel, or structurally similar enchantment for a missing function. A substitute distorts the Unbound Circle and changes the finale. It never erases the finale.

Record which true relics and substitutes enter Oraş Cald. Earlier victories should weaken Caldovian, remove options, increase instability, or provide the party with better control of the Hollow Circle.

### **Final Reminder**

The relics are not six keys waiting for a lock. Each object is a useful power, a cultural argument, and a responsibility. The campaign works when the characters still want the relic after learning why possession is difficult.

### **Complete Rules**

Chapter 14 includes Coin charges, Luck Debt, the Borrowed FOOM interaction chart, Mirror charges, immediate-consequence procedures, recognition, substitutions, and a campaign custody tracker.



## CHAPTER 4 — A Player's Guide to the Border City

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### Welcome to the Border City

The Border City stands near the frozen north, where river traffic, caravan roads, geothermal water, old shrines, new businesses, and several immigrant communities meet. It is cold, crowded, theatrical, practical, and old enough to possess more than one explanation for almost everything.

This chapter is safe to share with players before the campaign. It describes public knowledge, ordinary services, visible institutions, common rumors, and places a resident or visitor may know. Nothing in this chapter explains the campaign's central conspiracy or the true purpose of the six relics.

### What Life Feels Like

A winter street may contain a bathhouse vent, a funeral procession, a courier carrying three sealed packages, a theater queue, a broken carriage under repair, a priest serving soup, and a clerk arguing about a bridge permit. No single institution controls the entire city. Authority changes from street to street and problem to problem.

Residents respect competence. A person who can repair a hinge, verify a signature, carry a body properly, find a safe room, cook for a crowd, or keep a road open may possess more practical influence than a decorated noble.

### What Characters Commonly Know

The Scarlet Step is a thieves' guild with visible style and invisible reach. Giftschrunk Priory stores magical objects that cannot safely be used or destroyed. The Last Watch verifies identity and death when magic makes either uncertain. The Path of Glorious Life honors Elra and Mother Solice. Elra is dangerous to imitate. Vara Vay leads the Scarlet Step. Caldovian is a celebrated performer who appears at the Red Door.

None of this knowledge establishes guilt, ownership, or complete truth. In the Border City, a public fact is usually the beginning of a disagreement.

### A Good Starting Attitude

Ask who has authority here, who has responsibility here, who benefits from delay, and who will record what happens. Carry dry socks. Read every contract twice. Never assume an ordinary object is unimportant merely because a magical object is present.

## **Finding a Way Through**

*Districts, roads, steam, and ordinary travel*

### **Common District Names**

The city has official wards, old neighborhood names, trade names, and private names used by residents. Visitors usually rely on practical shorthand.

The Visitors' District surrounds the Red Door, inexpensive rooms, eating houses, small theaters, caravan offices, and businesses that can equip a traveler quickly. The River Warehouses hold grain, timber, cloth, ceramics, imported machinery, and goods whose paperwork may be cleaner than the goods. The Steam Quarter contains public baths, laundries, healers, boiler works, tile shops, and streets warmed from below. The Measures Ward contains civic offices, legal copyists, scales, route maps, and clerks who can tell a person exactly which office has refused responsibility.

Beyond the dense streets, the East Reeds follow geothermal overflow toward Giftschrunk Priory. The road is public. The Priory grounds are not.

### **Streets and Bridges**

Old bridges carry several generations of repairs. New stone may sit beside old brick, elven foundations, timber braces, and pipes installed by workers who argued about every measurement. During bad weather, a bridge may close to wagons but remain open to foot traffic. A red cord, chalk mark, or posted board may indicate repairs, a funeral route, criminal attention, or nothing more dangerous than wet paint.

The shortest route is rarely the simplest route. A procession, market, inspection, burst pipe, public performance, or arrested wagon can change movement without warning.

### **Geothermal Heat**

Warm water reaches bathhouses, kitchens, laundries, workshops, and public pipes. Steam is useful, dirty, occasionally dangerous, and never treated as magical merely because a visitor finds it impressive. Residents recognize warning bells, mineral smells, pressure knocks, and the difference between ordinary steam and a reason to run.

Do not open a marked valve. Do not block a grated channel. Do not stand on a warm iron cover because the street is cold.

### **Getting Help**

A lost visitor can ask an innkeeper, bath attendant, courier, watch officer, public cook, or road clerk. The answer may include a warning, a fee, a correction to the question, or all three. City directions often use businesses and public works rather than street numbers: left after the northern bath vent, across from the blue weighing stone, or two doors before the bridge office.

## Places to Know

*Player-forward location descriptions, part one*

### **The Red Door**

A broad red-painted entrance opens into an inn warmer than the street deserves. Music, stew, wet coats, and private conversations share the crowded air.

### **Giftschrank Priory**

Dark stone walls follow the edge of a black geothermal pond. Warning bells, clipped paths, iron hooks, and labeled gates surround a priory built by people who consider caution a sacred duty.

### **Cheval Oratorie**

Painted horses, carved saddles, battle banners, and blue devotional cloth fill a grand Elran hall devoted to a history told with confidence and very selective detail.

### **Păianjen și Pânză**

A painted sign reads “food and drink” beneath the image of a spider and web. Inside, long tables, heavy kettles, good bread, and watchful service make strangers feel noticed without feeling examined.

### **The Last Watch**

Black cloth covers the mirrors. Lamps are hooded, names are written twice, and every room is arranged to make uncertainty leave evidence.

### **Vara Vay's Public House**

Polished wood, scarlet thread, perfect repairs, and quiet guards mark a severe building designed for private decisions rather than public admiration.

### **The Public Weighing Floor**

Grain measures, wagon scales, brass standards, and chalked prices fill an open civic hall where value becomes public before money changes hands.

### **The Outer Reed Road**

Warm drainage channels divide low reeds beside a road that bends toward distant stone walls and a bell tower rising through steam.

### **Mirrorglass Baths**

Steam drifts across tiled pools and old mirrors, softening voices and making every reflection look slightly delayed.

### **The House of Roads and Measures**

Stone counters, brass scales, route maps, numbered desks, and public notices fill a civic house where distance, weight, passage, and obligation are expected to become exact.

### **The House of the Mother**

A refined perfumery and devotional house offers pale flowers, quiet rooms, funerary scents, and attendants who speak of death as a promise that must not be

### **Silver Steam**

Scrubbed tables, excellent locks, heavy kettles, and quiet pipes offer the comfort of a breakfast room built to survive important guests.

### **The Registry House**

Tall shelves, numbered desks, sealed drawers, and patient clerks turn identity into paper. Every name appears to have a place, even when no one agrees where that

### **The House Without an Entrance**

The narrow building has walls, windows, chimneys, and a roof, but no visible door, gate, cellar opening, or honest explanation for how anyone enters.

### **The River Carriage Yards**

Working carriages stand beside dismantled frames, stacked wheels, clean axles, and repair sheds. Nothing remains whole merely because it arrived whole.

### **The Hollow Crown Theatre**

A faded crown hangs above a theater whose velvet, ropes, mirrors, and painted scenery preserve the confidence of better-funded years.

## **Food, Lodging, Work, and Equipment**

*The ordinary things that keep adventurers alive*

### **Food and Drink**

Hot meals are common because kitchens can draw heat from public or private steam systems. Stews, roast meat, grain dishes, preserved fruit, pickles, dark breads, river vegetables, and imported spices appear throughout the city. Horse meat is available in northern and Elran establishments, but no one should mistake the custom for a universal meal or a sacred requirement.

Goats and crabs receive unusual religious respect. Geese receive similar treatment in some communities. A cook may refuse to prepare a sacred animal while serving horse without hesitation.

### **Lodging**

The Red Door offers crowded warmth, meals, private rooms, and a social center for adventurers. Bathhouses rent sleeping alcoves during severe weather. Caravan offices maintain bunkrooms. Temples sometimes provide shelter after service, grief, injury, or public disaster.

A cheap room may be safe, clean, quiet, or private. Expect to choose two. A room with all four qualities usually belongs to a person with influence or careful friends.

### **Finding Work**

Work boards appear in inns, guild offices, caravan yards, temples, and civic houses. Honest employers describe authority, payment, risk, and ownership separately. Fraudulent employers combine all four into one urgent story.

Useful work includes escorting people or objects, recovering records, verifying claims, protecting repairs, finding missing couriers, guarding funerals, carrying sealed messages, testing routes, and keeping a public service open during a crisis.

### **Useful Purchases**

Silk rope, thieves' tools, dark armor, red thread, waterproof cases, heat-resistant gloves, waxed document wraps, hidden-pocket clothing, carriage parts, and measuring chains are easy to find. Quality varies. The best criminal equipment often passes through legal shops because the item itself is legal.

A masterwork tool does not excuse a poor plan. A cheap tool does not prove an owner is harmless.

### **Money and Favors**

Coin pays for a service. A favor may pay for silence, priority, risk, or access that no posted price covers. Residents remember who paid fairly, who demanded an exception, and who treated ordinary workers as scenery.

## **Law, Faith, and the Dead**

*Public rules that matter before combat begins*

### **Fragmented Authority**

The city watch handles violence, public danger, and immediate order. Civic offices handle permits, roads, measures, trade records, and public works. Temples may control funerary practice without controlling criminal evidence. A property owner may possess a building without possessing every object inside it. Giftschränk Priory may claim containment authority without claiming cultural ownership.

Ask for a written order. Ask which office issued it. Ask whether the order covers the person, the place, the object, or only the route.

### **The Last Watch**

When identity, death, duplication, resurrection, illusion, or possession may be involved, the Last Watch establishes a chain of observation. Mirrors can be covered. Carried magic can be separated. Names, handwriting, wounds, voice, witnesses, and time are recorded.

A corpse is evidence, a person, and the center of possible religious claims. A body is never merely unattended treasure.

### **Elra and Mother Solice**

The Path of Glorious Life and Peaceful Death honors two divine faces. Elra is flesh, beauty, appetite, noise, courage, and divine anger. Mother Solice is mummified dignity, quiet authority, continuity, funerary order, and civic duty.

Followers greet one another by tracing a narrow wavering line in the air. The same line appears in blue on white cloth, signs, records, and devotional objects.

### **Imitation and Invocation**

Do not paint the body blue and claim to be Elra outside the Festival of the Last Empire. The warning is religious, magical, and practical. A person who impersonates Elra risks possession or sacrifice.

The phrase “Glory to Elra” can be ordinary devotion. Whispered inside a prepared congregation, the same phrase may begin a coordinated dagger ritual. Context matters.

### **Resurrection and Undeath**

Orthodox Elran practice disagrees about resurrection but condemns undeath strongly. The House of the Mother rejects every resurrection without exception. Mother Solice is openly divine, openly Undead, and openly the contradiction that neither side can make disappear.

### **Public Powers**

*Institutions, reputations, and visible factions*

#### **The Scarlet Step**

The Scarlet Step is a visible thieves' guild of burglars, couriers, fixers, performers, fences, and small cells. Scarlet may appear as thread, lining, a painted heel, or a deliberate mask rather than a uniform.

Vara Vay is the guild's public leader. A member does not earn a meeting with her through rank or long service. Vara appears when a problem matters to Vara.

#### **Handshake**

Handshake is a name associated with freight, repair, liquidation, buying, importing, tools, armor, rope, and people who can make difficult goods move. Some offices are respectable. Some offices are criminal. Many employees would find the distinction irrelevant to most of a normal workday.

No sensible resident assumes every warehouse with clean papers is innocent or every suspicious warehouse is important.

#### **Giftschrank Priory**

The Priory contains dangerous magical objects and maintains procedures for transport, storage, testing, and emergency response. Priory staff can be obstructive because containment work requires refusal. A warden who says no may be protecting a street rather than protecting institutional pride.

#### **The Path**

Elran temples, kitchens, bathhouses, funeral houses, workshops, and civic offices overlap. Authority follows responsibility. A celebrated champion can inspire a crowd without outranking a custodian responsible for one body or one furnace.

#### **Civic Offices**

The House of Roads and Measures, Registry House, weighing floors, bridge offices, and repair boards rarely behave like one unified government. A correct document can still arrive at the wrong desk. A clerk may be powerless to approve a request and completely capable of preventing anyone else from pretending approval already exists.

## Inns and Kitchens

An innkeeper often knows who arrived, who left, who paid, who ate, who lied about eating, and which trouble entered through the kitchen. Public cooks and servers hear many stories. Courtesy to staff is both decent behavior and sound investigative practice.

## Belonging in the Border City

*Character ties, public rumors, and useful habits*

### Choose Two Connections

Before the first session, choose or invent two connections.

1. A business owner once hid you from a dangerous employer.
2. You worked at an inn, theater, bathhouse, archive, workshop, caravan yard, temple, or public kitchen.
3. A Scarlet Step favor protected someone you care about.
4. A civic office preserved a record that proved your identity or innocence.
5. A Priory custodian refused your request and was probably correct.
6. A Last Watch clerk recorded an event no one else believed.
7. You owe money or labor to a carriage yard, tailor, rope seller, or importer.
8. You know a performer, server, courier, porter, bath attendant, or road worker by name.
9. A funerary dispute divided your family or community.
10. You have seen a person use respectable paperwork for a dishonest purpose.
11. You once carried an object no one trusted you to open.
12. Someone at the Red Door recognizes you from an earlier visit.

### Public Rumors

Choose one rumor as something your character has heard. Accuracy is not guaranteed.

1. The Scarlet Step can arrange a bed, a boat, or a forged signature, but never without remembering the favor.
2. The Last Watch writes every name twice because one version may be wearing the other.
3. Giftschrunk Priory has more warning bells than wardens.
4. The Red Door serves better stew on nights when the musicians are terrible.
5. Vara Vay knows every person who has lied to her and prefers several such liars.
6. The best couriers wear ordinary shoes and carry expensive thread.
7. A professional custodian asks where an object has been before asking what it does.
8. The House of Roads and Measures can prove a road exists even after a building covers it.
9. A good innkeeper can tell whether trouble entered through the front door by how the kitchen goes quiet.
10. Every magnificent magical object eventually becomes a clerk's problem.

### Useful Habits

Agree upon one party habit before play: no one carries a relic alone; no contract is accepted before payment and authority are verified separately; no body is moved before identity is recorded; no companion is abandoned because a respected institution demands it; or no accusation is made from one piece of evidence.

## Voices of the Border City

Player-forward quotes, part one

|                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Ossa Brindle</b><br><i>"You can be mysterious after breakfast. Before breakfast, you are only delaying the eggs."</i>                            | <b>Ossa Brindle</b><br><i>"The Red Door is not neutral. It is mine, and I prefer living customers."</i>                   |
| <b>Caldovian</b><br><i>"Please do not confuse confidence with a lack of preparation. I prepared several excellent explanations."</i>                | <b>Caldovian</b><br><i>"A dangerous object is simply an ordinary object with better publicity."</i>                       |
| <b>Vara Vay</b><br><i>"Tell me what happened, not what you hoped was happening."</i>                                                                | <b>Vara Vay</b><br><i>"Charm is a tool. So is a lock. Trouble begins when someone mistakes either one for affection."</i> |
| <b>Sava Dren</b><br><i>"A legal document is not proof of honesty. It is proof that someone anticipated a question."</i>                             | <b>Sava Dren</b><br><i>"No. You may ask the longer question if you need a longer refusal."</i>                            |
| <b>Ianca Mereş</b><br><i>"Engineering is the art of making consequences arrive in the correct order."</i>                                           | <b>Ianca Mereş</b><br><i>"The floor is not moving. You are moving incorrectly upon it."</i>                               |
| <b>Tessel Vane</b><br><i>"Procedure is care written down."</i>                                                                                      | <b>Tessel Vane</b><br><i>"Surviving a dangerous object does not qualify a person to explain it."</i>                      |
| <b>Vara Vay</b><br><i>"A witness is not someone who agrees with you. A witness is someone who remains alive long enough to disagree in public."</i> | <b>Caldovian</b><br><i>"I like heroes. Heroes make impossible requests sound like invitations."</i>                       |
| <b>Mother Solice</b><br><i>"A glorious death leaves work. Complete the work."</i>                                                                   | <b>Mother Solice</b><br><i>"Duty is not less sacred because no audience understands .."</i>                               |
| <b>Elra</b><br><i>"Eat first. Courage lies badly when hungry."</i>                                                                                  | <b>Elra</b><br><i>"Beautiful is not the same as good. Beautiful is louder."</i>                                           |
| <b>Lady Cornelia Van Ghoul</b><br><i>"A promise that ends at death was honest. A promise that drags a corpse back is ownership."</i>                | <b>Lady Cornelia Van Ghoul</b><br><i>"I do not fear death. I fear people who believe love gives permission."</i>          |
| <b>Thosa Lham</b><br><i>"The dead require no performance. The living often require several."</i>                                                    | <b>Thosa Lham</b><br><i>"Say the final words exactly. Grief may interpret later."</i>                                     |
| <b>Nela Vos</b><br><i>"An audience sees the face offered to it. A mirror is not always so polite."</i>                                              | <b>Nela Vos</b><br><i>"Costume is not identity, but identity has often rented a costume."</i>                             |
| <b>House of Roads Clerk</b><br><i>"The permit is valid. The route is closed. Both facts can remain true until morning."</i>                         | <b>Last Watch Clerk</b><br><i>"State what you saw. Then state what you think. Do not improve either answer."</i>          |
| <b>Bath Attendant</b><br><i>"Blue valve for heat. Brass valve for pressure. Red cord means stop touching things."</i>                               | <b>Handshake Broker</b><br><i>"I buy damaged assets. I do not ask how damage became available."</i>                       |
| <b>Scarlet Step Courier</b><br><i>"A red thread means something. The useful question is who tied it."</i>                                           | <b>Public Cook</b><br><i>"Everyone becomes honest after stew. Some people require a second bowl."</i>                     |

These quotations establish public voice rather than secret allegiance. A person may lie, joke, exaggerate, repeat a saying, or speak differently under pressure. Use the lines as inspiration, not as promises about later behavior.



## CHAPTER 5 — Player Options

*This chapter presents optional character material connected to Elra, Mother Solice, the Border City, and the roads leading toward Oraş Cald. Every option is designed for active play: movement, protection, practical problem solving, dangerous ritual, or a meaningful choice between spectacle and duty.*

### Rules Basis

These options use the SRD 5.2.1 class, subclass, background, feat, and spell structure. Subclass features appear at the revised fifth-edition levels. All new rules remain playtest material until used at the table. A player should receive Game Master approval before selecting any option in this chapter.

### Two Divine Faces

Elra is fleshy beauty, appetite, noise, courage, performance, heat, and divine anger. Mother Solice is mummified dignity, silence, continuity, funerary order, public responsibility, and civic duty. Neither woman is subordinate. A character may serve one divine face, honor both, reject the church while keeping its practices, or carry divine attention without any faith at all.

### Options in This Chapter

| Type             | Option                       | Play Identity                                                             |
|------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cleric           | Glorious Life Domain         | Move allies, preserve life, balance courage with finality.                |
| Paladin          | Oath of the Last Road        | Hold a dangerous foe, protect consent, carry companions home.             |
| Monk             | Warrior of the Wavering Line | Cross the battlefield, redirect misses, fight in moving patterns.         |
| Barbarian        | Path of the Glorious Burden  | Take part of an ally's injury and make the pain useful.                   |
| Sorcerer         | Wound-Touched Sorcery        | Turn spells into appetite, anger, beauty, and dangerous attention.        |
| Warlock          | Mother Solice Patron         | Preserve failed work, cast through an ally, and keep the office standing. |
| Backgrounds      | Three origins                | Civic Keeper, Steppe Devotee, Keeper of Final Words.                      |
| Feats and Spells | Six feats, eight spells      | Food, movement, daggers, funerary custody, repair, and anti-Undead magic. |

### Using Player Options in the Campaign

No option grants secret knowledge. A character may recognize public doctrine, ritual forms, or ordinary equipment, but campaign revelations still require play. A class feature never settles ownership of a relic, outranks a custodian, or makes Elra's favor morally reliable.

**PLAYTEST PRIORITY.** *After each session, ask which feature created a satisfying decision, which feature was forgotten, and which feature solved a problem too easily. Adjust numbers only after observing actual play.*

### Cleric Subclass: Glorious Life Domain

*Elra's courage and Mother Solice's continuity*

*Clerics of the Glorious Life Domain minister to both divine faces. A cleric can be loud or quiet, orthodox or reforming, but must treat living and dying as responsibilities rather than abstractions.*

## Glorious Life Spells

| Cleric Level | Always Prepared Spells                                     |
|--------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3            | Aid, Gentle Repose, Heroism, Protection from Evil and Good |
| 5            | Aura of Vitality, Speak with Dead                          |
| 7            | Aura of Life, Death Ward                                   |
| 9            | Greater Restoration, Hallow                                |

### Level 3: Civic Calling

Gain proficiency in one of the following: Insight, Medicine, Persuasion, Religion, Cook's Utensils, Mason's Tools, or Smith's Tools. If you already have the chosen proficiency, gain Expertise in it instead.

### Level 3: Two Sides of Grace

You gain the following Channel Divinity options. Each option expends one use of Channel Divinity.

#### Glorious Life

As a Bonus Action, choose a number of creatures within 30 feet up to your Wisdom modifier, with a minimum of one creature. Each chosen creature gains Temporary Hit Points equal to 2d8 plus your Cleric level and can move up to 10 feet without provoking Opportunity Attacks.

#### Peaceful Death

As a Reaction when a living creature within 30 feet would be reduced to 0 Hit Points, cause that creature to drop to 1 Hit Point instead. The creature has Resistance to all damage until the start of its next turn. This option cannot affect an Undead creature.

### Level 6: Balanced Ministry

Once on each of your turns when a Cleric spell restores Hit Points to a creature or deals Radiant or Necrotic damage, choose a different creature within 30 feet. The chosen creature either gains Temporary Hit Points equal to your Wisdom modifier or moves up to 10 feet without provoking Opportunity Attacks.

### Level 17: One Coin, Two Faces

When you use one option of Two Sides of Grace, the other option remains available until the end of your next turn and can be used once without expending Channel Divinity. The free use cannot trigger this feature again. In addition, a creature with Temporary Hit Points from Glorious Life has Advantage on saving throws against Charmed, Frightened, and possession.

**AT THE TABLE.** Open a dangerous round with Glorious Life, then use healing or Radiant damage to move one more ally. Save Peaceful Death for a fall that would otherwise collapse the party's position.

## Paladin Subclass: Oath of the Last Road

*Defend glorious life without stealing peaceful death*

*A paladin of the Last Road protects consent, opposes predatory undeath, and refuses to turn grief into ownership. The oath honors courage, but it measures courage by who returns home.*

### Tenets of the Last Road

- Live Greatly. Safety is not the only good, and fame is not the only glory.
- Do Not Cheapen Sacrifice. A choice matters because it can cost something real.
- Guard the Final Door. No power, title, or grief owns the dead.
- Carry the Living Home. Courage includes evacuation, food, repair, and care afterward.

## Oath Spells

| Paladin Level | Always Prepared Spells            |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|
| 3             | Heroism, Sanctuary                |
| 5             | Gentle Repose, Lesser Restoration |
| 9             | Aura of Vitality, Speak with Dead |
| 13            | Aura of Life, Death Ward          |
| 17            | Dispelling Evil and Good, Hallow  |

### Level 3: Channel Divinity

#### Glorious Challenge

As a Bonus Action, choose one creature within 30 feet. The target makes a Wisdom saving throw against your spell save DC. On a failed save, the effect lasts for 1 minute: the target has Disadvantage on attack rolls against creatures other than you, and once on each of your turns when you hit the target with an attack, the attack deals extra Radiant damage equal to your Charisma modifier, with a minimum of 1. The target repeats the save at the end of each turn. The effect ends while the target is more than 30 feet from you.

#### Keep the Last Door

As a Reaction when a living creature within 30 feet fails a saving throw against Charmed, Frightened, possession, or magical transformation into Undead, add your Charisma modifier to the roll, potentially turning failure into success. If the effect permits a later saving throw, the creature can instead repeat that save immediately and add your Charisma modifier.

### Level 7: Aura of Finality

You and allies in your Aura of Protection have Resistance to Necrotic damage and Advantage on saving throws against possession. A corpse inside the aura cannot be animated or transformed into Undead. The aura expands with Aura Expansion as normal.

### Level 15: No Death Stolen

When a living creature in your Aura of Protection drops to 0 Hit Points but is not killed outright, use your Reaction to let the creature spend one Hit Point Die and regain Hit Points equal to the roll plus your Charisma modifier. You take Radiant damage equal to the number rolled; this damage cannot be reduced. You can use this feature a number of times equal to your Charisma modifier, with a minimum of one use, and regain all uses after a Long Rest.

### Level 20: Incarnation of the Last Road

As a Bonus Action, embody the road between glory and peace for 1 minute. Your aura becomes 30 feet. Allies inside it gain 10 feet of Speed and cannot be Charmed, Frightened, or possessed. The first time each ally would drop to 0 Hit Points during the transformation, that ally drops to 1 Hit Point instead. Undead inside the aura have half Speed and Disadvantage on saving throws against your Paladin features. Once per Long Rest, or regain use by expending a level 5 spell slot.

## Monk Subclass: Warrior of the Wavering Line

*Turn the Path's symbol into footwork*

*The Wavering Line teaches that a straight approach is often vanity. Move where the wound opens, stop where duty requires, and never let an opponent decide the shape of the room.*

### Level 3: Wavering Line Technique

Daggers are Monk weapons for you. Whenever you expend a Focus Point to use Flurry of Blows, Patient Defense, or Step of the Wind, choose one technique. A single use of a feature grants only one technique.

#### Cut

One Unarmed Strike or dagger hit before the end of the turn deals one extra roll of your Martial Arts die.

#### Slip

Until the end of the turn, you can move through the spaces of creatures larger than you as Difficult Terrain. A creature whose space you leave cannot make Opportunity Attacks against you during that turn.

#### Still

Gain Temporary Hit Points equal to one roll of your Martial Arts die plus your Wisdom modifier.

### Level 6: Return the Miss

When Deflect Attacks reduces damage to 0, you can expend 1 Focus Point to move up to half your Speed without provoking Opportunity Attacks. If the attacker is within reach at the end of the movement, make one Unarmed Strike or dagger attack against the attacker. On a hit, the attack deals one extra Martial Arts die of damage.

### Level 11: Chorus of One

When you use Flurry of Blows, make three attacks instead of two if each attack targets a different creature, or if you move at least 10 feet between the first and second attacks and again between the second and third attacks. This movement can occur before, between, or after the attacks as long as both distances are completed.

### Level 17: Perfect Wound

When you hit a creature with an Unarmed Strike or dagger, you can expend 3 Focus Points to mark the creature for 1 minute. Once on each of your turns, after moving at least 10 feet before hitting the marked creature, deal two extra Martial Arts dice of Force damage. After this bonus has occurred on three different turns, you can end the mark when you hit the creature. The target makes a Constitution saving throw against your Focus save DC, taking eight Martial Arts dice of Force damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful save. Once you use this feature, you cannot use it again until after a Long Rest, unless you expend 5 Focus Points when you roll Initiative to regain its use.

**AT THE TABLE.** The subclass rewards visible movement. Use Slip to pass through a large enemy, Cut when a target must fall now, and Still when Patient Defense needs to hold a dangerous position.

### Barbarian Subclass: Path of the Glorious Burden

*Accept the load and make the hurt useful*

*A Glorious Burden barbarian rages because someone still has to hold the door, carry the wounded, brace the bridge, or keep the monster away from the healer. Fury becomes radical responsibility.*

### Level 3: Carry the Weight

While your Rage is active, when another creature within 10 feet takes damage, use your Reaction to divide that damage equally between you and the creature before either creature applies Resistance, Immunity, or any other reduction. Round odd damage down for the other creature and up for you.

Also while raging, your carrying capacity doubles, and you cannot be moved or knocked Prone unless you choose.

**DAMAGE ORDER.** Divide the original damage first. After division, each creature applies its own Resistance, Immunity, or reduction. This prevents the same Resistance from reducing one injury twice.

#### **Level 6: Stand Where Needed**

When you enter your Rage, and as a Bonus Action on later turns while raging, choose an ally you can see within 30 feet. Move up to half your Speed toward that ally without provoking Opportunity Attacks. If you end within 5 feet of the ally, both of you gain +1 AC until the start of your next turn.

#### **Level 10: Make the Hurt Useful**

Once on each of your turns, if you took damage through Carry the Weight since the end of your previous turn, one Strength-based attack that hits deals an extra 2d8 damage. The target cannot make Opportunity Attacks until the start of its next turn.

#### **Level 14: No One Falls Alone**

Once during each Rage, when a living ally within 10 feet would be reduced to 0 Hit Points but is not killed outright, use your Reaction to make the ally drop to 1 Hit Point instead. You take Force damage equal to twice your Barbarian level; this damage ignores Resistance and Immunity. You can then move up to half your Speed without provoking Opportunity Attacks and make one melee attack.

#### **Playing the Burden**

- Carry the Weight is strongest when the protected ally has poor defenses and you still possess Rage Resistance.
- Stand Where Needed turns Rage into immediate repositioning rather than a stationary damage mode.
- No One Falls Alone can injure or even drop you. The danger is intentional; the rescue should feel costly.

**NOT MINDLESS ANGER.** A Glorious Burden barbarian may be furious, calm, terrified, or exhausted. The defining act is accepting the load and making pain useful.



## Sorcerer Subclass: Wound-Touched Sorcery

*Elra noticed, and the magic kept the wound open*

*A Wound-Touched sorcerer has been noticed by Elra through blood, relic contact, sacred fire, a shared meal, a Dagger Chorus, or survival from a death she found interesting. The sorcerer need not worship her.*

### Wound-Touched Spells

| Sorcerer Level | Always Prepared Spells                    |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------|
| 3              | Command, Heroism, Aid, Lesser Restoration |
| 5              | Aura of Vitality, Fear                    |
| 7              | Death Ward, Freedom of Movement           |
| 9              | Geas, Greater Restoration                 |

### Level 3: Threefold Notice

Once on each of your turns after casting a Sorcerer spell with a spell slot, you can spend 1 Sorcery Point and choose one manifestation:

- **Appetite.** You or one creature within 30 feet gains Temporary Hit Points equal to 1d8 plus your Charisma modifier.
- **Anger.** One creature damaged by the spell takes an extra 1d8 Fire or Radiant damage, chosen when the damage occurs.
- **Beauty.** One hostile creature affected by the spell cannot make Opportunity Attacks and has Disadvantage on its next attack roll before the start of your next turn.

### Level 6: Attention Spreads

Once on each of your turns when you use Metamagic, choose one creature within 30 feet. The chosen creature can move up to 10 feet without provoking Opportunity Attacks, or it adds 1d4 to the next saving throw made before the start of your next turn.

### Level 14: Flesh Made Radiant

As a Bonus Action, spend 4 Sorcery Points to transform for 1 minute. You gain a Fly Speed of 40 feet, Resistance to Radiant and Necrotic damage, and can use Threefold Notice once on each of your turns without spending a Sorcery Point. You shed Bright Light for 20 feet and Dim Light for 20 feet beyond.

### Level 18: Glory to Elra

As a Magic action, spend 7 Sorcery Points to create a 30-foot Emanation for 1 minute; no Concentration is required. At the start of each of your turns, choose Loud or Quiet. Loud: enemies of your choice in the Emanation make a Constitution saving throw against your spell save DC, taking 2d8 Radiant damage and being pushed 10 feet on a failed save, or half as much damage without a push on a successful save. Quiet: allies of your choice in the Emanation gain 2d8 Temporary Hit Points and can end Frightened on themselves or stand from Prone. Once per Long Rest, you can use this feature without spending Sorcery Points.

**DIVINE ATTENTION.** *The subclass is not proof of priesthood. Some Wound-Touched sorcerers spend a lifetime trying to become less interesting to Elra.*

## Warlock Subclass: Mother Solice Patron

*A pact with divine continuity and the office that remains*

Mother Solice grants power to people willing to preserve records, bodies, institutions, promises, and necessary work after inspiration has left the room. The pact is not approval of undeath. It is a contract with the divine exception that refuses to abandon an unfinished duty.

### Solice Patron Spells

| Warlock Level | Always Prepared Spells                   |
|---------------|------------------------------------------|
| 3             | Aid, Command, Gentle Repose, Hold Person |
| 5             | Dispel Magic, Speak with Dead            |
| 7             | Death Ward, Greater Invisibility         |
| 9             | Geas, Greater Restoration                |

### Level 3: Necessary Exception

When you or a creature within 30 feet fails an ability check or saving throw, use your Reaction to add 1d8 to the roll, potentially turning failure into success. You can use this feature a number of times equal to your Charisma modifier, with a minimum of one use, and regain all uses after a Long Rest.

### Level 3: Mummified Composure

You have Advantage on saving throws against Charmed and Frightened. You can remain motionless for any length of time without discomfort, and magic cannot force you to speak faster than you choose.

### Level 6: Borrowed Office

As a Bonus Action, choose a willing creature within 30 feet for 10 minutes. While that creature remains within 120 feet on the same plane, whenever you cast a spell with a range other than Self, you can originate the spell from your space or the chosen creature's space. You still choose targets and satisfy every other requirement; range and cover are measured from the chosen origin. The bond ends if either participant has the Incapacitated condition. Once per Long Rest, or regain use by expending a Pact Magic spell slot.

### Level 10: Mummified Dignity

You gain Resistance to Necrotic damage. You no longer need to eat, drink, or breathe, and magic cannot age you. You have Advantage on saving throws against possession in addition to the benefits of Mummified Composure.

### Level 14: The Office Remains

When you or a living creature within 30 feet would be reduced to 0 Hit Points but is not killed outright, use your Reaction. The creature drops to 1 Hit Point, gains 30 Temporary Hit Points, and cannot be moved or knocked Prone for 1 minute. This protection ends early when the Temporary Hit Points are gone. Once per Long Rest.

**AT THE TABLE.** *Necessary Exception protects a crucial roll. Borrowed Office creates unusual angles through a willing ally. The Office Remains is strongest when it preserves a person who must still complete a practical objective.*

### Three Elran Backgrounds

*Work, roads, and the custody of final words*

Each background offers three ability scores, an Origin Feat from this chapter, two skills, one tool proficiency, and equipment. Increase one listed score by 2 and another by 1, or increase all three by 1.

#### Civic Keeper

You maintained a gate, furnace, bath, road, kitchen, measure, stable, archive, or another public necessity. Faith may be strong, doubtful, or purely cultural; the work still has to function.

| Ability Scores                     | Origin Feat  | Skills                    | Tool                             | Equipment                                                      |
|------------------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom | Shared Table | Investigation, Persuasion | Mason's Tools or Cook's Utensils | Chosen tools, work gloves, Path pigment, common clothes, 15 GP |

#### Steppe Devotee

Your practice grew from horse-linked traditions older than most local temples. You know working animals, routes, weather, hospitality, and the difference between romantic stories of the steppe and surviving there.

| Ability Scores              | Origin Feat     | Skills                    | Tool                  | Equipment                                                       |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Strength, Dexterity, Wisdom | Horse-Kin Rider | Animal Handling, Survival | Leatherworker's Tools | Chosen tools, riding blanket, dagger, traveler's clothes, 16 GP |

#### Keeper of Final Words

You served as a funerary witness, mourner, scribe, custodian, or attendant trusted with the statements of the dying. You know that a final sentence can be sacred, petty, confusing, or legally devastating.

| Ability Scores                 | Origin Feat   | Skills             | Tool                    | Equipment                                                                |
|--------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Constitution, Wisdom, Charisma | Final Witness | Medicine, Religion | Calligrapher's Supplies | Chosen supplies, white funerary cloth, blue pigment, healer's kit, 14 GP |

#### Background Connection

| d6 | Connection                                                              |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | A priest taught you doctrine; a worker taught you what doctrine costs.  |
| 2  | Your family follows Elra, but you prefer Solice.                        |
| 3  | You serve Solice while condemning undeath.                              |
| 4  | A House of the Mother believer saved your life and resents the results. |
| 5  | Elra noticed you once; you have tried to seem boring ever since.        |
| 6  | You keep the greeting and funerals but reject every temple.             |

## Elran Feats

*Three Origin Feats and three General Feats*

### Shared Table

**Origin Feat.** Gain proficiency with Cook's Utensils. During a Short Rest, prepare food for a number of creatures up to your Proficiency Bonus. Each chosen creature that spends one or more Hit Point Dice can reroll one of those dice and must use the new result. Once per Long Rest, after sharing food for at least 10 minutes, grant Heroic Inspiration to one participant other than yourself.

### Horse-Kin Rider

**Origin Feat.** Gain proficiency in Animal Handling. Mounting or dismounting costs only 5 feet of movement. You have Advantage on saving throws made to avoid falling from a mount. When a mount within 5 feet takes damage, use your Reaction to reduce the damage by 1d6 plus your Proficiency Bonus.

### Final Witness

**Origin Feat.** Gain proficiency in Medicine or Calligrapher's Supplies. When a creature within 30 feet dies, use your Reaction to allow the creature to speak one sentence of no more than twenty-five words. Once per Long Rest, cast Gentle Repose without a spell slot or Material components; choose Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma as your spellcasting ability.

### Trace the Path

**General Feat; Prerequisite:** Level 4+. Increase Dexterity or Wisdom by 1, to a maximum of 20. After you take the Dash or Disengage action, you can move through the space of any creature larger than you as Difficult Terrain until the end of the turn. Once on each of your turns when you leave a hostile creature's reach, impose Disadvantage on one Opportunity Attack made against you.

### Dagger Chorister

**General Feat; Prerequisite:** Level 4+. Increase Dexterity or Charisma by 1, to a maximum of 20. Gain proficiency in Performance; if you already have it, gain proficiency in Acrobatics. A dagger you wield deals 1d6 damage instead of 1d4. Once on each of your turns when you hit a creature with a dagger and an ally is within 5 feet of the target, choose one: move up to 10 feet without provoking Opportunity Attacks, or deal extra damage equal to your Proficiency Bonus.

### Quiet Dignity

**General Feat; Prerequisite:** Level 4+. Increase Wisdom or Charisma by 1, to a maximum of 20. You have Advantage on saving throws against Frightened and possession. When a creature within 30 feet fails a Wisdom or Charisma saving throw, use your Reaction to add your Proficiency Bonus to the roll, potentially turning failure into success. Once used, regain this Reaction benefit after a Short or Long Rest.

## Spells of the Path/Graceful Life

*Movement, hospitality, final words, and the blue Wound*

*These spells are original playtest material. Suggested class lists are guidance rather than a restriction when a subclass or Game Master grants access.*

### Blue Wound — Evocation Cantrip

Casting Time: Action • Range: 60 feet • Components: V, S • Duration: Instantaneous

Draw a narrow wavering line through one creature you can see. The target makes a Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, it takes 1d8 Force damage and is pulled up to 5 feet toward a point you choose along the line. The damage increases by 1d8 when you reach character levels 5, 11, and 17.

**Suggested Lists:** Cleric, Sorcerer, Warlock

### **Shared Table — Level 1 Enchantment (Ritual)**

Casting Time: 10 minutes • Range: Touch • Components: V, S, M (food for each target) • Duration: 8 hours

Up to six creatures sharing the meal gain 3 Temporary Hit Points and Advantage on the next saving throw against Frightened made before the spell ends.

**Using a Higher-Level Spell Slot.** The Temporary Hit Points increase by 2 for each spell slot level above 1.

**Suggested Lists:** Cleric, Paladin

### **Final Sentence — Level 1 Necromancy**

Casting Time: Reaction, taken when a creature within range dies • Range: 30 feet • Components: V, S • Duration: Instantaneous

The dead creature may speak one sentence of no more than twenty-five words. The spell does not compel truth, capture a soul, or permit further conversation.

**Suggested Lists:** Cleric, Warlock, Wizard

### **Wavering Passage — Level 2 Transmutation**

Casting Time: Bonus Action • Range: Self • Components: V, S • Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

Your Speed increases by 10 feet. You can move through the spaces of creatures larger than you as Difficult Terrain, and the first Opportunity Attack made against you during each round has Disadvantage.

**Suggested Lists:** Sorcerer, Warlock, Wizard

## **Spells of the Path/Peaceful Death**

*Undeath, burden, civic repair, and protected custody*

### **Quiet the Unquiet — Level 2 Abjuration**

Casting Time: Action • Range: 60 feet • Components: V, S, M (a length of blue thread) • Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

Choose one Undead creature you can see. The target makes a Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, the target cannot regain Hit Points, create Undead, possess a creature, or take Reactions. The target repeats the save at the end of each of its turns, ending the spell on a success.

**Suggested Lists:** Cleric, Paladin, Warlock

### **Carry the Burden — Level 3 Abjuration**

Casting Time: Reaction, taken when an ally within range takes damage • Range: 30 feet • Components: V, S • Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

Divide the triggering damage equally between you and the ally before either creature applies Resistance, Immunity, or any other reduction. Round odd damage down for the ally and up for you. While the spell lasts, you can repeat this division once during each round by using your Reaction; no additional spell slot is required.

**Suggested Lists:** Cleric, Paladin

### **Civic Continuity — Level 3 Transmutation**

Casting Time: 1 minute • Range: Touch • Components: V, S, M (a tool used in repair) • Duration: Instantaneous

Repair a nonmagical object or a 10-foot section of a structure. The target regains 8d10 Hit Points. One ordinary function, such as a door, pump, wheel, gate, oven, pipe, or bridge joint, operates for 24 hours even if other damage remains. The spell cannot create missing valuable material or restore a magic property.

**Suggested Lists:** Cleric, Wizard

**Peaceful Death — Level 4 Abjuration**

Casting Time: Action • Range: Touch • Components: V, S, M (white cloth and blue thread) • Duration: 10 days

Choose a willing living creature or a corpse. A protected corpse, including the corpse of a living target that dies during the duration, cannot become Undead, be possessed, or be returned to life without the soul's consent. Divination concerning the target reveals only that custody is protected. The spell ends if the target willingly returns to life.

**Suggested Lists:** Cleric, Paladin, Warlock

**CAMPAIGN INTERACTION.** *Peaceful Death* can block involuntary resurrection, including unusual relic effects. It does not destroy a resurrection item or prove who has legal custody of a body.



## Living the Path

*Equipment, character contradictions, and playtest use*

### Devotional Equipment

| Item                   | Cost  | Use                                                                                                     |
|------------------------|-------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Path pigment kit       | 5 GP  | Blue pigment, white chalk, brushes, and oil for twenty symbols or one funerary room.                    |
| Matched chorus daggers | 12 GP | Ceremonial blades; Advantage on one check to join a Dagger Chorus when both are worn openly.            |
| Final-word ledger      | 8 GP  | Water-resistant witness forms and sealing thread; Advantage on one check to establish funerary custody. |
| White funerary cloth   | 3 GP  | Enough clean cloth to wrap one Medium corpse or mark a protected room.                                  |
| Blue duty thread       | 1 GP  | Twenty yards used to seal records, mark repairs, bind tools, or trace the Wound.                        |
| Civic key ring         | 6 GP  | Numbered blanks, wax tags, and chain; Advantage on one check to organize or audit access.               |

### d8 Relationship to the Path

| d8 | Relationship                                                            |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | Sincere orthodox follower of the Path.                                  |
| 2  | Cultural Elran who keeps meals and funerals but avoids clergy.          |
| 3  | Skeptic employed by Mother Solice.                                      |
| 4  | House of the Mother heretic who rejects all resurrection.               |
| 5  | Steppe devotee whose practice predates local church authority.          |
| 6  | Person accidentally noticed by Elra and trying to remain uninteresting. |
| 7  | Former priest who still hates Undead and keeps the greeting.            |
| 8  | Outsider convert who understands doctrine better than etiquette.        |

### d8 Contradiction

| d8 | Contradiction                                               |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1  | You fear death despite preaching peace.                     |
| 2  | You love someone whose resurrection you oppose.             |
| 3  | You serve Solice while condemning undeath.                  |
| 4  | You enjoy the Dagger Chorus too much.                       |
| 5  | You believe glorious work is becoming exploitation.         |
| 6  | You hate horses.                                            |
| 7  | You survived resurrection and cannot resolve what it means. |
| 8  | Elra helped you, and the cost fell on someone else.         |

## CHAPTER 6 — Major NPCs and Relationships

### The Cast Is the Conspiracy

The campaign moves because people want incompatible things from the same relics, institutions, lovers, bodies, and stories. Run each major nonplayer character as a person with an objective, a method, a limit, and a response to failure. A useful ally can remain dangerous. A villain can offer sincere kindness. An institution can be competent and still make the wrong claim.

### Bond and Pressure

Track two values for each major NPC. Bond measures personal investment in the party. Pressure measures fear, suspicion, injury, or conflict. High Bond and high Pressure can exist at the same time. That combination produces the campaign's strongest scenes.

| Value | Bond                                    | Pressure                              |
|-------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 0     | Unknown: no personal investment         | Calm: no active concern               |
| 1     | Useful: offers ordinary help            | Wary: watches and verifies            |
| 2     | Trusted: risks reputation or resources  | Suspicious: prepares a countermeasure |
| 3     | Chosen: risks position, body, or future | Hostile: acts to contain or defeat    |

### Changing a Track

Raise Bond when the characters preserve a confidence, accept a meaningful burden, protect an NPC without turning the rescue into leverage, or honor a difficult claim. Lower Bond after public humiliation, deliberate betrayal, theft from personal custody, or proof that affection was only a tactic. Raise Pressure after unexplained relic movement, exposed lies, broken procedure, violence against an ally, or evidence of a hidden plan. Lower Pressure through proof, restitution, restraint, and practical service.

### Using the Numbers

At Bond 2, an NPC offers one resource without demanding immediate payment. At Bond 3, an NPC accepts serious personal risk once per adventure. At Pressure 2, an NPC prepares an exit, witness, counterspell, sealed order, or armed escort. At Pressure 3, an NPC acts before another conversation can solve the problem. The Game Master can ignore a track when the fiction clearly requires another result.

### Stat Blocks

This chapter gives each major figure a Challenge Rating and combat summary. Complete combat statistics appear in Chapter 15. Social influence never replaces a saving throw or ability check when a rule calls for one.

### Caldovian

*The charming ally who turns friendship into ritual material*

### Public Face

Caldovian is a celebrated Caldovi bard-sorcerer, a genuine champion of Elra, and the most immediately useful person in the campaign. He knows customs, performers, thieves, priests, legal shortcuts, old songs, and the humiliations that make powerful people careless. He pays generously, notices discomfort, feeds companions, and gives excellent advice when good advice improves the story he wants.

### Appearance and Manner

He is slender, graceful, physically fragile, and dressed as though every room has already consented to become a stage. He praises before requesting, frames danger as an aesthetic failure, and treats exclusion

as an invitation. His kindness is often sincere. Sincerity does not prevent him from using the resulting loyalty.

### **Faith**

Elra truly favors Caldovian. Her attention can save him from failure, make a performance miraculous, or turn a dangerous entrance into a glorious one. He interprets divine affection as permission. Mother Solice sees brilliance without duty: a man who wants the feast, the song, and the wound but not the inventory, burial, repair, or promise afterward.

### **At the Table**

Let Caldovian solve small problems and create larger obligations. He should introduce a useful contact, notice a forged detail, pay for a room, or draw danger away from a frightened witness. He should not steal the party's central victory. His best help places the characters in a position where a meaningful choice remains.

### **Voice**

He rarely says "I need." He says, "You are the only person in the room who can make this elegant." He calls manipulation an opportunity, coercion a role, and public danger a failure of staging.

**CR 8 controller** AC 16; HP 112; Speed 30 ft. Signature play: charm, movement, radiant or psychic attacks, and Elra's visible favor. Below half Hit Points, Caldovian becomes faster and harder to pin down.

### **Caldovian's Hidden Plan**

*Six relic functions, one living masterpiece, and no acceptable ordinary ending*

### **What He Wants**

Caldovian intends to combine six relic functions inside an Unbound Circle and transform himself into a living magical relic. He wants to return to Caldov as a masterpiece no institution can dismiss. He also wants the Scarlet Step as a personal army, the guild treasury as operating capital, and Vara Vay's public murder as the symbolic act that crowns the transformation.

### **What He Does Not Know**

He does not know the Lady on the Xebec controls the deeper Red Fist network. He does not know Ra'av is the Lady. He misunderstands several relics: the Obsidian Reliquary preserves a final heartbeat rather than a soul, the Crooked Coin postpones failure rather than canceling it, the Mirror reveals one immediate consequence rather than a complete future, and Fume accepts no master.

### **Methods**

Caldovian attacks through invitations, custody claims, witnesses, scripts, forged expectations, and public sympathy. He prefers to make an institution participate in its own failure. He may argue for destruction while arranging a failed destruction, support secure transfer while choosing the frightened courier, or send adventurers to recover property for the actual thief.

### **Three States**

Performer. Caldovian is charming, mobile, helpful, and deniable. He avoids unnecessary direct violence.

Unbound. The relics and ritual alter him. His body, voice, and magic answer one another. He becomes more powerful and less able to distinguish a person from a role.

Hollowed. Inside the Hollow Circle, relic power fails. Caldovian becomes physically ordinary, frightened, furious, and still dangerous because his social instincts remain.

### **Relationship Triggers**

Raise Bond when a character takes him seriously without worshiping him, protects him during visible weakness, or shares a private humiliation. Raise Pressure when a character verifies his claims, keeps a relic beyond his reach, refuses a dramatic frame, or treats civic duty as more important than his story.

### **Best Defeat**

Caldovian wants a beautiful ending. A quiet arrest, restrained surrender, unremarkable death, or practical containment denies him the final meaning he has prepared. A dramatic victory can still save the city, but Elra may find it irresistible.

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## **Vara Vay**

*The red-masked courier and visible mistress of the Scarlet Step*

### **The Woman Members Mean**

Vara Vay is the visible leader of the Scarlet Step and a genuine criminal authority. When field work requires anonymity or ritual, she wears the smooth red mask and sealing-wax cloak. She is the red-masked courier who recovers the crate in “The Cup That Would Not Break.” She controls cells, discipline, visible finances, protection, and ordinary guild operations.

### **Authority and Distance**

No member earns a meeting with Vara through rank, profit, bravery, or years of service. She enters a person's orbit when she has a reason. Her organization uses cells, theaters, workshops, rented rooms, couriers, laundries, stables, and Handshake businesses rather than a central guildhall.

### **Caldovian**

Vara and Caldovian are lovers, accomplices, and intellectual rivals. She values his access and theatrical intelligence. He values her authority, network, appetite for risk, and public identity. Vara does not know that he plans to turn her murder into the emotional center of his masterpiece.

### **What She Does Not Know**

Vara believes she is the true and final Vara. She knows actor-doubles protect her public movements. She does not know Lysa Quill has been trained as her long-term replacement. She does not know the Lady on the Xebec exists above her or that Ra'av directs the deeper network.

### **Turning Vara**

Moral argument alone will not separate Vara from Caldovian. Evidence that he plans her death, intends to empty the treasury, or will sacrifice Step members can turn her. Once convinced, she acts to protect the guild, preserve authority, and punish betrayal. She may become an ally without becoming good.

### **Voice**

Vara speaks in decisions. She does not announce threats that require repetition. She watches the person who notices rather than the object everyone else is watching.

**CR 8 skirmisher and commander** AC 18; HP 110; Speed 30 ft. Signature play: three precise rapier attacks, coordinated allied movement, hidden exits, and exceptional initiative inside a prepared Step location.

## **Lysa Quill**

*The long-term replacement for Vara Vay*

### **Not a Temporary Double**

Vara uses actors for isolated sightings, travel, decoys, and controlled rumors. Lysa Quill is something else. She is the long-term replacement prepared to inherit Vara Vay's visible office and identity if Vara dies, disappears, becomes unusable, or must be removed.

### **The Training**

Lysa studies Vara's voice, gait, posture, temper, handwriting, preferences, scars, relationships, private history, and expected mistakes. Her preparation includes the practical work of command: cell discipline, payments, protected businesses, safe routes, public appearances, and the particular silences that make a Vara believable.

### **What Lysa Knows**

Lysa knows that succession is intended. She does not know the Lady on the Xebec is the deeper leader. She believes Ra'av is an elderly attendant and institutional historian. Lysa has no xebec, harbor,

river-trade, or smuggling connection. Any clue suggesting such a connection points to Ra'av's concealed life, not Lysa's.

### **Relationship with Vara**

Vara does not know Lysa is the designated successor. Lysa can admire, resent, imitate, fear, and protect Vara at the same time. A face-to-face meeting is dangerous because Lysa knows every rehearsed detail but cannot predict how it feels to meet the woman whose life has become her profession.

### **Using Lysa**

Lysa can become witness, rival, rescue target, reluctant conspirator, or a second Vara after the original falls. Evidence of the replacement plan can destabilize her for one crucial moment. Compassion can create loyalty, but asking Lysa to become Vara “for the greater good” repeats the system that consumed her identity.

### **Voice**

In her own voice, Lysa asks exact questions and waits for complete answers. As Vara, she speaks with controlled certainty and leaves small, rehearsed imperfections because a flawless imitation would appear false.

**CR 7 infiltrator** AC 17; HP 88; Speed 30 ft. Signature play: perfect rehearsal, concealed blade, false openings, and exceptional Deception and Performance.

### **The Lady on the Xebec**

*Ra'av, hidden continuity, and the network no raid can destroy*

### **The Deepest Authority**

The Lady on the Xebec controls the wider Red Fist Syndicate. Success does not earn access to her. Rank, profit, blackmail, loyalty, and bravery only produce another intermediary. She values distance because a network should survive any leader, office, warehouse, route, or public identity.

### **Ra'av**

In the Border City, the Lady appears as Ra'av: an elderly servant, historian, and grandmotherly memory of the Scarlet Step. Members bring her tea, ask about dead criminals, and explain present operations because she appears harmless and past usefulness. Her apparent service to Lysa helps conceal both women's actual positions.

### **Nonmagical Mesmerism**

Ra'av controls attention through framing, conditioning, repetition, timing, and suggestion. She rarely commands. She remembers a worker's grandmother, compares a plan to an old failure, or wonders aloud why a route changed. The conclusion feels like the listener's own reasonable choice. Antimagic does nothing because the method is not magical.

### **Limits**

Ra'av cannot make an impossible act appear possible, create belief against direct evidence, force suicide, or erase a defining principle. Contradiction creates resistance. Her strength is recognizing which plausible choice a person already wants permission to make.

### **Campaign Objective**

She wants the network to survive Caldovian, Vara, the party, and herself. She may quietly aid the party against Caldovian while preserving the Red Fist. She will sacrifice a visible operation before exposing the deeper structure.

### **Voice**

Ra'av asks for clarification after she already understands. The Lady speaks rarely and treats a person as one route among several.

**CR 9 social controller** AC 17; HP 126; Speed 30 ft. Signature play: nonmagical framing, prepared contacts, Cunning Action, and precise Sneak Attack damage.

### **Sava Dren**

*The unseen monk who believes divine power should finish its paperwork*

#### **Appearance**

Sava is petite, pale, and deliberately plain. Her Caldovi-made uniform appears cheap until close inspection reveals waterproof panels, hidden pockets, reinforced seams, tool loops, and concealed openings. It functions as light armor, field office, evidence kit, and statement of professional anonymity.

#### **Faith and Work**

Sava is a Caldovi monk of Elra, a Warrior of the Wavering Line, and an operative of Mother Solice. She claims agnosticism while tracing the Path, enforcing funerary obligations, and privately insulting Elra's judgment. Her skepticism is part of her relationship with the faith, not an absence of belief.

#### **Methods**

She uses law, cultural memory, precise movement, hidden tools, and procedural leverage. Sava enters hostile spaces without granting clean attacks, removes reactions, identifies contradictions, and turns a room's own rules against the person who expected those rules to provide cover.

#### **Caldovian**

Sava is openly hostile toward Caldovian. She sees Elra's favor as proof of divine bad judgment, not proof of his virtue. Caldovian wants her recognition because contempt from a competent Caldovi operator feels like an unfinished review. She refuses to make hatred entertaining for him.

#### **Ianca**

Sava trusts Ianca with her body, mission, equipment, and worst private opinions. The banter between both women is harsh because neither woman mistakes harshness for abandonment. In public, each protects the other's cover.

#### **Voice**

Sava answers the exact question, corrects the false premise, and treats a joke as an item submitted without the required form.

**CR 7 mobile controller** AC 18; HP 112; Speed 50 ft. Signature play: three Wavering Strikes, movement through hostile spaces, reaction denial, Evasion, and counter-movement after a missed attack.

### **Ianca Mereş**

*The bartender, engineer, and barbarian who carries what still matters*

#### **Appearance and Cover**

Ianca is a very tall grey-skinned Caldovi woman with black hair, severe beauty, and the balanced posture of a statue set on hidden foundations. In the Border City she works as a bartender and practical engineer. The cover is convincing because she is excellent at both jobs.

#### **Faith in the Load**

Ianca is a barbarian of the Glorious Burden. Her rage is not loss of responsibility. It is responsibility made physical. A bridge, body, wall, companion, or door still needs someone strong enough to hold it. She expresses Elra's anger through protection and Mother Solice's duty through repair.

## Methods

She listens to structures, pressure, resonance, weight, and the way a room will fail. In a fight, she divides damage with an ally, refuses forced movement, pushes enemies away from vulnerable people, and converts pain accepted for another person into decisive force.

## Sava

Ianca and Sava work for Mother Solice and claim agnosticism with varying credibility. Ianca notices every hidden threat before Sava finishes counting half the threats. Sava notices every legal consequence before Ianca finishes deciding which wall must come down. Each woman understands the other's limitations.

## Caldovian

Ianca respects courage and despises irresponsibility. She will protect Caldovian from an immediate death if protection remains the right act. She will also carry him out of a room while he objects to the loss of staging.

## Voice

Ianca speaks in short physical truths. When danger becomes real, her accent flattens and every word becomes exact.

**CR 8 protector** AC 17; HP 136; Speed 40 ft. Signature play: Glorious Rage, damage sharing, forced movement resistance, and heavy attacks that become stronger after she carries another person's injury.

## Elra and Mother Solice

*Two divine faces of one sacred coin*

### Elra

Elra is flesh, appetite, beauty, heat, noise, performance, courage, divine anger, and glorious life. She is attractive, pale blue, and formed from contrasting curves that almost become a woman before becoming something less anatomically reasonable. Her favor is attention, not moral approval. She loves courage, spectacle, horse meat, wine, goats, geese, crabs, and people who become impossible to ignore.

### Mother Solice

Mother Solice is mummified dignity, silence, restraint, continuity, civic duty, funerary order, records, promises, and peaceful death. She is Elra's equal divine counterpart, not a servant or lesser remains. She is also an Undead proto-lich: the Necessary Undead protected by a faith that condemns undeath. The hypocrisy is acknowledged, administered, and never made clean.

### Using Elra

Do not use Elra as a reward machine. Her manifestation should alter appetite, attention, risk, and the emotional scale of a scene. Imitating her outside the Festival of the Last Empire can invite possession or sacrifice. A sudden cry of "Glory to Elra" from an impersonator may mark divine seizure rather than enthusiasm.

### Using Solice

Solice acts through possession, official instructions, custody, preserved obligations, and people who continue necessary work after inspiration leaves. When she possesses a mortal vessel, posture becomes immaculate and every movement appears measured. She should create duties and choices rather than solve the party's objective.

### Divine Disagreement

Elra asks whether an act was glorious. Solice asks who repairs the road afterward. The faith needs both questions. Caldovian wants the first without the second. Sava and Ianca live inside the argument.

**Divine power** Elra has no Challenge Rating in this campaign and cannot be defeated through ordinary combat. Mother Solice's manifested body is Challenge 15:AC 19, HP 228, divine resistance, possession, quiet commands, and legendary control.

## **Tessel Vane**

*Senior custodian of Fume and survivor of the Lost Arm*

### **Industrial Hazard**

Tessel Vane is the Giftschränk Priory custodian responsible for Fume. She treats the sword as an industrial hazard with a blade attached, not as a personality, destiny, heroic inheritance, or invitation. Every consumed spell, transfer, release, request, and discrepancy belongs in the ledger.

### **The Left Arm**

Fume took Tessel's left arm below the elbow during a containment failure. She chose to hold the carrying frame rather than let the sword fall into a crowded workroom. She wears a practical prosthesis and refuses to use the injury as proof of holiness. Courage, in her view, does not mean sending another person into a danger already understood.

### **Faith**

Tessel is a sincere northern-steppe Elran worshiper. She understands glorious life as clear courage and Mother Solice's duty as accurate custody. She hates undeath, respects funerary authority, and distrusts anyone who describes an uncontrolled relic as a chosen companion.

### **Methods**

Tessel verifies Fume's charge total, keeps the sword sheathed, prepares suppression equipment, and chooses a deliberate discharge only when every safer option has failed. She cannot control a FOOM result. Her authority comes from accepting that uncertainty rather than pretending expertise can erase it.

### **Relationships**

Sava respects Tessel's records. Ianca respects her physical judgment. Mother Solice values her refusal to romanticize necessary work. Caldovian sees her as an audience member who has mistaken restraint for wisdom. Tessel sees Caldovian as a custody breach that learned to sing.

### **Voice**

Tessel describes magic in terms of load, radius, witnesses, damage, and who signed the transfer.

**CR 6 custodian** AC 18; HP 102; Speed 30 ft. Signature play: ward staff, Null Seal, safe voluntary discharge while carrying Fume, containment reactions, and resistance to Fume's fear and hazards.

## **Lady Cornelia Van Ghoul**

*A brilliant heretic whose doctrine is stronger than comfort*

### **Peaceful Life, Glorious Death**

Cornelia follows a House of the Mother heresy that rejects resurrection absolutely. Her doctrine does not merely forbid resurrection for members of her sect. She believes no one should ever be returned from death. Mortality gives courage, honor, love, risk, and sacrifice meaning. Her belief is sincere, coherent, compassionate toward mourners, and capable of atrocity.

### **Immediate Genius**

Inside a room, Cornelia is terrifying. She identifies the most dangerous person, reads the next few seconds, chooses the cleanest line, and moves before a plan becomes visible. Across days or months, her

reasoning becomes shallow. She can win a duel and lose a campaign because she treats the next perfect instant as proof of long-term wisdom.

### **The Relics**

Cornelia sees the Coin of the Phoenix as an abomination and the Crooked Coin as evidence that deferred consequence still belongs to death. The Mirror of the Unlived Moment appeals to her obsession with the immediate future. She never collaborated with Caldovian. Any apparent cooperation is parallel action, forged evidence, or Caldovian exploiting her doctrine.

### **Using Cornelia**

She can be patron, swordmaster, negotiator, doctrinal antagonist, or temporary ally against undeath. She keeps agreements that preserve her honor. She breaks peace when another person prepares resurrection. A respectful argument can change tactics but will not casually change doctrine.

**CR 10 swordmaster** AC 19; HP 168; Speed 40 ft. Signature play: three blade attacks, exceptional initiative, reaction-denying movement, perfect ripostes, and brilliant short-term positioning.

**Aliraia — CR 2** Cornelia's valet and doctrinal logistics officer. AC 14; HP 52. Aliraia manages clothing, witnesses, schedules, exits, evidence, and bodies. She turns Cornelia's beautiful convictions into material operations and can hide or recover a crucial Tiny object as a reaction.

### **Arulea and Thosa Lham**

*Continuity in the living city and custody at the edge of death*

#### **Arulea — Continuity Minister**

Arulea represents civic Elran devotion in Oraş Cald: accurate records, honest measures, uninterrupted water, functioning gates, repaired furnaces, and services that continue after disaster. She receives the party as a customs, continuity, repair, and public-safety problem rather than as legendary heroes. That practical reception teaches the final adventure's central solution.

#### **GM-Only Future**

Arulea is useful, competent, and not an obvious villain in Book One. Her longer arc turns true facts into administrative weapons by stripping away context. Preserve that possibility without making every helpful act a wink toward betrayal. In this campaign, she should earn trust through real service.

**Arulea — CR 2** AC 15; HP 66. Signature play: administrative authority, orderly retreat, investigation, civic coordination, and the ability to make practical work happen under pressure.

**Thosa — CR 5** AC 17; HP 85. Signature play: funerary magic, radiant staff attacks, suppression of possession, and one final sentence from a creature at the moment of death.

#### **Thosa Lham — Funerary Custodian**

Thosa is a Rock Elf keeper of final words, body custody, and the Obsidian Reliquary. He treats a body as a person's final entrusted possession, not as evidence, property, or a convenient magical resource. Power, rank, grief, and urgency do not substitute for consent.

#### **Resurrection**

Thosa is orthodox rather than absolutist. He can permit resurrection when consent, law, and circumstance support it. He opposes corpse theft, possession, undeath, and politically convenient returns. His Final Witness allows one last sentence without trapping, delaying, compelling, or returning a soul.

## Red Fist Operators

*Four forms of criminal authority beneath the visible guild*

### Varo — CR 5

AC 16; HP 82. Varo is a replaceable operational identity for claim warrants, contracts, receivership, and legal pressure. The current Varo can die without ending the office. Prepared writs and institutional certainty make a crime look like administration.

### Xyom Kulth — CR 7

AC 18; HP 128. Xyom leads violent retrievals, changes objective the field, and mistakes fear for indispensability. Caldovian can tempt with a permanent armed command. The Red Fist keeps him only while his damage remains useful.

### Brannoc Tallow — CR 6

AC 18; HP 118. Brannoc is an old-guard enforcer called the Doc protects people, passages, witnesses, and evidence before abstracted. Proof that an order endangers Varo can turn him against the order without making him feel disloyal.

### Harl Fen — CR 4

AC 16; HP 68. Harl leads a protective Step cell. He treats members, witnesses, and usable relationships as assets worth preserving. He opposes commanders who describe avoidable slaughter as security can move allies out of a collapsing scene.

## Using the Four

Varo creates a legal obstacle. Brannoc creates a defended passage. Xyom creates immediate violence. Harl creates an escape for people the party may need alive. Place two operators in conflict when the guild must choose between profit, loyalty, terror, and survival.

## Handshake

No operator commands a central warehouse because no central warehouse exists. Each person controls selected offices, records, contracts, routes, workshops, carriers, or cells. A raid can break one process and expose one relationship. Another business continues ordinary work the next morning.

## The Red Door Troupe

*Friendship, performance, and the people caught inside the coup*

### Zam Zam — CR 6

AC 17; HP 96. A beloved acrobat and House of the Mother infiltrator. Her affection for Li'l Snoot and Bottle Eater is real. Her anti-resurrection doctrine is stronger. Her betrayal should hurt because it was never false.

### Li'l Snoot — CR 3

AC 16; HP 55. A gnomish knife thrower and prop keeper who maintains weapon balance, counts exits, and protects his troupe. He can identify a substituted stage blade before most guards identify a threat.

### Nela Vos — CR 3

AC 14; HP 58. An orthodox performer capable of imitating Elra enough to invite possession or sacrifice. Nela is ambitious, devout, and unprepared for the moment a role becomes a divine vessel.

### Bottle Eater — CR 4

AC 15; HP 76. An orc stage performer who bites sugar glass and makes injuries look worse than reality. Offstage he is methodical, careful, and willing to take half of an ally's injury.

## The Friendship

Zam Zam, Li'l Snoot, and Bottle Eater genuinely love one another. Do not reduce the trio to a trap. Give each performer ordinary work, arguments, meals, rehearsal problems, and chances to help the characters before doctrine divides the group.

## Adventure Use

The trio becomes central in the House Without an Entrance and the Circle of Embers. Nela anchors the Elra impersonation crisis. A rescued performer can reveal a route, forged prop, script change, or cell order, but no performer knows the entire conspiracy.

## Starting Relationships

*What exists before the characters begin changing the network*

| Pair               | Start              | Hidden truth                                    |
|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Caldovian / Vara   | Bond 3, Pressure 1 | He plans to use her public death.               |
| Caldovian / Sava   | Bond 0, Pressure 2 | He wants recognition; she wants verified distar |
| Caldovian / Ianca  | Bond 1, Pressure 1 | Respect for courage survives contempt.          |
| Sava / Ianca       | Bond 3, Pressure 0 | Private cruelty is built on complete trust.     |
| Vara / Lysa        | Bond 0, Pressure 0 | Vara does not know her successor exists.        |
| Lysa / Ra'av       | Bond 2, Pressure 0 | The attendant is the hidden ruler.              |
| Vara / Lady        | Bond 0, Pressure 0 | Vara does not know the deeper office.           |
| Cornelia / Aliraia | Bond 3, Pressure 0 | Service makes doctrine operational.             |
| Tessel / Caldovian | Bond 0, Pressure 2 | Each sees the other as a misuse of danger.      |
| Solice / Sava      | Bond 2, Pressure 1 | Duty and doubt strengthen the relationship.     |
| Solice / Ianca     | Bond 2, Pressure 0 | Repair is worship, even when Ianca denies it.   |
| Elra / Caldovian   | Bond 3, Pressure 0 | Divine affection is appetite, not approval.     |

## Player Relationships

Start Caldovian at Bond 1 with the party after the first generous act. Start Vara at Pressure 1 once the party touches Scarlet Step business. Start Sava and Ianca at Bond 0 unless a character has a Caldovi, funerary, civic, or Solice connection. A character background can raise one starting Bond by 1.

## Do Not Flatten Conflict

A high Bond does not make an NPC obedient. A high Pressure does not erase affection. Vara can love Caldovian and prepare to kill him. Sava can distrust a character and still defend that character's custody claim. Cornelia can respect courage while opposing resurrection with lethal force.

## Escalation and Continuity

*Keeping the cast active without allowing the cast to replace the party*

## Appearance Rhythm

Adventure 1 centers Caldovian and Vara, with the Red Door troupe nearby. Adventure 2 centers Tessel, Sava, Ianca, and the Priory. Adventure 3 brings Zam Zam, Li'l Snoot, Bottle Eater, Varo, and Handshake procedure forward. Adventure 4 centers Vara, Thosa, Caldovian, and the Reliquary. Adventure 5 centers Cornelia, Aliraia, Sava, Ianca, the Crooked Coin, and the Mirror. Adventure 6 activates the full Red Door cast, Lysa, the replacement crisis, the coup, and the treasury theft. Adventure 7 centers Arulea, Elra, Mother Solice, and Caldovian while earlier relationships determine who arrives, who believes the party, and which route remains open.

## Response to Failure

Caldovian turns failure into a new story. Vara removes access and verifies loyalty. Lysa rehearses the version required after the failure. Ra'av sacrifices the visible route and preserves continuity. Sava records the contradiction. Ianca protects the person still carrying weight. Tessel narrows custody. Cornelia chooses a decisive immediate act. Arulea converts disaster into procedure.

## Death and Replacement

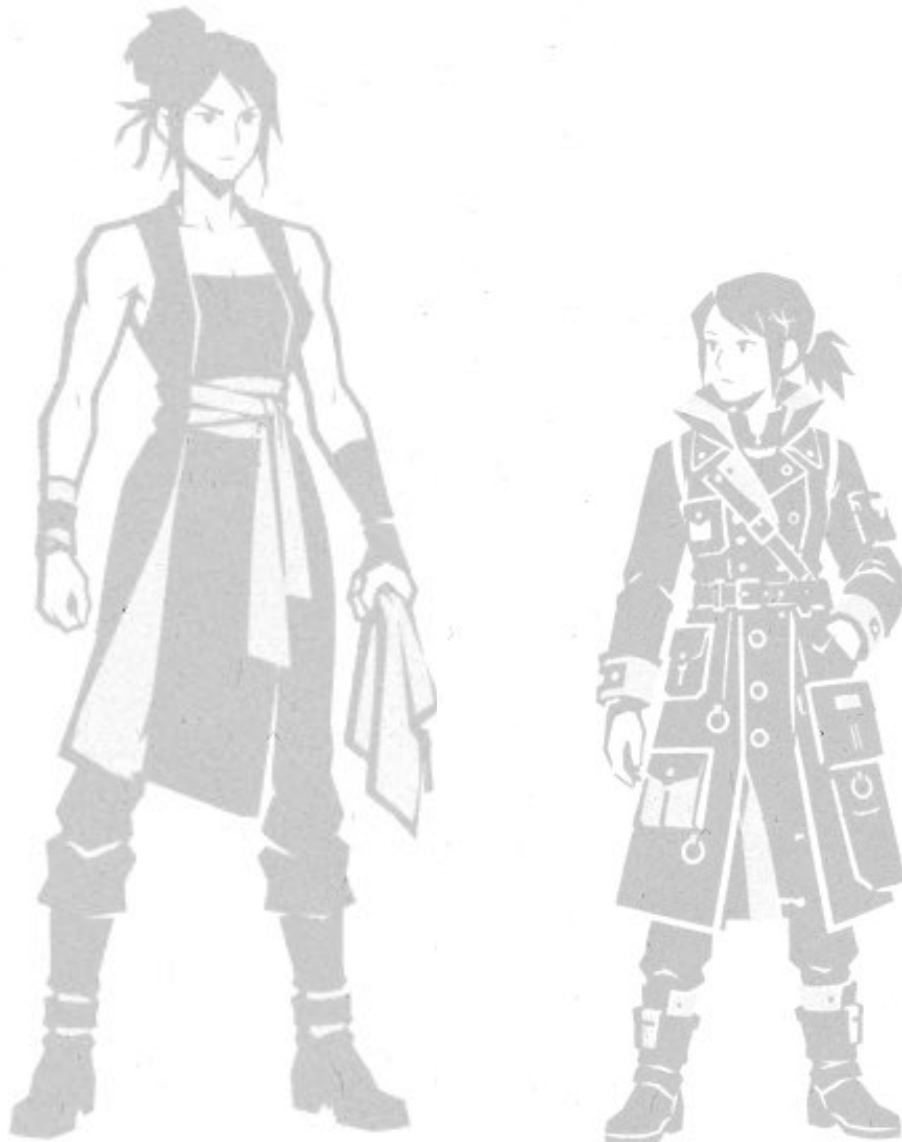
Do not resurrect a dead NPC merely because later notes expect an appearance. Transfer the function. Lysa can replace Vara. Another Varo can assume the coat. Harl can inherit a protective cell. A Priory commander can hold Tessel's records without reproducing her judgment. Aliraia can continue Cornelia's logistics while rejecting one conclusion. The loss should remain visible in relationships and available resources.

## Keep the Party Central

An NPC may open a door, hold a bridge, provide a writ, create an exit, suppress a hazard, or tell the party what a result means. The characters decide which claim to honor, which relic to move, which person to trust, which ritual to reverse, and what kind of ending Caldovian receives.

## Quick Voice Test

Before speaking as an NPC, ask one question. Caldovian: how can this become a story? Vara: who has already decided? Lysa: what detail must be rehearsed? Ra'av: which choice already feels reasonable? Sava: what premise is false? Ianca: what still needs carrying? Solice: what duty continues? Elra: what is glorious? Tessel: what is the verified risk? Cornelia: what wins the next ten seconds? Arulea: what keeps the city functioning?



## CHAPTER 7 — The Bard at the Red Door

### Adventure One for characters of 3rd level

#### Adventure Summary

The characters meet Caldovian during a crowded performance at the Red Door. A badly wounded young adventurer named Kessa Rill collapses in the common room and reports that the Copper Larks are trapped in the abandoned Mirrorglass Baths. The Larks accepted a rescue contract claiming that criminal scholars had kidnapped a royal translator and stolen the Bracers of Two Tongues. Almost none of the contract is true.

The scholars possess the Bracers lawfully. The Scarlet Step created the false assignment to obtain the relic without exposing experienced operatives. After the Copper Larks discovered the deception, Rusk Vale brought a retrieval crew to seize the Bracers, remove witnesses, and manufacture a rescued captive. Caldovian helped direct interest toward the Bracers. He expected theft, not slaughter. He now genuinely wants the survivors saved while quietly steering the relic toward useful custody.

#### Adventure Purpose

This adventure introduces the Border City, Caldovian, Sava, Ianca, Vara Vay, the Scarlet Step, and the campaign's central question: does understanding a dangerous object create authority over it? The party should leave with good reasons to like Caldovian, distrust the Step, and question why his name appeared before the crisis began.

| Element            | At the Table                                                                             |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Relic              | Bracers of Two Tongues                                                                   |
| Primary locations  | The Red Door and the Mirrorglass Baths                                                   |
| Apparent objective | Rescue the Copper Larks and a kidnapped translator                                       |
| Actual objective   | Save survivors, protect lawful scholars, expose the false assignment, and decide custody |
| Level              | Begin at 3rd level; advance to 4th level after resolution                                |

*The party should discover the truth. The party decides what the truth requires.*

#### The Truth Behind the Contract

*Culpability without a single clean villain*

#### Several Weeks Earlier

A restoration circle working in the Mirrorglass Baths completed repairs to the Bracers of Two Tongues. The silver bracer carries flowing Old Elven. The bronze bracer carries blunt Common. The pair does more than translate words: each bracer reveals implication, duty, social register, and likely consequence.

Caldovian learned about the restoration and told a Scarlet Step intermediary that the Bracers might allow unlike enchantments to interpret one another. He asked for a quiet purchase. Vara Vay approved acquisition after the scholars refused a generous offer. She expected a clean theft, leverage, or another recoverable arrangement. She did not authorize a public massacre.

#### The Copper Larks

Rusk Vale wrote a false heroic contract and hired the Copper Larks, a young adventuring company with more courage than caution. The contract claimed that bathhouse scholars had kidnapped a royal

translator named Eren Vale, corrupted previous rescuers, compromised the city watch, and begun an identity-altering ritual. Caldovian's name appeared as an emergency contact because Rusk expected the bard to calm witnesses and validate the public story.

### The Crisis

The Larks entered with weapons drawn. The scholars defended the archive. Both groups began to recognize the mistake. Rusk then entered through a service route with Scarlet Step operatives. His crew attacked both sides, captured Toma Vesk, prepared Sella Dorne to pose as the rescued translator, and moved toward the Bracers. Kessa escaped. Rusk expected her injuries to finish the work.

### Caldovian's Position

Caldovian wanted access to the Bracers and knew a false recovery was possible. He did not intend the deaths. He sees no contradiction between saving every survivor and accepting the relic afterward. His preferred ending leaves the scholars grateful, the party impressed, Rusk blamed, and the Bracers in his hands for "temporary study."

### If the Characters Refuse

Sava and Ianca leave for the baths. Caldovian recruits whoever will follow. Resolve the crisis offstage with severe losses: one additional Lark dies, Rusk escapes, and Caldovian or Vara gains the Bracers. The campaign continues, but the Step controls the first public account and Party Credibility begins at -1.

*Vara Vay's approval of theft does not excuse Rusk's slaughter. Rusk's excess does not make Vara innocent.*

## Adventure Flow and Crisis Clock

*A rescue under pressure rather than a room-clearing dungeon*

### Expected Flow

1. Caldovian performs at the Red Door and offers one sincere kindness.
2. Kessa collapses with the false contract.
3. The party treats Kessa, tests the story, and chooses how much time to spend on records.
4. The party approaches the Mirrorglass Baths.
5. The characters rescue survivors and gather incompatible accounts.
6. The party negotiates with the scholars and encounters the Bracers.
7. Rusk launches the final retrieval.
8. Vara Vay arrives to contain the Step's failure.
9. The party decides the public story and the relic's immediate custody.

### Crisis Clock

Begin at 1 when Kessa collapses. Advance the clock after approximately 15 minutes of avoidable delay, a Short Rest inside the baths, or a loud action that gives Rusk time to move. Do not advance the clock for careful play that directly addresses the crisis.

| Clock | Development                                                            |
|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1     | Kessa reaches the Red Door. Rusk's crew enters the west service route. |
| 2     | The central-pool island begins to break apart around Ordan.            |
| 3     | Bel's air pocket shrinks in the heating galleries.                     |
| 4     | Rusk reaches the Mosaic Gallery and seals the archive shutters.        |
| 5     | The retrieval attack begins, even if negotiation is incomplete.        |
| 6     | Rusk escapes with one bracer unless a character blocks the west route. |

### Starting Relationships

Caldovian begins at Bond 1 and Pressure 0. Sava and Ianca begin at Bond 0 and Pressure 1. Vara Vay begins at Bond 0 and Pressure 1. Ossa Brindle begins at Bond 1 if a character has a Red Door connection.

### Scaling the Adventure

For three characters, remove the Step burglar from the final scene and reduce Rusk to 48 Hit Points. For five or six characters, add one Red Thread enforcer and give Rusk 68 Hit Points. For a party above 3rd level, add a second steam release during the final scene rather than only raising Hit Points.

### The Red Door

*Warmth, witnesses, and a bard already at home*

#### The Inn

The Red Door occupies a broad corner in the Visitors' District. Its scarlet entrance is repainted every spring. The common room smells of onions, bread, wet wool, lamp oil, and whatever spice Ossa Brindle bought cheaply that morning. Travelers believe the inn is popular because Caldovian performs here. Caldovian performs here because Ossa gave him a place where people already knew his name.

#### Who Is Present

Ossa Brindle, a practical grey-haired innkeeper, controls the room without appearing to hurry. Sava sits near the wall in her deliberately plain Caldovian uniform. Ianca stands at the bar with a metal pitcher and the stillness of a load-bearing column. Caldovian's smoky grey cup from the previous night rests behind the bar. Sava looks at it as if the cup has committed fraud.

Neither woman explains the midnight delivery at Giftschrunk Priory. Sava wants the cup recovered without rewarding Caldovian. Ianca knows pursuit will make him treasure it more.

#### Opening Performance

Caldovian performs "The King Who Misplaced Tuesday," a comic song about a monarch who slept through an entire day and ordered the court to find it. He notices one harmless detail about the party and folds it into an improvised verse. The joke should make the room notice the characters favorably, not humiliate a player.

#### Read Aloud

The performer on the low stage is dressed in dark green and black, with a narrow red ribbon tied at one wrist. He is slender enough that the sword at his side looks borrowed, but he moves as though every table, chair, and startled server has been placed for his convenience. The final verse ends with the king discovering Tuesday beneath his own pillow. The room erupts. The performer bows, goes briefly pale, and steadies himself against the stage. Then he looks directly at you. "New arrivals," he says. "Or very committed regulars wearing unfamiliar faces."



## A Sincere Kindness

Before asking for help, Caldovian performs one real kindness. Choose a suitable act: he arranges a room, replaces a stolen meal, returns a dropped item, warns a character about dishonest lodging, finds a healer, translates an awkward exchange, or stops a cruel joke at a character's expense. He gains information from the moment, but the kindness is not false.

*Caldovian introduces himself as "Caldovian. Performer, occasional adventurer, and a surviving example of several avoidable decisions."*

## Kessa Rill and the False Contract

*First aid, contradiction, and a witness with only part of the event*

### The Collapse

Kessa Rill stumbles through the scarlet door wearing the copper-bird emblem of the Copper Larks. She has a blade wound, steam burns, a narrow puncture beneath the ribs, and bathhouse soot across one side of her face. She sees Caldovian and says, "The paper said you would help." Then she collapses.

Caldovian catches Kessa, nearly falls under her weight, and immediately directs treatment with real competence. Ossa clears a table. Ianca lifts Kessa as if moving a folded blanket. Sava locks the door and asks which route Kessa used.

### Stabilizing Kessa

A character can stabilize Kessa with a DC 10 Wisdom (Medicine) check or any healing magic. On a failure, Kessa remains unconscious for 10 minutes but does not die. A success by 5 or more lets Kessa answer questions immediately. Kessa begins with 3 Hit Points after treatment.

### Kessa's Account

The Copper Larks accepted a contract to rescue Eren Vale, a royal translator supposedly held by bathhouse scholars. Ordan Pike led the company through the east entrance. The scholars shouted that no captive existed. Before Ordan could stop the fight, another crew entered through the steam. Kessa saw red thread, padded restraints, and a case shaped for forearms. She heard, "Take the wrists first." Toma ordered Kessa to run. Someone stabbed Kessa near the changing rooms.

Ordan is near the central pool. Bel Fen vanished into the heating galleries. Toma Vesk was dragged toward the west service rooms. Kessa never saw Eren Vale and cannot identify Rusk, Vara, or the contract's author.

### Testing the Story

The party can spend up to 15 minutes checking records. One successful check below gives confirmation without advancing the Crisis Clock. A second records check advances the clock by 1 unless a character uses a relevant contact or feature. The baths contain enough evidence to reveal the fraud, so no detour is required.

| Check or evidence                              | What it reveals                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| DC 12 Medicine                                 | The puncture came after the steam burn. Someone stabbed Kessa while she retreated.                             |
| DC 13 Investigation                            | Red thread beneath a buckle is a Scarlet Step recognition marker.                                              |
| The contract                                   | It offers 50 gp, names Caldovian as emergency contact, and carries a genuine seal attached to false authority. |
| DC 13 Investigation or calligrapher's supplies | The payment clause and emergency contact were added after the main document dried.                             |
| City records or legal knowledge                | No royal translator named Eren Vale, rescue license, warrant, or lawful seizure order exists.                  |
| Ask Ossa                                       | Someone checked Caldovian's performance schedule before the Larks accepted the contract.                       |

### Sava and Ianca

Sava identifies professional paperwork designed to survive a casual inspection. Ianca recognizes a bathhouse with dangerous pressure galleries and offers one warning: “Do not run where the tiles shine.” Neither woman orders the party to act.

### Caldovian’s Admission

Caldovian says he knew someone was looking for the Bracers but did not know the Copper Larks had been sent. The statement is carefully incomplete and literally true.

*Kessa believes the contract. Her account contains confusion, not a rehearsed lie.*

### Road to the Mirrorglass Baths

*Choosing speed, secrecy, or public authority*

#### Three Approaches

The Mirrorglass Baths stand in the older Steam Quarter, closed after a foundation shift redirected the hottest water. The party can reach the site by the main streets, the warm drainage walk, or a Handshake carriage route.

| Route              | Time and benefit                                                              | Complication                                                                                  |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Main streets       | 10 minutes. Easy navigation. A watch patrol can be asked to witness the site. | A visible group alerts one Step watcher. Rusk gains advantage on his first initiative roll.   |
| Drainage walk      | 12 minutes. DC 12 Survival. Success reaches the east wall unseen.             | Failure costs 5 minutes and exposes one character to scalding runoff for 3 (1d6) fire damage. |
| Handshake carriage | 5 minutes if a contact or 10 gp secures a ride.                               | The driver records every passenger. Vara learns the party’s names before the final scene.     |

### Caldovian on the Road

Caldovian joins unless the party refuses. He carries a healer’s case and a short length of silk rope. He does not mention that the rope came through Handshake. During the walk he asks about each character’s experience with relics, translation, or dishonest employers. His questions sound like concern because concern is part of the motive.

### Sava and Ianca Split Off

Sava and Ianca take a maintenance route. Sava wants the property records and service entries. Ianca wants the pressure controls. This separation keeps the party central. Each woman appears later where practical work creates an opening.

### Signs Outside the Baths

A DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check finds two distinct entries: hurried adventurers through the east door and disciplined operatives through the west service route. A DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds a dragged heel mark leading inward. A successful check using thieves’ tools finds a professional bypass on the west lock and crude force on the east lock.

### A Watch Patrol

A patrol will secure the street but refuses to enter without a lawful warrant or visible civilian danger. Presenting Kessa, the contract, or a witness convinces one officer to record names and times. This witness grants advantage on the first check made to establish the public account after the adventure.

*Entering from the east favors rescue. Entering from the west favors interruption of the Step. Neither route is wrong.*

## The Mirrorglass Baths

*A dynamic rescue site shaped by steam, sound, and old diplomacy*

### Using the Location

The baths are not a sequence of rooms that must be cleared. Voices carry through acoustic channels, steam opens and closes sight lines, and service passages connect distant areas. Let the party choose which endangered person or objective matters first. Advance the Crisis Clock when the fiction justifies it.

### Bathroom Conditions

Steam lightly obscures areas beyond 20 feet. A creature can follow a familiar voice through steam with a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check. A wrong source wastes one round, not fifteen minutes. Shining wet tile is difficult terrain when crossed at speed. A creature that Dashes across such tile must succeed on a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw or fall Prone.

Uncovered hot water deals 5 (1d10) fire damage when a creature enters it for the first time on a turn or starts a turn in it. A creature pulled out before the end of the same turn takes half damage.

### Area Connections

The east entrance opens into Reception and the Changing Rooms. The Central Pool lies beyond. The Heating Galleries run along the south wall. The Mosaic Gallery and Scholar Refuge occupy the west side. The west service route connects the Heating Galleries, Mosaic Gallery, and street.

### Noise and Recognition

A loud explosion, thunder effect, or repeated weapon strike advances the Crisis Clock by 1. Ordinary combat does not. The Bracers can hear meaning in the bathhouse acoustics; once a character reaches the Mosaic Gallery, inscriptions shift in response to nearby honest disagreement.

### Resting

A Short Rest advances the clock by 1. A character can spend Hit Dice during a 10-minute pause after the final attack if the party secures both exterior routes.

|                      |                   |                     |
|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| WEST<br>SERVICE      | MOSAIC<br>GALLERY | SCHOLAR<br>REFUGE   |
| HEATING<br>GALLERIES | CENTRAL<br>POOL   | ARCHIVE<br>SHUTTERS |
| CHANGING<br>ROOMS    | RECEPTION         | EAST<br>STREET DOOR |

*Schematic only; doors and service passages can shift with the steam shutters.*

## Reception and Changing Rooms

*The first proof that the heroic story is false*

### Reception Hall

Broken Copper Lark weapons lie beside a scholar's staff. Scorching spreads outward from a damaged adventurer's flask, not from the archive. One paralytic hand-crossbow bolt is lodged in a doorframe. Red thread is caught beneath the bolt's leather wrapping. A Step token lies under a cracked bench.

### Glassback Newts

A swarm of heat-loving glassback newts has crawled from a wall vent. The creatures hide beneath the bench and react to sudden movement. The swarm attacks only if burned, cornered, or struck. Food, a slow approach, or a DC 12 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check moves the swarm aside. A character who avoids needless slaughter finds the Step token automatically. Use the Glassback Newt Swarm, Challenge Rating 1/2, on page 21.

## Changing Rooms

The Copper Larks' packs have been searched. Money remains. Healing supplies, rope, and identification papers are missing. One locker contains Nilo Ash's wax tablet, dropped during the first fight.

## Nilo's Note

"No captive. Our records are real. Ordan will not listen. Someone opened the west service door. He knew exactly where the case was."

The note is written partly in Common and partly in Old Elven. A character who knows either language can read only the matching clauses. Holding one Bracer later reveals the full note. A DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check reconstructs enough from repeated words to understand the warning now.

## The Drag Trail

Blood and wet cloth mark a route from the changing room toward the west service corridor. This is Toma Vesk's trail. Following it leads toward a locked service room near the Mosaic Gallery. A character can pursue Toma immediately or continue toward Ordan's calls from the pool.

## Useful Salvage

The room contains one healer's kit with 4 uses, 50 feet of wet silk rope, a pry bar, and a bathhouse maintenance hook. Each item can help with later rescues. The silk rope grants advantage on one check made to pull a creature from the Central Pool.

*The scene rewards restraint, investigation, and ordinary equipment before combat begins.*

## The Central Pool

*Rescuing Ordan without turning a mistake into a death sentence*

## The Situation

Ordan Pike lies unconscious on a broken service island in the middle of a dangerously hot pool. A cracked tile arch supports the island. Each pressure pulse carries another piece away. At Crisis Clock 2 or higher, Ordan has 2 Rescue Rounds. At a lower clock, Ordan has 3 Rescue Rounds. At the end of each round, remove 1 round. At 0, Ordan falls into the pool and begins Dying.

## Read Aloud

Steam parts for an instant. A man in copper-bird colors lies across a slab of white tile in the center of the pool. The island beneath him is not an island. It is a roof panel balanced on a broken arch. Hot water strikes the underside in slow, heavy pulses. Each pulse moves the slab closer to collapse.

## Rescue Options

A character can cross overhead pipes with a DC 13 Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check. A failure deals 3 (1d6) fire damage and leaves the character hanging safely from a pipe. A character can throw and secure rope with a DC 12 Dexterity check. A character can drain part of the pool with a DC 13 Intelligence check using mason's tools, tinker's tools, or the maintenance hook. Magic can move Ordan, cool water, create a bridge, or protect a rescuer. Reward a sensible spell without requiring the listed checks.

## Ianca's Opening

If the party has no safe anchor, Ianca arrives through a service passage and braces the failing arch. She buys 2 additional Rescue Rounds but cannot move without causing immediate collapse. The party must reach Ordan, secure the rope, or alter the water.

## Ordan's Account

After healing or 10 minutes of rest, Ordan admits that he ordered the attack after seeing the Bracers. The scholars shouted that no captive existed. Before Ordan could stop, a masked crew attacked both groups. A woman ordered Toma taken alive. Ordan heard the phrase "the singer wanted the pair intact." He cannot identify the singer.

## Consequence

Saving Ordan before searching for the Bracers raises lanca's Bond by 1. Letting Ordan fall does not end the adventure. His copper badge remains a witness to the false contract, and Kessa can identify his body.

*Central Pool Hazard — Challenge Rating 1. The hazard is dangerous because time and position matter, not because the pool deals enormous damage.*

## The Heating Galleries

*A practical rescue under a failing pressure system*

### Bel Fen

Bel is trapped behind a warped copper pressure door. A burst pipe has filled the gallery with steam. He survives inside a narrowing air pocket. At Crisis Clock 3 or higher, mark 2 Breath boxes. Otherwise mark 3. Remove one box after each failed attempt or after a character spends a full round without changing the situation. At 0, Bel falls unconscious and begins Dying.

### Pressure Challenge

The group needs 3 successes before 2 failures. The base DC is 13. A successful action must change pressure, support the door, create a safe route, or protect Bel.

| Approach                                              | Example                                                                |
|-------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Strength (Athletics)                                  | Hold the warped door while another character crawls through.           |
| Intelligence with smith's, mason's, or tinker's tools | Vent the correct line or brace the hinge.                              |
| Wisdom (Perception)                                   | Identify the quiet pipe carrying pressure rather than sound.           |
| Dexterity with thieves' tools                         | Release the emergency latch through a narrow maintenance slit.         |
| Magic                                                 | Cool steam, move metal, create airflow, teleport, or shield a rescuer. |

### Failure

On the second failure, the door bursts. Each creature in a 15-foot cone must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) fire damage on a failure or half damage on a success. Bel is thrown into the corridor at 0 Hit Points but remains alive.

### Sava's Opening

Sava can arrive with the correct maintenance tablet after one failed check. She points to a valve and says, "That one is lying." Her information grants advantage on the next check. She does not perform the repair.

### Bel's Account

Bel heard one operative say, "The singer wanted both wrists, not bodies." Another voice answered, "Rusk wants no witnesses." Bel also heard a woman practicing the name Eren Vale behind the archive shutters.

### Recovered Equipment

Bel carries two Potions of Healing supplied by the Copper Larks. He gives both to the party after rescue. A Step service map lies inside the pressure door. It grants advantage on one check made to block the west escape route.

*Pressure Gallery Hazard — Challenge Rating 2. A burst can hurt the whole group, but the rescue remains solvable through tools, strength, or magic.*

## **Toma Vesk and the West Service Rooms**

*The witness Rusk intended to keep until the story was ready*

### **Finding Toma**

The drag trail ends at a tiled service room near the Mosaic Gallery. The door has a quality lock and a wire alarm. A DC 13 Dexterity check with thieves' tools opens the lock. A character who beats DC 15 also notices and disables the alarm. Breaking the door is automatic with a pry bar and one action, but the noise advances the Crisis Clock if the clock is below 5.

### **Inside**

Toma Vesk is bound to a pipe with silk rope and a padded restraint around each forearm. The restraints were sized for a Bracer wearer, not for Toma. A folded red scarf smells of bitter orange. One wall carries a charcoal rehearsal list: "Eren Vale. Royal translator. Memory uncertain. Old Elven lost. Common restored."

### **Toma's Account**

Toma saw Rusk direct the attack. Sella Dorne practiced the role of Eren Vale while Rusk searched for the Bracers. Toma heard: "The bard will ask whether the pair spoke." This phrase means Caldovian expected a report about relic communication. Toma also saw one order bearing a red wax handprint, a mark associated with Vara Vay's authority. The order concerned acquisition; Rusk added witness removal in his own hand.

### **Freeing Toma**

Cutting the rope is simple. Removing the padded restraints without bruising the wrists requires a DC 11 Dexterity check or one minute. A success preserves evidence that the restraints were designed for the Bracers. A failure frees Toma but damages the evidence.

### **Toma in the Finale**

Toma has 8 Hit Points and refuses another frontal fight. She can guard a route, carry a message, identify Sella, or protect an unconscious person. Assign one task. Toma succeeds unless directly attacked.

### **Rusk's Spare Case**

A second padded case contains wax impressions of the silver and bronze inscriptions. Beneath the lining is a note: "Quiet Ember. Capacity twelve. Do not cast within thirty feet." This is the first direct lead toward Fume and Adventure Two.

*Toma provides the clearest separation between Vara's acquisition order and Rusk's murder plan.*

## **The Mosaic Gallery**

*Ancient arguments preserved in tile and steam*

### **The Gallery**

The west gallery once hosted treaty ceremonies. Human and Elven mosaics face one another across a narrow floor channel. Steam rising through the channel reveals hidden sentences in the glaze. The sentences do not match. One side describes shared intention. The other describes shared responsibility.

### **The Empty Case**

The Bracers' display case shows three distinct entries. Scholar keys opened the case lawfully. Copper Lark tools forced one hinge during the first misunderstanding. A later professional attempt bypassed the lock without damaging it. A DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check identifies all three. No check is needed after a character studies the case for one minute.

### **Treaty Voices**

A creature speaking in the gallery hears an echo that emphasizes hidden meaning. For example, "safe" may return as "safe from attack, not from collapse." "Mine" may return as "in my hands, not under my authority." Use the effect to sharpen language, not to force confession.

### **The Bracers' First Appearance**

The scholars carried the Bracers into the refuge. A silver inscription remains reflected in one mosaic. A bronze answer appears opposite it: "Understanding is not surrender." A character who touches both reflections hears a short phrase in a language the character does not know and understands the intended distinction anyway.

### **A Caldovian Reaction**

Sava traces the narrow wavering symbol of the Path in the air before examining the gallery. Ianca remains quiet. Caldovian recognizes the workmanship as older than Elra's ascension and becomes visibly moved. His emotion is real. He also moves one step closer to the scholar refuge.

### **Blocking the West Route**

The party can spend one minute and make a DC 13 check using thieves' tools, mason's tools, or the Step service map to jam the west shutter. Success prevents automatic escape at Crisis Clock 6. Failure alerts Rusk and gives the Step burglar advantage on the first check made to seize a bracer.

*The gallery teaches the campaign's central relic rule: better understanding creates better choices, not compulsory agreement.*

### **The Scholars' Refuge**

*A barricade built by lawful custodians who expect another heroic attack*

### **The Scholars**

Athis Venn, a human legal historian, leads the restoration circle. Sister Kelra Nymm, a Rock Elf funerary translator, interprets Old Elven ritual language. Daro Quince maintains purchase records and chain-of-custody documents. Nilo Ash, a young human apprentice, dropped the wax tablet in the changing rooms.

The scholars hold the Bracers behind a barricade of benches, archive shutters, and mirrored screens. The silver bracer rests on Kelra's left wrist. The bronze bracer rests on Athis's right wrist. The pair functions across the room.

### **Beginning the Conversation**

The scholars negotiate if the party lowers weapons, presents Kessa's contract, calls a survivor by name, or states a clear intention other than seizure. A character can force a pause with a DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check. No check is needed after the party presents Nilo's note, Toma, Ordan, or the professional service map.

### **What the Scholars Know**

The circle purchased the damaged Bracers through lawful estate liquidation and recorded every transfer. An unnamed buyer later offered triple value through a note signed "S.T." The scholars refused. Athis suspects Scarlet Step involvement. Kelra believes the Bracers translate intention between magical systems. Daro can prove no royal translator was held here.

### **What the Scholars Want**

Athis wants the Bracers moved to a witnessed civic archive. Kelra wants the pair to remain together and continue translation work. Daro wants every survivor's statement recorded before any faction controls the story. Nilo wants to rescue the Copper Larks despite the attack.

### **Caldovian's Conduct**

Caldovian does not demand custody. He apologizes for the false story, offers money for repairs, and asks careful questions about the restoration. His kindness is persuasive because he means it. Athis distrusts him. Kelra is fascinated by Elra's favor. Sava watches the contract records. Ianca checks the shutters.

### **If Negotiation Fails**

The scholars defend without pursuing. Use three Bath Scholars, Challenge Rating 1/4, plus Athis as a noncombatant with AC 12 and 18 Hit Points. A character can end hostilities by dropping a weapon, exposing the Step, or rescuing a wounded scholar. Rusk attacks both sides at Crisis Clock 5.

*The scholars are lawful custodians, not saints. Athis can be arrogant, Kelra can be reckless, and Daro can value records over immediate comfort.*

### **The Bracers Speak**

*Relic recognition without a forced answer*

#### **First Contact**

When a character wears both Bracers or when the pair comes within 60 feet of another relic, the inscriptions move. No other true relic is physically present in the baths. Caldovian's smoky cup is not a relic. Elra's favor on Caldovian, however, is a magical condition shaped by the same divine history. The Bracers react to the difference between what he intends and what his presence will cause.

#### **What a Wearer Experiences**

The silver bracer expresses: "He wants all lives preserved." The bronze bracer answers: "He wants the result preserved more." Neither statement calls Caldovian a liar. Both statements are accurate. The moment should increase suspicion without revealing the full campaign.

#### **Using One Bracer**

A creature wearing only the silver bracer understands Old Elven and catches implication, beauty, and intended meaning. A creature wearing only the bronze bracer understands Common and catches action, responsibility, and practical consequence. Full item rules appear in Chapter 14.

#### **Useful Tests**

The party can use the pair to compare Kessa's account with the contract, question a scholar, or test Sella later. The Bracers do not read minds. A sincere speaker can still be wrong. A liar can speak a technically true sentence. The pair reveals the distinction a speaker is trying to preserve.

#### **Central Cast Reactions**

Caldovian is delighted and frightened. He asks one precise question: "Can unlike enchantments make introductions?"

Sava asks who currently has legal and cultural authority over each bracer.

Ianca asks what happens if the pair disagrees with itself.

Kelra asks whether a translation can create a new obligation.

Athis asks everyone to stop asking questions while he still has a building.

#### **A Player-Facing Choice**

Let one character try the Bracers before the final attack. The scene should make the relic genuinely desirable. Understanding idiom, intent, and magical interaction is useful. The campaign works better when custody is a difficult choice rather than an obvious refusal.

*The Bracers never say, "Trust Caldovian," or "Do not trust Caldovian." The pair gives the distinction that makes such a decision meaningful.*

## Steam and Red Thread

*Rusk's retrieval plan enters the refuge*

### Trigger

The attack begins when the Crisis Clock reaches 5, when a character attempts to remove the Bracers through the east door, or when negotiation reaches a stable custody decision. Rusk cannot allow a clean agreement.

### The Plan

Rusk seals the archive shutters, releases steam from the south service line, sends a burglar toward the Bracers, and positions Sella Dorne as the rescued Eren Vale. One Red Thread enforcer blocks the east route. For five or six characters, use two enforcers. Rusk wants the Bracers, living captives useful to the story, and no uncontrolled witnesses.

### Read Aloud

The west shutter drops with a sound like a guillotine striking tile. Steam erupts beneath the treaty mosaics. A woman behind the mirrored screens begins screaming, "My name is Eren Vale. I think it is my name." Red thread appears at three wrists at once.

### Observable Contradictions

Sella watches Rusk before answering. She speaks neither Old Elven nor the court dialect named in the contract. Her clothing is dry beneath the outer robe. The padded restraint marks on Toma match the case carried by the burglar. Rusk's operatives move toward wrists before attacking armed opponents.

### Initiative and Objectives

Roll initiative. Place two Bracer objectives, one on Athis and one on Kelra. The Step burglar attempts to seize one bracer rather than deal damage. Rusk directs the enforcer and attacks a character who can block the route. Sella performs until exposed. The scene ends when Rusk is defeated or retreats, both bracers leave Step reach, and no survivor remains trapped behind a shutter.

| Round | Bathroom development                                                                                 |
|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1     | Steam fills the Mosaic Gallery. Areas beyond 10 feet become Heavily Obscured.                        |
| 2     | A pressure vent opens in a 15-foot line: DC 13 Dexterity save, 7 (2d6) fire damage, half on success. |
| 3     | The west shutter unlocks. An operative carrying a bracer can attempt                                 |
| 4+    | Roll 1d6. On a 5–6, another pressure line vents in a different area.                                 |

## Running the Final Confrontation

*A hard level-3 encounter with rescue, evidence, and custody objectives*

### Encounter Group

For four characters, use Rusk Vale (CR 2), Sella Dorne (CR 1/2), one Red Thread Enforcer (CR 1/2), and one Step Burglar (CR 1/2). The adjusted difficulty is near the upper edge of Hard for a 3rd-level party. The operatives divide attention among escape, seizure, and witness control, so the scene is less lethal than a focused four-enemy assault.

### Environmental Actions

- A character can use an action for one of the following:
- Close a steam valve with a DC 12 Strength check or a DC 12 Dexterity check using thieves' tools.
  - Raise one archive shutter with a DC 14 Strength check.
  - Break a mirrored sight line, removing Sella's advantage on Deception checks.
  - Pull a survivor into cover.
  - Secure a bracer in the padded case. A secured bracer cannot be seized until the case is opened with an

action.

- Use the Bracers to challenge Sella. She must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma (Deception) check or lose her next action.

### **Caldovian**

Once during the encounter, Caldovian can protect one vulnerable creature, impose Disadvantage on one attack through illusion, or move one survivor 15 feet without provoking Opportunity Attacks. He refuses to take a bracer unless a character gives it to him. After helping, he becomes pale and loses the ability to assist again.

### **Sava**

Sava pursues the burglar if the burglar escapes the room with a bracer. This prevents automatic loss but removes Sava from the main fight. A character must still stop Rusk or recover the second bracer.

### **Ianca**

Ianca holds the south pressure gate. While she remains in place, the round-4 random vent occurs only on a 6. A character can replace her with a DC 14 Strength (Athletics) check, freeing Ianca to carry one unconscious creature to safety.

### **The Scholars and Larks**

A rescued Lark or scholar can Help once per round, move an unattended object, or drag an unconscious creature. No allied NPC makes attacks unless the party explicitly asks for covering fire. The party remains responsible for the decisive actions.

### **Morale**

Sella surrenders when exposed and reduced below half Hit Points. The enforcer surrenders after Rusk falls. The burglar flees with or without a bracer. Rusk retreats at 15 Hit Points if the west route remains open.

*The scene is won by controlling people, exits, evidence, and relics—not by reducing every opponent to 0 Hit Points.*

## **The Red Mask at the West Door**

*Vara Vay enters the party's orbit*

### **Arrival**

Vara Vay appears after Rusk falls, surrenders, or reaches the west street. She wears the smooth scarlet mask and dark red cloak seen in the opening fiction. Four distant Step agents secure the street but do not enter. Vara comes alone because the failure belongs to her organization and because no rank or profit grants another member access to this conversation.

### **What Vara Knows**

Vara approved acquisition of the Bracers. She expected deniable theft, leverage, or purchase. Rusk added witness murder, a false captive, and a public rescue story. Vara considers his choices wasteful, disobedient, and dangerous to the Step. She does not apologize for wanting the relic.

### **Her Offer**

Vara offers to take Rusk, pay medical costs, return stolen personal property, and provide the party with one future Scarlet Step favor. In exchange, she wants the acquisition order, the red-wax handprint, and silence about her authorization. She does not demand the Bracers in the first offer. If the party appears willing to bargain, she offers 500 gp for temporary custody.

### **Caldovian and Vara**

Caldovian calls her “Vara” before she introduces herself. The familiarity is unmistakable. Vara tells him, “You asked for quiet scholarship.” Caldovian answers, “I asked you not to kill the scholars.” Both statements are true. This exchange confirms prior involvement without exposing the full relationship.

## Possible Resolutions

A character can persuade Vara to surrender Rusk to civic custody with a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check supported by a public witness, preserved order, or Toma's account. Intimidation works only if the party controls both bracers and the west route. Vara accepts a temporary retreat rather than risk a street battle.

## If Combat Begins

Vara uses the CR 8 profile in Chapter 6 and focuses on escape, not slaughter. She disengages after one round if no bracer is within reach. Her four agents cover withdrawal but do not enter unless a character pursues into the street. This is not intended as a fair combat encounter for 3rd-level characters; every cue should communicate that fact.

*Vara Vay can respect the party, owe the party, and still remain the leader of a criminal organization.*

## Custody of the Bracers

*Immediate control is not permanent ownership*

## The Decision

After the crisis, ask who physically holds each bracer, who can verify the choice, and when the arrangement will be reviewed. Do not demand a permanent legal settlement before wounds are treated.

| Immediate custody                    | Consequence                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The party carries both               | The characters gain direct access to the relic and become an obvious Step target. Caldovian offers to help with attunement.     |
| The scholars retain both             | Athis and Kelra remain strong witnesses. The baths require immediate relocation and protection.                                 |
| A civic archive receives both        | Public safety rises. Institutional politics and competing cultural claims begin.                                                |
| Caldovian receives temporary custody | His Bond rises by 1. His collection plan advances. Sava's Pressure rises by 1.                                                  |
| Sava and Ianca transport both        | The pair enters witnessed Caldovi custody. Caldovian becomes curious about the women's actual authority.                        |
| Ossa hides both at the Red Door      | The inn becomes a relic site and future target. Ossa's Bond rises by 1.                                                         |
| The pair is divided                  | Full paired magic stops beyond 1 mile. Two custodians must cooperate. Kelra objects; Athis accepts the safety argument.         |
| Vara buys or takes custody           | The Step gains leverage. The party receives money or a favor, but Party Credibility falls by 1 if the agreement becomes public. |

## Relic Recognition Record

Record the bearer of each bracer, distance between the pair, current attunement, last verified witness, and Caldovian's access. Chapter 14 contains complete item rules.

## A Good Custody Scene

Let every claimant state one benefit and one risk. Athis offers history but lacks security. Sava offers procedure but conceals her employer. Caldovian offers expertise but has hidden motives. Vara offers protection through fear. The party offers courage but may lack permanence. No option is perfect.

*Understanding the relic does not create ownership. Possession does create responsibility.*

## Evidence and the First Public Story

*What can be proved, what remains suspicious, and who speaks first*

### Required Revelations

By the end of the adventure, the party should know that the scholars held the Bracers lawfully, the contract was false, the Step wanted the pair intact, and Caldovian knew about the operation earlier than he first admitted. No single clue must carry the full revelation.

| Revelation                    | Independent routes                                                                                                           |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The scholars are lawful       | Purchase records; civic records; Daro's chain of custody; the empty case; Nilo's note.                                       |
| Eren Vale is false            | No city record; Sella's language failure; rehearsal list; Toma's identification; contract contradictions.                    |
| The Step targeted the Bracers | "Take the wrists first"; padded case; red thread; Rusk's order; burglar behavior.                                            |
| Rusk planned witness removal  | His handwritten addition; Bel's account; Toma's account; paralytic bolt and restraints.                                      |
| Caldovian knew more           | His name on the contract; Ossa's visitor; "the singer wanted the pair intact"; the question about whether the Bracers spoke. |
| Vara authorized acquisition   | Red-wax handprint; Toma's sighting; Vara's admission; Caldovian's exchange with her.                                         |

### Choosing the First Messenger

The party can speak publicly, ask Daro to file an account, let the Copper Larks confess, negotiate a quiet repair with Vara, or allow Caldovian to tell the story. The first account affects reputation but does not become permanent truth.

### Public Outcomes

A documented public exposure raises Party Credibility by 1 and Vara's Pressure by 1. A quiet settlement preserves witnesses and grants one Step favor but creates no public gain. Letting Caldovian speak raises his Favor by 1; his story protects the party while minimizing his own prior knowledge. Killing witnesses or allowing the Step to remove records lowers Party Credibility by 1.

### The Small Contradiction

Caldovian says he learned the full danger when Kessa arrived. The contract, Ossa's account, and Rusk's questions show preparation before that moment. The party should have enough reason to watch him, but not enough proof to know his complete plan.

*A successful adventure ends with better questions, not a solved campaign.*

## Rewards, Advancement, and Aftermath

*What the city remembers after the steam clears*

### Material Rewards

Caldovian offers 25 gp per character for the rescue, even if the party openly criticizes him. Ossa provides three nights of rooms and meals. The Copper Larks offer two Potions of Healing if Bel's potions were not used, or one future escort through the Border City. The scholars offer access to restoration notes and six inscribed translation tokens.

### Translation Tokens

A token is a small ceramic tile marked in Old Elven on one side and Common on the other. A character can break a token after hearing or reading one unfamiliar phrase. The character learns the literal meaning, intended social register, and one important implication. A token cannot decipher a cipher, command word, or concept no participant understands. Each token works once.

## Milestone

Characters reach 4th level after the bathhouse crisis ends and immediate custody is recorded. Perfect rescue, public proof, and possession of the Bracers are not required.

## Relationship Changes

Raise Caldovian's Bond by 1 if the party accepted his help, protected him during visible weakness, or trusted him with temporary custody. Raise his Pressure by 1 if the party preserved evidence of his prior knowledge.

Raise Sava's Bond by 1 if the party protected chain of custody or used practical proof before accusation. Raise Ianca's Bond by 1 if the party rescued people before pursuing the relic. Raise Vara's Bond by 1 if the party negotiated without humiliation; raise her Pressure by 1 after public exposure or refusal of every settlement.

## Copper Lark Futures

Kessa becomes a reliable street-level contact. Ordan either admits his mistake or clings to the false heroic story. Bel becomes suspicious of every contract that uses the phrase public safety. Toma can identify Step restraint methods and Sella's face. A surviving Lark can reappear whenever the campaign needs a witness to the cost of manufactured heroism.

## Scholar Futures

Athis becomes the first respectable witness willing to suggest that Caldovian does not merely arrive wherever relics become endangered. Kelra continues studying interpretation between magical systems. Daro preserves a sealed copy of every statement. Nilo writes to the party whenever a new translation changes the meaning of an old promise.

## Lead to Adventure Two

Rusk's spare case contains the note: "Quiet Ember. Capacity twelve. Do not cast within thirty feet." Within three days, Giftschrunk Priory sends an urgent request. Fume has begun producing smoke whenever the Bracers are discussed, and someone has filed a legal petition demanding the sword's destruction.

*End with a meal at the Red Door if the table wants quiet. Caldovian raises the unbreakable cup and says, "To accurate contracts. May we someday encounter one."*

## Minor NPCs and Creatures

*Table-ready statistics for the Red Door and bathhouse crisis*

### Copper Lark

*Medium Humanoid, any alignment • Challenge Rating 1/2 (100 XP) • PB +2*

AC 15 (studded leather); HP 32 (5d8 + 10); Speed 30 ft.

STR 12 (+1), DEX 16 (+3), CON 14 (+2), INT 10 (+0), WIS 12 (+1), CHA 11 (+0)

Skills Athletics +3, Perception +3, Survival +3

### TRAITS

**Young Company.** The Lark has Advantage on a saving throw against being Frightened while another conscious Copper Lark is within 10 feet.

### ACTIONS

**Shortsword.** Melee Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

**Shortbow.** Ranged Attack: +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft. Hit: 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

### Bath Scholar

*Medium Humanoid, any alignment • Challenge Rating 1/4 (50 XP) • PB +2*

AC 12; HP 18 (4d8); Speed 30 ft.

STR 9 (-1), DEX 12 (+1), CON 10 (+0), INT 15 (+2), WIS 13 (+1), CHA 11 (+0)

Skills Arcana +4, History +4, Investigation +4

## TRAITS

**Archive Training.** The scholar has Advantage on checks to identify documents, seals, inscriptions, or an alteration to a stored object.

## ACTIONS

**Staff.** Melee Attack: +1 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 2 (1d6 – 1) bludgeoning damage.

**Scalding Flask (1/Day).** Ranged Attack: +3 to hit, range 20/60 ft. Hit: 7 (2d6) fire damage.

## Glassback Newt Swarm

*Medium Swarm of Tiny Beasts, Unaligned • Challenge Rating 1/2 (100 XP) • PB +2*

AC 13; HP 31 (7d8); Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft., swim 20 ft.

STR 7 (–2), DEX 15 (+2), CON 10 (+0), INT 2 (–4), WIS 12 (+1), CHA 3 (–4)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing; Condition Immunities Charmed, Frightened, Grappled, Prone, Restrained

## TRAITS

**Swarm.** The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa. The swarm cannot regain Hit Points or gain Temporary Hit Points.

**Heat Drawn.** Food or a warm unattended object presented within 10 feet grants Advantage on a check made to move the swarm without violence.

## ACTIONS

**Bites.** Melee Attack: +4 to hit, reach 0 ft. Hit: 7 (2d4 + 2) piercing damage, or 4 (1d4 + 2) while the swarm has half Hit Points or fewer.

## Red Thread Enforcer

*Medium Humanoid, any non-good alignment • Challenge Rating 1/2 (100 XP) • PB +2*

AC 15 (leather, buckler); HP 32 (5d8 + 10); Speed 30 ft.

STR 16 (+3), DEX 13 (+1), CON 14 (+2), INT 10 (+0), WIS 11 (+0), CHA 10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +5, Intimidation +2

## TRAITS

**Hold the Door.** The enforcer has Advantage on checks and saves against being moved while within 5 feet of a doorway, shutter, or narrow passage.

## ACTIONS

**Sap.** Melee Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage. The enforcer can deal nonlethal damage without penalty.

**Shove Aside.** One creature within 5 feet must succeed on a DC 13 Strength saving throw or move 5 feet and fall Prone.

## REACTIONS

**Interpose.** When a creature within 5 feet is hit by an attack, the enforcer becomes the target instead.

## Scarlet Step Operatives

*Table-ready statistics for Rusk's retrieval crew*

### Step Burglar

*Medium Humanoid, any non-good alignment • Challenge Rating 1/2 (100 XP) • PB +2*

AC 15; HP 27 (6d8); Speed 30 ft.

STR 10 (+0), DEX 16 (+3), CON 11 (+0), INT 13 (+1), WIS 12 (+1), CHA 11 (+0)

Skills Acrobatics +5, Sleight of Hand +5, Stealth +5; Tools thieves' tools +5

### TRAITS

**Quick Fingers.** The burglar can draw, stow, open, or seize one unattended Tiny object as a Bonus Action.

**Exploit Opening.** Once per turn, the burglar deals 3 (1d6) extra damage after hitting a creature while an ally is within 5 feet of the target.

### ACTIONS

**Shortsword.** Melee Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

**Smoke Pellet (1/Day).** A 10-foot-radius sphere within 30 feet becomes Heavily Obscured until the end of the burglar's next turn.

### BONUS ACTIONS

**Cunning Action.** The burglar takes the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

### Sella Dorne, False Captive

*Medium Humanoid, neutral • Challenge Rating 1/2 (100 XP) • PB +2*

AC 14; HP 27 (6d8); Speed 30 ft.

STR 9 (-1), DEX 16 (+3), CON 11 (+0), INT 12 (+1), WIS 12 (+1), CHA 16 (+3)

Skills Deception +5, Insight +3, Performance +5, Sleight of Hand +5

### TRAITS

**Prepared Story.** Sella has Advantage on the first Deception check made to support the Eren Vale identity. The Advantage ends after a witness exposes one contradiction.

**Survival Before Loyalty.** Sella surrenders while below half Hit Points if a character offers protection from Rusk.

### ACTIONS

**Poisoned Dagger.** Melee or Ranged Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft. Hit: 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) poison damage.

**Panic Script (1/Day).** One creature within 30 feet that can hear Sella must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or have Disadvantage on its next attack roll before the end of its next turn.

### Rusk Vale, Retrieval Captain

*Medium Humanoid, lawful evil • Challenge Rating 2 (450 XP) • PB +2*

AC 16 (studded leather, buckler); HP 58 (9d8 + 18); Speed 30 ft.

STR 12 (+1), DEX 16 (+3), CON 14 (+2), INT 13 (+1), WIS 12 (+1), CHA 14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Wis +3; Skills Deception +4, Insight +3, Perception +3, Stealth +5

### TRAITS

**Exploit Confusion.** Once per turn, Rusk deals 3 (1d6) extra damage after hitting a creature that is adjacent to one of Rusk's allies or standing in steam.

**Planned Exit.** Rusk can take the Disengage action as a Bonus Action while within 20 feet of the west service route.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Rusk makes two Rapier attacks.

**Rapier.** Melee Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

**Paralytic Bolt (1/Day).** Ranged Attack: +5 to hit, range 30/120 ft. Hit: 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or have Speed 0 until the end of its next turn.

### **BONUS ACTIONS**

**Direct the Cut (Recharge 5–6).** One allied operative within 30 feet can move up to half Speed without provoking Opportunity Attacks.

### **REACTIONS**

**Use the Witness.** When hit by an attack while adjacent to a creature, Rusk gains +2 AC against that attack. If the attack then misses, Rusk can move 5 feet without provoking Opportunity Attacks.

*Rusk's numbers assume a mobile objective encounter. He becomes much more dangerous if every operative focuses damage on one character; use the crew's actual goals.*



## CHAPTER 8 — That FOOM Sword

### Adventure Two for characters of 4th level

#### Adventure Summary

Giftschrank Priory intends to destroy Fume, a slender artifact longsword that consumes nearby spells and releases unrelated magical catastrophes. Tessel Vane has reduced the sword from eleven charges to two through nine controlled discharges. Sister Helle Norr has prepared a fully nonmagical destruction method using null-salt, iron pins, mechanical pressure, and heat drawn from the Priory's geothermal pond. The method can work.

Someone has made success socially difficult. Premature broadsheets advertise the destruction. A second adventuring company has orders to arrest the characters if Fume moves. Two Scarlet Step cells have received incompatible instructions. A retrieval crew intends to seize the sword for Vara Vay. Harl Fen's protective cell intends to keep the characters alive and ensure that witnesses see a character wield Fume. Caldovian publicly supports destruction while privately making every failure point look like a reasonable decision made by someone else.

The characters inspect the Priory, verify the procedure, uncover sabotage, manage frightened witnesses, and defend the Null Kiln. If the procedure fails, drawing Fume may save lives. The first public FOOM can make the party famous and leave the sword in mobile custody. If the party preserves the procedure, Fume can be destroyed permanently.

#### Adventure Purpose

This adventure makes custody physical. The party must decide who may touch a dangerous object, when expertise deserves trust, whether public attention makes safety impossible, and whether immediate rescue justifies accepting long-term responsibility. Fume should feel powerful, frightening, funny, and worth carrying.

| Element            | At the Table                                                                   |
|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Relic              | Fume, the FOOM Sword                                                           |
| Primary location   | Giftschrank Priory beside a geothermal pond                                    |
| Apparent objective | Witness and protect Fume's destruction                                         |
| Actual decision    | Preserve the procedure, draw Fume, release it, or assign custody after failure |
| Level              | Begin at 4th level; advance to 5th level after resolution                      |

*A successful destruction is a valid victory. Do not reverse it to preserve a later outline.*

#### The Truth Behind the Destruction

*A sound method surrounded by manipulated people*

#### The Previous FOOM

On the night before the party met Caldovian at the Red Door, a junior warden cast a minor diagnostic charm while Fume was already full. The sword consumed the spell, released an automatic FOOM, and fell to eleven charges. Stones floated above the geothermal pond, water rose in a column, and twenty-four imported ceramic cups rang across the road. No member of the public saw the sword, but enough people saw the blue light to begin asking questions.

#### Tessel's Decision

Tessel had already argued that Fume should be destroyed. The automatic release ended the last internal objection. Over the next three days, Tessel and Helle used isolated chambers, mechanical

carriers, empty pond platforms, and documented voluntary releases to reduce Fume from eleven charges to two. Each discharge created a different effect. No person died. One storage room became six inches shorter, every mushroom in the medical garden learned the same whistle, and a warden's left boot now points north.

The destruction procedure is not desperate improvisation. Helle tested every mechanical stage with an inert replica. Tessel verified the sword's charge total. Coren closed the Priory to ordinary visitors. The method fails only if magic enters the kiln, a pin releases early, the pressure rail slips, or someone touches Fume before the black channel softens.

### Vara Vay's Order

Vara Vay has issued a real acquisition order. Her instruction is narrow: seize Fume if the Priory loses control, avoid unnecessary deaths, and do not leave the sword with Caldovian. Daska Rell, the retrieval captain, interprets loss of control as any moment when a case opens. Daska wants a visible success after the Step's failure at the Mirrorglass Baths.

### Caldovian's Scheme

Caldovian wants Fume's function for the final transformation, but possession today is less important than association. He leaked the destruction date, encouraged a civic witness order, arranged Harl's protective instructions, praised Edrin's final test, and helped a forged warning reach Coren. Caldovian expects fear to produce one small spell near the sword. He then expects a character to draw Fume, save lives, and become its publicly remembered bearer.

### What Caldovian Did Not Order

Caldovian did not order Daska to kill a custodian, damage the geothermal system, or trap civilians. He will oppose such acts sincerely. His rescue efforts do not erase his responsibility for constructing the crisis.

*The procedure is technically sound. The sabotage is social, documentary, and physical.*

## Adventure Flow and Crisis Clock

*Preparation matters before the kiln begins*

### Expected Flow

1. The Priory summons the party and Caldovian offers to accompany the group.
2. Coren presents two contradictory notices at the gate.
3. Tessel explains Fume, the charge ledger, and the destruction procedure.
4. The party inspects the grounds, visitors, documents, and equipment.
5. The characters assign roles and begin the thirteen-minute kiln cycle.
6. Daska's retrieval crew, Harl's protective cell, and the Marble Lions act on conflicting orders.
7. A spell enters Fume's range or the party prevents every magical trigger.
8. The party preserves destruction, draws Fume, or manages a FOOM.
9. Survivors compare orders and decide immediate custody.
10. The city chooses whether the party saved the Priory or became the newest Fume problem.

### Crisis Clock

Begin at 0 when the party reaches the Warning Bridge. Advance the clock after approximately 20 minutes spent on unrelated activity, a failed attempt to conceal a public disturbance, or a loud confrontation that alerts the waiting cells. Direct investigation, evacuation, and repair do not advance the clock.

| Clock | Development                                               |
|-------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| 0     | The gate remains closed; Coren verifies the party.        |
| 1     | Unauthorized spectators gather beyond the Warning Bridge. |

|   |                                                                 |
|---|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2 | The Marble Lions receive the forged arrest order.               |
| 3 | Daska's crew enters through a legitimate delivery route.        |
| 4 | Harl's cell takes positions around the evacuation path.         |
| 5 | The kiln cycle begins whether every concern is resolved or not. |
| 6 | Daska acts, Harl intervenes, and the Lions attempt an arrest.   |

### Starting Relationships

Tessel begins at Bond 0 and Pressure 1. Sava and Ianca retain current values. Caldovian retains current values from Adventure One. Vara Vay's Bond rises by 1 if the party negotiated at the baths without humiliating her; her Pressure rises by 1 if the party publicly exposed the Step.

### Scaling the Adventure

For three characters, remove one Step burglar and reduce Daska to 58 Hit Points. For five or six characters, add one Red Thread enforcer and one Marble Lion. For a party above 4th level, increase the Kiln Frame hazard's save DC by 1 and give Spell-Fed Smoke 15 additional Hit Points.

### The Summons and the Warning Bridge

*A black pond, a closed gate, and two official truths*

#### The Summons

A Priory runner reaches the Red Door within three days of the bathhouse crisis. The sealed note bears Tessel Vane's name and a list of six prohibited items: active spells, open flame, summoned creatures, unstable alchemy, unrecorded magic items, and heroic improvisation. The final line reads, "The Bracers reacted when Fume's name was entered into the ledger. Bring the characters who heard the reaction."

If the party lacks the Bracers, the note asks for the witnesses who handled the pair. If the Bracers remain with the scholars, Athis sends a translation rubbing. If Caldovian has temporary custody, Tessel orders the Bracers sealed before arrival.

#### Caldovian's Offer

Caldovian says destruction is sensible. He volunteers cultural interpretation, promises not to cast near the sword, and carries the smoky grey cup inside a padded case because Sava has forbidden him to leave it unattended at the Red Door. His support is persuasive because it is partly sincere.

#### Read Aloud

The Priory wall follows the edge of a geothermal pond black enough to reflect nothing. Steam crawls across the road and gathers beneath the broad stone bridge. Beyond the mist, shuttered windows face outward like closed eyes. Three flags hang above the gate: red for isolation, white for medical danger, and blue for magical danger. All three are raised. A fourth flag has been tied beneath the warning flags. It reads, in hurried black paint: NO SONGS.

#### The Two Notices

Coren Wyle opens the gate only far enough to pass two documents through an iron slot. One notice authorizes the party, Caldovian, Sava, and Ianca as witnesses and emergency auxiliaries. The second warns that the party intends to steal Fume and orders Coren to detain every character if the sword leaves its carrier. Both notices use real seals, correct paper, and valid phrasing. Neither came from Tessel.

A DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds that the arrest notice copied the spacing of a form retired four months ago. A DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) check shows that Coren wants a verifiable reason to admit the party, not an excuse to exclude it. Presenting Tessel's original summons, the Bracers' rubbing, or a witness from Adventure One resolves the gate without further delay.

## Coren's Rule

Coren inventories carried magic but does not confiscate a character's defining equipment. A character can seal an item in waxed cloth, document its passive effect, or leave it in a numbered gate case. A lie discovered later raises Tessel's Pressure by 1.

*Coren Wyle, Priory Commander — Challenge Rating 4. His complete statistics appear in Chapter 15.*

## Giftschrank Priory

*A containment house built beside a geothermal pond*

### Using the Grounds

The Priory is not a dungeon waiting for invaders. Staff members know the routes, doors, bells, and emergency procedures. The adventure becomes difficult because several visitors carry valid access, forged instructions, or contradictory authority. The party can move freely after receiving red witness cords from Coren.

#### 1. Warning Bridge

A broad stone bridge crosses the pond's controlled overflow. Coren can raise iron bars at either end. Spectators gather on the city side and cannot see the Null Kiln without entering.

#### 2. Outer Gate and Visitor Court

The gate records names, weapons, active magic, and declared business. The court contains stone benches, interview rooms, ordinary food, and nothing decorative enough to become dangerous when thrown.

#### 3. Cloister of Two Exits

Every chamber opens toward two marked routes. Stone saints hold sand buckets, warning chains, pry bars, masks, and folded carrying cloths. The hourly bell is audible throughout the complex.

#### 4. Conservation Rooms

Helle and Edrin keep scales, charcoal diagrams, null-salt, inert replicas, mechanical gauges, and the sealed charge ledger. No active divination is permitted.

#### 5. Quiet Vaults

Small cells are separated by stone, air gaps, independent drainage, and separate locks. Fume's empty cell has a grey smoke stain that returns after cleaning.

#### 6. Reinforced Glass Walk

A corridor crosses one arm of the geothermal pond. Three mechanical shutters can isolate sections. The glass can withstand heat and ordinary weapons but not a major FOOM.

#### 7. Null Kiln

A circular chamber uses pond pressure to heat an iron cradle without magical flame. The lifting rail, seven pins, shutter wheel, pressure valves, and mechanical breaker can be operated from separate stations.

#### 8. Bell Tower and Evacuation Path

Pellin controls flags, bells, and sealed instructions. A marked path leads around the pond to a gravel assembly field. Harl's cell plans to keep this route open.

| BELL TOWER   | VISITOR COURT | OUTER GATE       |
|--------------|---------------|------------------|
| QUIET VAULTS | CLOISTER      | WARNING BRIDGE   |
| CONSERVATION | GLASS WALK    | NULL KILN / POND |

*Schematic only; the geothermal pond follows the south and east walls.*

Priory staff use plain language during emergencies: location, hazard, route, action, witness.

## Tessel Vane and the Destruction Plan

*Procedure is care written down*

### Meeting Tessel

Tessel Vane waits in the Conservation Rooms beside a black ledger and an inert iron replica of Fume. She is a tall woman in her late sixties with close-cut grey hair, a reinforced coat, a heat-resistant apron, and a practical prosthesis replacing her left arm below the elbow. She does not offer the injury as a story. Caldovian looks at the prosthesis once and then keeps his attention on her face.

### Tessel's Briefing

"Do not call it a sword as though the blade were the dangerous part. It eats magic. Hunger is not obedience. We have brought it to two charges. We need thirteen minutes without magic, panic, interference, applause, or anyone deciding that a warning means destiny."

Tessel gives one character the Quiet Ember Ledger. Another character receives a brass charge counter with twelve sliding tabs. A third receives the sealed witness list. Tessel expects the party to verify every stage rather than admire her expertise.

### The Destruction Procedure

Fume can be destroyed only while it holds no more than 2 charges. All active magic must cease inside and within 30 feet of the kiln. Staff pack the sword in powdered null-salt, secure it with seven nonmagical iron pins, and heat the black channel using geothermal pressure. The shutters remain closed for thirteen uninterrupted minutes. No creature touches Fume until the softened channel is broken mechanically.

| Stage      | Required condition                                  | Primary station |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Verify  | Fume holds 0–2 charges; ledger and counter agree    | Charge desk     |
| 2. Isolate | No active magic or spellcasting within 30 feet      | Witness line    |
| 3. Pin     | Seven plain iron pins lock the sword into null-salt | Cradle          |
| 4. Heat    | Geothermal pressure rises without magical flame     | Valve wheel     |
| 5. Hold    | Shutters remain closed for thirteen minutes         | Shutter wheel   |
| 6. Break   | Mechanical breaker splits the softened channel      | Breaker lever   |

### The Staff

Sister Helle Norr designed the method and oversees the pressure system. Edrin Palk monitors the smoke channel and wants one final measurement. Coren controls access. Pellin controls bells and flags. Sava checks documents and assumptions. Ianca checks loads, braces, and exits.

### What Tessel Offers

The Priory pays 50 gp per character, provides one Quiet Ember token to the group, and grants future research access. Tessel adds one condition: if a character draws Fume, that character must state aloud who accepts custody after the immediate rescue.

## The Paper Trail

*Publicity arrived before permission*

### Premature Broadsheets

Three broadsheets outside the gate advertise “THE FINAL FOOM,” “THE DEATH OF THE SPELL-EATING SWORD,” and “CALDOVIAN’S LAST WORD ON FUME.” The Priory approved no announcement. Each sheet names the correct day but a different hour. The printer received payment through a legal office that liquidates theatrical assets. The office sold the account to a courier, the courier sold the delivery to a criminal broker, and the final invoice belongs to an ordinary importer. This is Handshake procedure, not evidence of a central criminal warehouse.

### The Visitor List

Tessel approved the party, Caldovian, Sava, Ianca, one civic observer, and two Priory witnesses. Coren’s list contains nine additional names: three painters, a broadsheet writer, four Marble Lions, and a supposed public-safety clerk. The clerk is Daska Rell under a borrowed name. The names entered through a valid office account after a forged amendment.

### The Forged Arrest Notice

The order naming the party as thieves uses a real seal copied from a receivership form. A DC 14 Intelligence check with Investigation, calligrapher’s supplies, or legal training identifies the retired spacing. Sava finds the same false premise without a check: the notice orders detention only after Fume moves, which means the author expects movement before any crime occurs.

### Harl’s Protective Instructions

A second set of orders uses no official seal. Harl Fen received a verbal message from a Red Door performer: protect the party from Vara’s retrieval crew, preserve witnesses, keep an evacuation route open, and make sure the bearer of Fume is seen. Harl believes Caldovian is preventing a quiet disappearance. He does not know that public association is the objective.

### Edrin’s Letter

Edrin received a flattering note arguing that one final nonmagical resonance reading could prove the destruction complete. The note is accurate about the measurement and dangerous about timing. Caldovian wrote it without signing his name. Edrin admits this after a DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check or after a character treats curiosity as a safety problem rather than a moral failure.

### What the Party Can Prove Now

The party can prove that the event was publicized deliberately, the arrest notice anticipated movement of Fume, the visitor list was altered, and at least two Step cells received incompatible objectives. No evidence yet proves that Caldovian designed the full crisis.

*A Handshake trail ends in ordinary businesses and partial responsibility, not one warehouse to raid.*

## Inspecting the Null Kiln

*Six stations, six chances to remove a future disaster*

### The Inspection

Before the kiln cycle begins, the party can inspect six stations. Each station takes about 5 minutes. One character can inspect a station while another questions a witness or checks records. A successful check removes the listed fault. A failed check reveals that something feels wrong but costs 5 minutes and advances the Crisis Clock only if the party repeats the same approach without changing tools or information.

| Station and DC                   | Fault                                  | Effect if unresolved                     |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Charge desk, DC 12 Investigation | One counter tab sticks between 2 and 3 | First charge change is misreported by 1. |

|                                              |                                          |                                                             |
|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Witness line, DC 13 Arcana or Perception     | A charm bead is sewn into a visitor cord | The bead casts a harmless light cantrip when heated.        |
| Cradle, DC 13 smith's tools or Investigation | Pin Seven is waxed and slips early       | Kiln Stability loses 1 during Minute 7.                     |
| Valve wheel, DC 13 mason's or tinker's tools | Gauge reads 20 degrees low               | Geothermal Surge activates during Minute 9.                 |
| Shutter wheel, DC 12 Athletics or tools      | Release cable is half cut                | One shutter jams when combat begins.                        |
| Breaker lever, DC 14 Investigation           | Copper linkage replaces plain iron       | Fume can consume the emergency ward built into the linkage. |

## Teamwork

A relevant tool, Priory diagram, Bracers translation, or staff explanation grants Advantage. Caldovian can identify the altered witness cord because the knot is theatrical, not monastic. Accepting his help raises no track by itself; refusing useful evidence solely because he offered it raises Tessel's Pressure by 1.

## Kiln Stability

Begin the kiln cycle with 4 Stability. Each unresolved physical fault can remove 1 Stability at the listed moment. A creature can restore Stability through the actions on page 14. At 0 Stability, the lifting rail collapses and the procedure fails.

## Finding Everything

If the party removes all six faults, Tessel delays the public witnesses, Coren detains the false clerk, and the destruction can succeed unless a character or attacker introduces magic. Caldovian remains impressed rather than visibly disappointed.

*Inspection is not mandatory. Unfound faults create active problems instead of automatic failure.*

## Fume at the Table

*Roll openly and keep the charge ledger visible*

## Starting State

Fume begins this adventure with 2 charges. Place two visible counters beside the Quiet Ember Ledger. Whenever a spell is cast within 30 feet of Fume, the caster rolls the Smoke Drinker d20. Roll even when the spell would help the Priory. Roll before resolving the spell.

| d20  | Smoke Drinker result                                                                          |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | Fume consumes the spell before any effect. The resource is expended, and Fume gains 1 charge. |
| 2–20 | The spell resolves normally. Fume gains no charge.                                            |

## What Fume Cannot Consume

Fume cannot consume a deity's direct intervention, an artifact's permanent property, a permanent planar trait, or a spell cast wholly inside a functioning dead-magic area. A cantrip and a 9th-level spell each add exactly 1 charge.

## Full Capacity

Fume holds a maximum of 12 charges and regains none at dawn. It continues attempting to consume spells while full. If it consumes a spell at 12 charges, the spell is negated and Fume automatically releases one FOOM effect. The release requires no action, cannot be declined, and leaves Fume at 11 charges.

## Voluntary Release

Once per round, the wielder can replace one attack made with Fume, speak the command word, and expend 1 charge. Roll 2d6 on the Center Table, then roll d100 on the FOOM Effect Table in Chapter 14.

The effect requires no Concentration. A beneficial result still affects the determined center, even when that creature is an enemy.

| 2d6  | Center or target    |
|------|---------------------|
| 2    | The wielder         |
| 3–11 | The intended target |
| 12   | The wielder         |

### Fearsome Reputation

When Fume releases, each creature within 30 feet that recognizes the sword must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or become Frightened of the wielder until the end of its next turn. A creature that succeeds is immune to this property for 24 hours.

### Relic Recognition

If the Bracers come within 60 feet, the silver bracer translates Fume as hunger and the bronze bracer answers with capacity, again, and no room. The Bracers do not claim that Fume wants a bearer. Recognition is not consent.

*Never choose a convenient d100 result. Fume is playable because the Game Master accepts the uncertainty too.*

### Visitors Who Should Not Be Here

*Witnesses, rivals, and a second heroic story*

#### The Marble Lions

The Marble Lions are a competent four-person adventuring company hired through a civic office. Jalen Orr leads the group. Darra Morn carries the forged arrest notice. Pelt Varo is a shield-bearing veteran. Mira Senn is a young mage who was told that Fume can erase coerced enchantment from innocent victims.

The Lions believe the party plans to steal Fume and force Caldovian to assist. The group begins with restraint, demands, and blocked exits rather than lethal violence. Showing both notices, Tessel's summons, the retired form spacing, or the altered visitor list causes Jalen to pause. Two pieces of evidence turn the Lions against the false clerk. A Lion who changes sides helps evacuate civilians or holds one station.

#### The Painters and Writer

Three painters and one writer expect access to the glass walk. Coren refuses. The visitors remain beyond the gate unless a character argues that public oversight is worth the risk. Inside witnesses make later false claims harder but increase panic and provide more targets. Outside witnesses see only smoke, bells, and anyone who exits carrying Fume.

#### The Civic Observer

Mela Dos is the only authorized public witness. She works for the House of Roads and Measures and knows enough engineering to ask useful questions. Mela records the exact minute of every stage. Protecting her notes grants Advantage on one later check made to disprove a false custody claim.

#### The False Clerk

Daska Rell enters as Orin Pell, a public-safety clerk with real records knowledge and a borrowed seal. A DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check notices that Daska watches the lifting rail instead of Fume. Coren can detain Daska if given proof before Clock 5. Without proof, Daska's valid office account protects the disguise.

## Caldovian Among Witnesses

Caldovian calms the Lions, praises Mela's precision, buys every broadsheet, and advises the painters to stay beyond the bridge. He appears to reduce spectacle while ensuring that each witness has a clear reason to remember him.

*Marble Lion — Challenge Rating 1. The company can become opposition, allies, or both in the same scene.*

## Bells, Flags, and the First Interference

*The crisis begins as a communication failure*

### Pellin's Signal

At Crisis Clock 4, Pellin rings two short bells and raises the white flag, the code for medical danger. No medical danger exists. Someone replaced Pellin's sealed card with an accurate copy carrying one false line. The signal draws two healers toward the Null Kiln. Both healers have active protective charms.

### Stopping the Healers

A character in the Bell Tower can correct the signal with a DC 12 Intelligence or Wisdom check. A character at the gate can intercept the healers through clear explanation, a DC 12 Charisma check, or a displayed blue danger flag. Failure does not force a spell near Fume. The healers stop at the glass walk, argue with Coren, and delay evacuation.

### The Delivery Route

At the same time, three Containment Porters arrive with a replacement null-salt chest. Two porters are legitimate. The third is a Step burglar. The chest contains correct null-salt above a false bottom holding padded restraints, a portable case, smoke pellets, and a dark armor coat sized for Daska.

### Examining the Chest

A DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check notices the chest weighs too much. A DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds the double bottom. A character who remembers Handshake methods can identify the strategy without a check: the chest is not stolen cargo. It is a legal shipment with one illegal function distributed inside ordinary work.

### Harl's Warning

Harl Fen approaches a character privately near the evacuation path. He admits that Vara has a retrieval crew inside and says another source ordered him to protect the party. Harl refuses to name Caldovian without proof that the message was false. He offers one fact: "Daska needs someone else to open the case. Vara said seize a failure, not start one."

### Choices

The party can expose Harl, recruit him, warn Tessel, detain the false porter, or use the route as bait. Harl keeps his promise to protect people even after exposure. Public humiliation raises Vara's Pressure by 1 because the cell structure becomes visible.

*Novice Pellin — Challenge Rating 1. Harl Fen — Challenge Rating 4.*

## Beginning the Thirteen Minutes

*The party chooses stations and responsibility*

### Assigning Roles

Before the doors close, each character chooses one primary station. A character can change stations later by crossing the kiln floor or glass walk. An allied Marble Lion can fill one unclaimed station. A Priory staff member can maintain a station but cannot resolve an attack or major fault without help.

| Station     | Normal action                              | Adventure benefit                          |
|-------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Charge desk | Verify counters, ledger, and Smoke Drinker | Detect a hidden charge change immediately. |

|               |                                                          |                                                         |
|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Witness line  | Keep active magic and unauthorized people beyond 30 feet | One intercepted spell never reaches Fume's range.       |
| Cradle        | Inspect pins and null-salt                               | Restore 1 Stability after a pin fault.                  |
| Valve wheel   | Control geothermal pressure                              | Cancel one Geothermal Surge.                            |
| Shutter wheel | Open or isolate glass-walk sections                      | Move up to two civilians 15 feet during a fall.         |
| Breaker lever | Prepare the final mechanical strike                      | At Minute 13, destroy Fume without an additional check. |

## The Minute Track

Use four rounds to represent the thirteen-minute cycle. Round 1 covers Minutes 1–4. Round 2 covers Minutes 5–7. Round 3 covers Minutes 8–10. Round 4 covers Minutes 11–13. Each round, every character takes normal turns. A station action uses an action unless a feature or sensible tool permits another action type.

## Kiln Stability

Begin with 4 Stability. At the end of each round, resolve one unresolved fault from page 8. Each failed station action can remove 1 Stability only when the action directly controls a dangerous apparatus. At 0 Stability, the lifting frame collapses, the shutters open, and the destruction procedure fails.

## No Spellcasting

A spell cast outside Fume's 30-foot range can still matter. Measure from the sword, not from the room. Clever positioning allows healing, barriers, communication, and movement magic without a Smoke Drinker roll. Caldovian casts only from marked safe circles unless a life is immediately at risk.

## Tessel and Helle

Once per round, Tessel can grant Advantage on one containment check or move a character 10 feet through workshop debris. Once per round, Helle can delay one apparatus fault until the end of the next round. Each woman creates time; the party must solve the problem.

*The station system makes nonmagical skill, movement, and ordinary tools as important as damage.*

## The Assault on the Null Kiln

*Three groups act on three different versions of safety*

## When the Assault Begins

At Crisis Clock 6 or the start of Round 2, Daska reveals the dark armor coat, orders the false porter to open the delivery route, and tries to seize the mechanical carrier. The Marble Lions present the arrest notice and block the party's movement. Harl's protective cell attacks Daska's crew, opens the evacuation path, and refuses to let any Step operative kill a witness.

## Daska's Retrieval Crew

Daska brings one Step burglar, one Red Thread enforcer, and the false porter. The crew attacks the charge desk, shutter controls, Tessel, records, and lifting rail. Daska wants another person to touch Fume first. The crew uses padded restraints, saps, smoke, and forced movement. Daska orders lethal attacks only after half the crew falls or someone identifies Daska publicly.

## Harl's Protective Cell

Harl brings one enforcer and one burglar. His cell protects civilians, prevents Daska from isolating the party, and keeps the pond-side route open. Harl also wants witnesses to see the eventual bearer. He blocks any attempt to move Fume through a concealed exit.

## The Marble Lions

The Lions demand that the party step away from the stations. A Lion uses the Help action, Grapple, Shove, or a readied nonlethal attack. Presenting two convincing pieces of evidence during combat turns Jalen. One convincing piece prevents the Lions from attacking during the next round.

## Caldovian

Caldovian protects civilians, urges restraint, and loudly warns every caster to remain outside the marked radius. He uses command, suggestion, illusions, and movement magic only from safe positions. If a child, civilian, or trapped staff member faces immediate death, he casts inside the radius and accepts the Smoke Drinker roll. His compassion is real. His preparation remains culpable.

## Priory Wardens

Wardens defend controls, carry injured people, and attempt to prevent anyone from touching Fume. A Warden never chases a fleeing enemy past an endangered station.

*Use objectives. A retrieval crew that focuses all damage on one character becomes deadlier and less believable.*

## Kiln Battle Zones

*Movement, shutters, and geothermal pressure*

### 1. Charge Desk

The desk stands 25 feet from Fume behind a low iron screen. A creature can seize or destroy the ledger. The desk has AC 15, 25 Hit Points, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. Losing the ledger does not change charges, but later custody evidence becomes weaker.

### 2. Pin Cradle

The cradle surrounds Fume. Entering its 10-foot square requires crossing loose null-salt, which is Difficult Terrain. A creature adjacent to the cradle can spend an action and succeed on a DC 14 Strength check to remove a pin or a DC 13 tool check to secure one.

### 3. Valve Wheel

The wheel is 35 feet from Fume, beyond ordinary Smoke Drinker range. A creature can use magic safely from the wheel if every part of the spell remains outside 30 feet. Turning the wheel against pressure requires a DC 13 Strength check or a DC 12 check with appropriate tools.

### 4. Shutter Walk

Three glass sections cross the pond. A shutter can close or open as an action at the control wheel. A jammed shutter requires a DC 14 Strength check. Broken glass creates Difficult Terrain and exposes the space to hot mist.

### 5. Mechanical Breaker

The final lever is 15 feet from Fume. The linkage strikes only after the black channel softens at the end of Round 4. A creature adjacent to the lever can sabotage it with a DC 13 Dexterity check using thieves' tools or repair it with a DC 13 Intelligence check using smith's or tinker's tools.

## Restoring Stability

A character can use an action at the relevant station and make a DC 13 check with Athletics, Investigation, Arcana used as theory rather than spellcasting, or an appropriate tool. On a success, restore 1 Stability, to a maximum of 4. A character must describe the physical correction. Repeating the same action after failure requires new information, help, or another tool.

| Round | Environmental event                                                         |
|-------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1     | Steam thickens; spaces beyond 30 feet become Lightly Obscured.              |
| 2     | A pressure pulse moves every unsecured Tiny object 10 feet toward the pond. |

|   |                                                                                           |
|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3 | Hot mist crosses the glass walk; DC 13 Constitution save or no Reactions until next turn. |
| 4 | The breaker becomes available if Stability is 1 or higher.                                |

*Null Kiln Frame — Challenge Rating 2. Geothermal Surge — Challenge Rating 2.*

### **The Failure Point**

*One spell is enough; no spell is inevitable*

### **Possible Magical Triggers**

A magical trigger occurs only if the fiction creates one. Use the first applicable event: the charm bead activates when heated; Mira Senn casts a restraint spell; an emergency ward fires through the copper linkage; Daska's burglar uses a stored cantrip bead; Caldovian casts to save a trapped person; or a player character casts inside the radius. If the party removed every trigger and prevents all casting, no spell appears. The procedure can continue.

### **Roll Smoke Drinker**

The caster rolls the d20 openly. On 2–20, the spell resolves. The crisis may still damage Stability or create a tactical problem, but Fume gains no charge. On a 1, Fume consumes the spell and rises from 2 to 3 charges. The destruction condition is broken immediately because Fume now holds more than 2 charges.

### **What Failure Looks Like**

The consumed spell vanishes. Grey smoke thickens inside the black channel. Pin Seven jerks sideways. The null-salt ripples as if breathing. The lifting rail twists, and the sword slides across the cradle toward the open edge. Tessel orders evacuation. Helle releases pressure. The procedure cannot resume until Fume returns to 2 charges and the equipment is rebuilt.

### **The Trapped Person**

Choose a person based on party priorities: Edrin beneath the lifting frame, Mela on the far side of a jammed shutter, a Marble Lion hanging above the pond, Pellin inside the bell stair, or a character restrained beside the cradle. The trapped person has 2 Rescue Rounds. At 0, the person falls into hot water, beneath the frame, or into Daska's custody and begins Dying.

### **Solutions Without Drawing Fume**

The party can restore the rail, free the trapped person, defeat Daska, open the shutter, lower the pond bridge, or force the Lions to cooperate. Use DC 13 for a direct physical or tool solution and DC 14 for an improvised remote solution. A relevant spell cast outside 30 feet works normally. Drawing Fume is tempting, not mandatory.

### **If Fume Is Not Consumed**

Continue the kiln cycle. Daska makes one last attempt to remove a pin during Round 4. If the party protects Stability and the breaker, Fume is destroyed. Caldovian assists visibly and says nothing against the decision.

*Never force a FOOM merely because the adventure title promises one. Prevention is play.*

### **Drawing That FOOM Sword**

*Power, fear, and a decision made in front of witnesses*

### **Touching Fume**

A creature can draw Fume from the failed cradle as an action. Suppression tongs, a carrying frame, or a mechanical hook can move it without becoming the wielder. A bare or gloved hand on the hilt creates immediate attunement for the remainder of the scene; normal attunement requirements apply afterward.

### **Read Aloud**

The hilt is colder than the rain outside. Smoke runs beneath the blade as though the metal contains a narrow storm. The sword does not speak. It does not choose. It becomes aware of magic the way an open mouth becomes aware of food. Every caster in the room suddenly feels much too close.

### **Immediate Benefits**

The wielder gains Fume's +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls and can use its finesse and versatile properties. The sword's physical edge can cut a restraint, jammed line, or damaged frame. A character can release Fume by replacing one attack and spending 1 charge. The wielder cannot predict the result.

### **Tessel's Question**

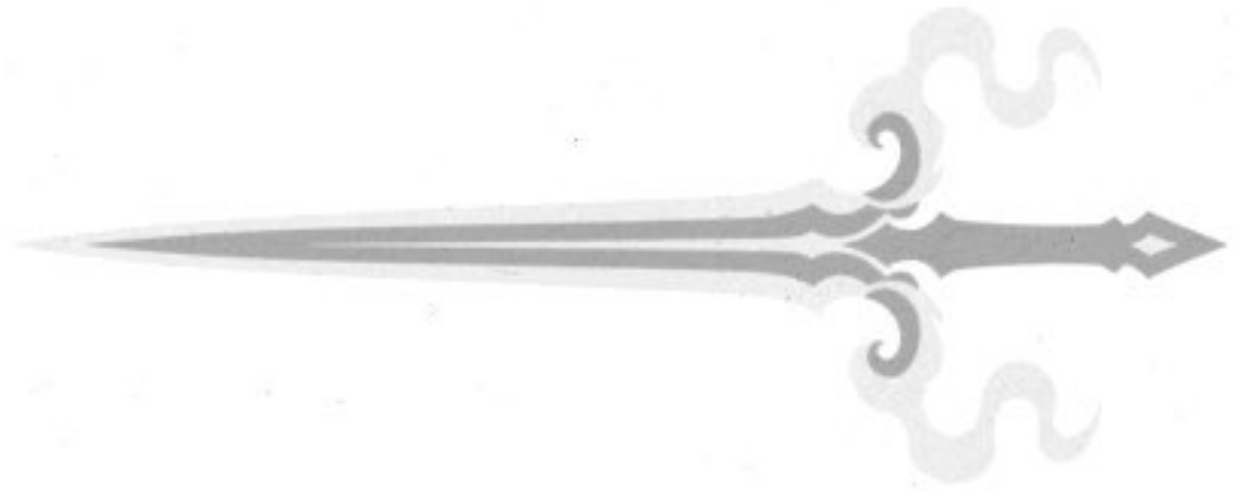
Tessel asks, "Who carries responsibility after this room?" A character can answer party, Priory, me, no one, or later. The answer creates no magical bond. Witnesses record it. Caldovian does not volunteer unless every character refuses and a life remains at risk.

### **A Deliberate Release**

A FOOM may create the opening needed to rescue the trapped person, scatter attackers, repair or destroy equipment, or make the entire scene stranger. Roll the Center Table and the full d100 table in Chapter 14. Apply the result exactly, then reinterpret routes and objectives around the new reality. Do not erase a rescue already completed.

### **Fear**

After a release, resolve Fearsome Reputation. Priory staff with Custodian's Discipline have Advantage. Daska's crew may flee if Daska becomes Frightened. A frightened Marble Lion drops the arrest attempt and seeks cover. Caldovian looks delighted for one breath and then makes his face useful again.



## The First Public FOOM

*Let the random result change the encounter*

### Read or Paraphrase

The smoke inside the blade vanishes. For one impossible instant, the sword feels hollow. Then the air folds inward. The sound is not an explosion. It is deeper, shorter, and somehow more final. FOOM.

### Resolve the Result

Use the normal Center Table and d100 FOOM Effect Table. Determine the effect before deciding what any faction does. A beneficial result still affects the chosen center. A harmful result may strike an ally, enemy, object, or area according to its text. Preserve the result even when it makes the encounter easier.

| Result changes...         | Immediate response                                                                   |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Position or terrain       | Move tokens, redraw routes, and let every group reconsider objectives.               |
| Bodies or conditions      | Resolve saves, healing, movement, transformation, or speech before attacks continue. |
| Time or memory            | State what each witness now remembers and which records remain reliable.             |
| Objects or magic          | Update Fume's charges, Kiln Stability, and custody evidence.                         |
| An exit or destination    | Allow escape or pursuit; do not force combat to remain in the kiln.                  |
| Nothing tactically useful | The sound, witnesses, fear, and public story still matter.                           |

### Spell-Fed Smoke

If the effect creates independent smoke, duplicates a magical discharge, or leaves a persistent cloud, use the Spell-Fed Smoke stat block on page 22. Otherwise do not add the creature merely to extend combat.

### A Second Spell

A frightened caster may cast again only when a stated motive supports it. Roll Smoke Drinker normally. Fume is unlikely to reach 12 charges in this adventure unless the party deliberately feeds it or a FOOM result adds charges. If it does reach 12, use the automatic-release rule exactly.

### The Witnesses

The painters outside cannot see the sword clearly, but every witness hears the word FOOM. A bearer leaving the gate becomes the public image. A bearer who remains concealed may still be named through the forged arrest order unless Mela's record survives.

*Fume is funny only because it is frightening. Let laughter and consequence exist together.*

### Ending the Crisis

*Capture, escape, and the stories each faction tells*

### Daska Captured

Daska knows Vara ordered acquisition only after containment failed. Daska also knows a separate Step channel ordered protection for the party and insisted that witnesses see any bearer. Daska cannot identify Caldovian as the source but remembers a Red Door performer carrying the verbal message.

### Daska Escapes

Daska abandons the retrieval case and takes one useful record: the charge ledger, visitor list, or Mela's notes. Harl refuses to pursue through an occupied evacuation route. Vara later hears that Daska began a failure instead of seizing one.

### **Harl Exposed**

Harl admits the protective order and explains that he believed Vara's crew planned a disappearance. He will not apologize for keeping an exit open. Proof that public association was the true objective raises Harl's Pressure toward Caldovian rather than toward the party.

### **The Marble Lions Change Sides**

Jalen Orr accepts verified records and assigns one Lion to each threatened station. Darra Morn keeps the forged notice as evidence. The company becomes a future ally against false heroic contracts.

### **The Priory Falls**

If the Null Kiln and glass walk become unusable, Coren evacuates survivors to the gravel field. Helle isolates pond pressure. Tessel preserves the ledger or reconstructs it from witnesses. The Priory remains an institution even when one building fails.

### **Caldovian's Position**

Caldovian protects civilians and offers to accept blame for bringing public attention. The offer sounds noble because it would also place him at the center of every account. A character can refuse, share, or document the blame. No choice reveals his entire plan yet.

### **Vara Vay**

Vara does not arrive during the assault. She later appears in her red mask at a controlled meeting, with the timing determined by current Pressure. Vara denies ordering sabotage and demands Daska's exact words. She believes Fume is safer in disciplined criminal custody than in a compromised public institution. The claim is self-serving and not entirely absurd.

### **Caldovian's Response**

Caldovian helps secure the fragments, congratulates the party, and says, "A thing can be beautiful and still deserve an ending." The sentence is sincere. He immediately begins considering substitutes for the magical reservoir he has lost. His later ritual uses a Smoke Crucible assembled from Fume residue, spent spell vessels, and one fragment only if Caldovian can steal it. The substitute is weaker and less stable than Fume.

### **Campaign Consequences**

Remove Fume from future custody. The party cannot be framed as its long-term bearer without obvious falsification. Caldovian's final Unbound Circle begins with one substitution fault. Tessel's Bond rises by 1. Party Credibility rises by 1 if Mela's record survives. Vara's Pressure rises by 1 because the acquisition route has closed.

### **Rewards**

Tessel pays 75 gp per character instead of 50 gp because the party completed the full procedure under attack. Helle offers one Null Flask. Mela files a public account naming every group that interfered. The Priory grants permanent research access.

### **Do Not Undo It**

Fume does not reform. Elra does not restore it. Caldovian does not reveal a duplicate. The success changes later adventures and proves that the campaign responds to player decisions.

### **What the Party Can Learn**

The public story was prepared before the Priory approved witnesses. Caldovian wanted the party protected and visible. Vara wanted acquisition after failure. Daska was willing to start the failure. Harl thought public witnesses prevented murder. The Bracers recognize Fume's function but do not declare a chosen bearer.

## Custody, Evidence, and Advancement

*Who carries responsibility after the room*

### The Final Break

At the end of Round 4, if Fume holds no more than 2 charges, Kiln Stability remains at 1 or higher, and the breaker linkage works, a character at the lever can destroy Fume without a check. The iron weight falls. The softened black channel splits. Grey smoke pours from the blade without forming a cloud, creature, or command word.

### What Remains

The physical sword breaks into three dark fragments. Each fragment remains warm and gives a faint chime when a spell is cast nearby, but no fragment consumes magic or releases a FOOM. Helle seals the pieces in separate inert cases. Tessel records the destruction and asks every witness to sign.

### If Fume Survives

The Priory vault is compromised, several outside groups know the procedure, and public attention has increased. Tessel prefers documented mobile custody until a second Warden site can receive the sword. Caldovian recommends the party because a visible bearer is harder to disappear quietly. He does not volunteer first.

| Custody                    | Consequence                                                                                                                                 |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The party accepts Fume     | Tessel provides the Quiet Ember Ledger, a mechanical case, and written limits. Record the bearer and every transfer.                        |
| The party refuses          | Tessel respects the refusal and arranges a guarded mobile caravan. Caldovian can later manufacture association, but the evidence is weaker. |
| Caldovian accepts          | He objects once, then accepts under written conditions and witnesses. Clear custody becomes powerful later evidence.                        |
| Fume remains at the Priory | Tessel moves it secretly within 24 hours. The Step or Caldovian may target the transfer later.                                              |
| Vara gains Fume            | The Step disperses its route across ordinary Handshake businesses. No single warehouse holds the sword for long.                            |

### Tessel's Ledger

The black book is titled FUME: CONSUMPTION, RELEASE, AND AVOIDABLE CONSEQUENCES. It records charges, witnesses, transfers, release results, requests to borrow the sword, and any disagreement between accounts. Honest maintenance grants Advantage on Investigation checks made to disprove a false custody claim.

### Rewards

Tessel pays 50 gp per character if Fume survives and the party protects the Priory. The group receives one Quiet Ember token. A character can break the token to gain Advantage on one saving throw against a spell or magical effect; the token then crumbles into warm ash. Helle offers access to nonmagical containment equipment.

### Milestone

Characters reach 5th level after the Null Kiln crisis ends and immediate custody or destruction is recorded. Perfect containment, capture of Daska, or possession of Fume is not required.

### Lead to Adventure Three

Within a week, a Handshake office attempts to liquidate a building that has no legal entrance. The deed is valid, the rooms are occupied, and every door opens somewhere else. A red thread delivery includes a note for the party: "Bring the Key. Do not use the front door. There is no front door."

*Destroying Fume is a complete victory. If Fume survives, end with the charge ledger open and ask who signs first.*

## Priory Personnel

*Table-ready statistics for the containment house*

### Novice Pellin

*Medium Humanoid, any alignment • Challenge Rating 1 (200 XP) • PB +2*

AC 13; HP 27 (6d8); Speed 30 ft.

STR 9 (−1), DEX 14 (+2), CON 10 (+0), INT 13 (+1), WIS 15 (+2), CHA 12 (+1)

Skills Perception +4, Sleight of Hand +4

### TRAITS

**Flag Code.** Pellin can communicate one of twelve prepared messages to any creature that can see the Bell Tower.

**Tower Routes.** Pellin has Advantage on checks made to navigate, signal, or evacuate within the Priory.

### ACTIONS

**Signal Baton.** Melee Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

**Ring Alarm (1/Day).** Allied creatures within 120 feet that hear the bell can move up to 10 feet as a Reaction.

### Quiet Ember Warden

*Medium Humanoid, any alignment • Challenge Rating 2 (450 XP) • PB +2*

AC 16 (reinforced coat); HP 45 (7d8 + 14); Speed 30 ft.

STR 14 (+2), DEX 12 (+1), CON 14 (+2), INT 13 (+1), WIS 15 (+2), CHA 11 (+0)

Skills Arcana +3, Athletics +4, Perception +4

### TRAITS

**Custodian's Discipline.** The warden has Advantage on saving throws against Fume's Fearsome Reputation and environmental effects caused by a known containment failure.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The warden makes two Ward Hook attacks.

**Ward Hook.** Melee Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage.

**Suppression Tongs.** One creature holding a Tiny or Small object within 5 feet must succeed on a DC 12 Strength or Dexterity saving throw or drop the object into an adjacent space chosen by the warden.

### REACTIONS

**Marked Exit.** When a containment bell rings, the warden moves up to 10 feet without provoking Opportunity Attacks.

### Null-Kiln Engineer

*Medium Humanoid, any alignment • Challenge Rating 1 (200 XP) • PB +2*

AC 14; HP 32 (5d8 + 10); Speed 30 ft.

STR 12 (+1), DEX 12 (+1), CON 14 (+2), INT 16 (+3), WIS 13 (+1), CHA 10 (+0)

Skills Investigation +5; Tools smith's tools +5, tinker's tools +5

### TRAITS

**Emergency Repair.** As an action, the engineer restores 10 Hit Points to an object or grants Advantage on the next check made to restore Kiln Stability.

### ACTIONS

**Tool Hammer.** Melee Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 4 (1d6 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

**Redirect Pressure (Recharge 5–6).** Creatures in a 15-foot cone make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) fire damage on a failure or half damage on a success.

### Containment Porter

*Medium Humanoid, any alignment • Challenge Rating 1/2 (100 XP) • PB +2*

AC 14; HP 26 (4d8 + 8); Speed 30 ft.

STR 16 (+3), DEX 11 (+0), CON 14 (+2), INT 10 (+0), WIS 12 (+1), CHA 10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +5

### TRAITS

**Carrying Frame.** The porter counts as Large for carrying capacity and has Advantage on checks and saves against forced movement while holding a frame, case, or stretcher.

### ACTIONS

**Pole Hook.** Melee Attack: +5 to hit, reach 10 ft. Hit: 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage. Instead of damage, the porter can pull one willing creature or unattended Small object 5 feet.

### Operatives and Marble Lions

*Statistics for conflicting orders*

#### Marble Lion

*Medium Humanoid, any alignment • Challenge Rating 1 (200 XP) • PB +2*

AC 16 (scale mail, shield); HP 39 (6d8 + 12); Speed 30 ft.

STR 15 (+2), DEX 12 (+1), CON 14 (+2), INT 10 (+0), WIS 13 (+1), CHA 12 (+1)

Skills Athletics +4, Insight +3, Perception +3

### TRAITS

**Heroic Restraint.** The Lion can deal nonlethal damage with any melee attack. The Lion has Advantage on the first check made to Grapple a creature named in a written arrest order.

**Evidence Changes Orders.** After seeing two verified contradictions, the Lion becomes immune to effects that would compel continued obedience to the forged order.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The Lion makes two Blunted Sword attacks.

**Blunted Sword.** Melee Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 6 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

**Shield Drive.** One creature within 5 feet must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or move 5 feet and fall Prone.

### REACTIONS

**Protect a Witness.** When a creature within 5 feet is hit, the Lion grants that creature +2 AC against the attack, possibly causing it to miss.

#### Daska Rell, Retrieval Captain

*Medium Humanoid, lawful evil • Challenge Rating 3 (700 XP) • PB +2*

AC 16 (dark armor); HP 72 (11d8 + 22); Speed 30 ft.

STR 13 (+1), DEX 17 (+3), CON 14 (+2), INT 15 (+2), WIS 12 (+1), CHA 14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Int +4; Skills Deception +4, Investigation +4, Perception +3, Sleight of Hand +5, Stealth +5

### TRAITS

**Seize the Failure.** Daska has Advantage on checks made to take an object from a damaged container, Prone creature, or creature that is Grappled or Restrained.

**Borrowed Authority.** Daska has Advantage on one Deception check made before combat to present the forged clerk identity. The Advantage ends after a verified contradiction is shown.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Daska makes two Shortblade attacks.

**Shortblade.** Melee Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

**Padded Restraint.** One creature within 5 feet must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or become Grappled. While Grappled this way, the creature has Disadvantage on checks made to retain a held object.

**Smoke Capsule (1/Day).** A 15-foot-radius sphere within 60 feet becomes Heavily Obscured until the end of Daska's next turn.

### BONUS ACTIONS

**Planned Route.** Daska takes the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action while within 20 feet of a door, shutter, carrier, or marked delivery route.

### REACTIONS

**Use the Procedure.** When a creature misses Daska with an attack, Daska moves 5 feet and can interact with one adjacent control, pin, case, or unattended Tiny object.

### Harl Fen, Protective Cell Leader

*Medium Humanoid, neutral • Challenge Rating 4 (1,100 XP) • PB +2*

AC 16 (dark armor); HP 68 (8d8 + 32); Speed 30 ft.

STR 16 (+3), DEX 14 (+2), CON 18 (+4), INT 12 (+1), WIS 15 (+2), CHA 14 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +5, Con +6; Skills Athletics +5, Insight +4, Intimidation +4, Perception +4

### TRAITS

**Preserve the Asset.** Allies within 10 feet of Harl have Advantage on death saving throws and checks made to escape a Grapple or Restraint.

**Open Route.** Difficult Terrain caused by creatures, workshop debris, or smoke costs Harl and adjacent allies no additional movement during the first 10 feet moved each turn.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Harl makes two Hooked Club attacks.

**Hooked Club.** Melee Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 8 (1d10 + 3) bludgeoning damage, and Harl can pull the target 5 feet if the target is Large or smaller.

**Clear the Exit (Recharge 5–6).** Harl moves up to his Speed. Each willing ally Harl passes within 5 feet of can move 10 feet as a Reaction without provoking Opportunity Attacks.

### REACTIONS

**Take the Weight.** When an ally within 5 feet would take damage or be knocked Prone, Harl takes half the damage and the ally remains standing.

### Hazards, Smoke, and Fume

*Final table references for the Null Kiln crisis*

### Fume Quick Record

Artifact longsword, +1 to attack and damage rolls, finesse, versatile (1d10). Fume begins at 2 charges in this adventure. Smoke Drinker consumes a spell on a d20 result of 1 and adds 1 charge. A voluntary release spends 1 charge and uses the 2d6 Center Table plus the d100 FOOM table in Chapter 14. At 12 charges, the next consumed spell causes an automatic release and leaves 11 charges.

### Object Statistics

Fume is a Tiny object with AC 21, 40 Hit Points, damage threshold 10, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. Ordinary damage cannot reduce it below 1 Hit Point. Only the completed Null Kiln procedure, an equivalent fully nonmagical method, or an artifact-specific effect can destroy it.

### At the End of the Session

Write the final charge total, bearer, case number, custody decision, FOOM result, destroyed equipment, surviving witnesses, and every contradictory order into the campaign record. Those facts matter more than who landed the final attack.

### Spell-Fed Smoke

*Medium Elemental, Unaligned • Challenge Rating 3 (700 XP) • PB +2*

AC 14; HP 52 (8d8 + 16); Speed 10 ft., fly 40 ft. (hover)

STR 8 (–1), DEX 16 (+3), CON 14 (+2), INT 5 (–3), WIS 12 (+1), CHA 8 (–1)

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; Damage Immunities poison; Condition Immunities Grappled, Poisoned, Prone, Restrained

#### TRAITS

**Smoke Form.** The smoke can move through a space as narrow as 1 inch without squeezing.

**Drink Cantrip.** When a cantrip is cast within 30 feet, roll a d6. On 1–2, the smoke negates the cantrip and regains 5 Hit Points.

#### ACTIONS

**Smoke Claw.** Melee Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 12 (2d8 + 3) fire damage.

**Choking Cloud (Recharge 5–6).** Each creature in a 10-foot-radius sphere within 60 feet makes a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 14 (4d6) poison damage and cannot take Reactions until the start of its next turn. On a success, a creature takes half damage.

### Null Kiln Frame

*Complex Environmental Hazard • Challenge Rating 2 (450 XP)*

Detection DC 12 Investigation; Disable or stabilize DC 13 Athletics or appropriate tools

Trigger Kiln Stability reaches 0 or the lifting rail loses support.

#### TRAITS

**Collapsing Rail.** Each creature within 10 feet of the cradle makes a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage, falls Prone, and becomes Restrained beneath the frame. On a success, a creature takes half damage and moves 5 feet to a safe space.

**Free a Creature.** A creature can use an action and succeed on a DC 13 Strength check to lift the frame, ending the Restrained condition for one creature.

### Geothermal Surge

*Environmental Hazard • Challenge Rating 2 (450 XP)*

Detection DC 12 Perception or tools; Cancel DC 13 Strength at the valve or DC 12 with mason's or tinker's tools

Trigger An unresolved pressure-gauge fault reaches Round 3.

#### TRAITS

**Steam Line.** A 30-foot-long, 10-foot-wide line erupts from a grate. Each creature in the line makes a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 14 (4d6) fire damage on a failure or half damage on a success.

**Pond Mist.** Until the end of the next round, the glass walk is Heavily Obscured and counts as Difficult Terrain.

*Never assume a full sword is a safe sword.*

## CHAPTER 9 — The House Without an Entrance

### Adventure Three for characters of 5th level

#### Adventure Summary

A Handshake liquidation office has posted a lawful sale notice for the contents of the House of Roads and Measures. The deed exists, the debt exists, and the auction date is valid. The problem is that the office does not own the building, cannot enter it, and has listed objects that remain under civic custody.

Three Scarlet Step performers are trapped inside: Zam Zam, Li'l Snoot, and Bottle Eater. Each performer entered under a different order. One order called the job a rescue. One called it a retrieval. One called it a staged protest. All three orders carry Vara Vay's genuine seal. The House seized the intruders, the forged papers, and the Key Without a House, then locked every controlled route while clerks compared authority. A second false order froze the lawful entrance before anyone could leave.

Mela Dos asks the characters to help before Varo places the institution into emergency receivership. Caldovian asks the party to rescue his friends and insists that the Key cannot remain in a building designed to deny passage. Sava sees an attack on civic authority. Ianca sees a building under dangerous mechanical strain. Varo sees an asset whose legal confusion can be made profitable. The characters must decide who may enter, who may leave, who owns the Key, and whether the difference between passage and permission matters when people are trapped.

#### Adventure Purpose

This adventure makes access a social and physical problem. The House is not a room-clearing dungeon. The party can solve most of the crisis through records, negotiation, engineering, surveillance, lawful entry, or a controlled breach. Violence remains possible, but violence makes every later custody claim harder to defend.

| Element            | At the Table                                              |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Relic              | Key Without a House                                       |
| Primary location   | The House of Roads and Measures                           |
| Apparent objective | Rescue three trapped performers and recover the Key       |
| Actual decision    | Separate access from permission and decide lawful custody |
| Level              | Begin at 5th level; advance to 6th level after resolution |

*The House has no street door. It has several entrances, and each entrance belongs to a different kind of authority.*

#### The Truth Behind the House

*Three orders, one stolen seal, and a building caught between facts*

#### The Institution

The House of Roads and Measures began as a Midlands surveying office. Over two centuries, the city built around it, raised the street twice, sold adjoining parcels, and moved its public counter into an annex. The House still owns its interior rooms, records, standard weights, survey instruments, and underground easement. It does not own most of the visible exterior wall.

The lawful entrance begins in the East Weight Annex across a narrow lane. A clerk opens a floor hatch, records the visitor, and leads the visitor through a short tunnel beneath the street. The tunnel ends at a rotating stone cabinet inside the House. A service stair reaches an old Rock Elf road below the foundations. A roof hatch belongs to the city repair board. None of these routes is a public front door.

### What the Performers Did

Zam Zam, Li'l Snoot, and Bottle Eater entered through a temporary doorway made by the Key. The House's anti-passage ward allowed the doorway to form because the wall itself was ordinary stone. The ward then closed the interior route network, marked the intrusion, and prevented a second magical passage. The Key became painfully hot and pointed toward the lawful tunnel beneath the East Weight Annex.

The performers could have surrendered at once. Li'l Snoot feared that the contradictory orders meant someone inside the Step wanted the trio erased. Zam Zam refused to abandon him. Bottle Eater barricaded a survey hall and kept frightened clerks away from broken glass. No clerk has been harmed.

### The Seal

Every order bears the same tiny crescent chip found in Vara Vay's original seal. The impression is not a copy. Someone used the actual seal. Vara currently carries a replacement so precise that no ordinary inspection reveals the exchange. The House can prove the original seal was used, but only if the seized orders and the House's seal gauge remain intact.

### Caldovian's Position

Caldovian did not order the trio into the House. He knows the Key is present because one performer sent a partial message before the routes closed. He wants all three friends alive. He also wants the Key and understands that a legal crisis gives him several chances to touch it without appearing to seize it. His compassion is genuine. His opportunism is also genuine.

### Varo's Position

The current Varo prepared the liquidation notice after a Handshake office purchased an old debt attached to one exterior parcel. Varo knows the claim does not include the House interior. He expects emergency receivership to grant temporary control before any court sorts the boundaries. Varo did not steal Vara's seal and does not know who did. He will still use the confusion.

*No single faction controls the entire event. The conspiracy works because several people exploit the same confusion for different reasons.*

*The house closes by procedure, not by prophecy*

### Expected Flow

1. Mela Dos presents the liquidation notice at the Red Door.
2. Caldovian identifies the trapped performers and asks for rescue.
3. The party examines the building, neighboring offices, and public records.
4. Sava establishes which claims are real; lanca studies the foundations and route machinery.
5. The characters choose a lawful, civic, physical, or deceptive entrance.
6. Inside, the party contacts the trio and compares the three orders.
7. Varo arrives with an emergency receivership team.
8. The House enters Full Closure and begins separating people, evidence, and routes.
9. The party rescues the performers, protects or exposes the seal evidence, and decides custody of the Key.
10. Surviving maps and records point toward Cheval Oratorie.

### The Access Clock

Begin at 0 when Mela reaches the party. Advance the clock after about 30 minutes spent without acting on access, after a public magical breach, after destruction of civic property, or when a faction gains uncontested authority. Research, negotiation, evacuation, and repair do not advance the clock without another listed trigger.

| Clock | Development |
|-------|-------------|
|-------|-------------|

|   |                                                                         |
|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 0 | Mela has limited authority to request assistance and preserve records.  |
| 1 | The liquidation office posts auction placards on every exterior parcel. |
| 2 | Varo files emergency receivership and brings two document cases.        |
| 3 | House staff begin Full Closure preparation; interior routes narrow.     |
| 4 | A Step rescue crew gathers near the service lane but waits for orders.  |
| 5 | Varo receives temporary control of the exterior parcels, not the        |
| 6 | Full Closure activates. Every internal route begins returning to        |

### Starting Relationships

Mela begins at Bond 1 if the party protected her notes at Giftschrunk Priory; otherwise she begins at Bond 0. Zam Zam, Li'l Snoot, and Bottle Eater begin at Bond 0 and Pressure 1 because rescue may also expose the trio. Varo begins at Bond -1 and Pressure 1. Caldovian, Sava, Ianca, and Vara retain current values.

### Scaling

For three characters, remove one Measure Bailiff and reduce the Measure Guardian to 52 Hit Points. For five or six characters, add one bailiff and one Step Knife to Varo's exterior team. For a party above 5th level, increase Full Closure save DCs by 1 and give the Measure Guardian 15 additional Hit Points.

### The Notice at the Red Door

*A sale that cannot legally reach the objects being sold*

#### Mela Dos Arrives

Mela reaches the Red Door before breakfast service ends. She carries a survey tube, a wax tablet, and three identical auction notices. One notice was nailed to the House. One appeared inside the East Weight Annex. One was found beneath a locked standard-weight case that only House staff can open.

Mela explains that the House has heard movement inside the western survey hall. Speaking tubes carried three voices, one argument about knives, and repeated demands for tea. Staff identified no injuries. Full Closure will begin at noon unless an authorized visitor establishes a safe route.

#### The Liquidation Notice

The notice lists furniture, standard measures, survey maps, storage cabinets, and "one oversized iron key of unknown industrial purpose." The debt attached to the sale belongs to an abandoned carriage concern that once owned the building's west wall. The debt is real. The property description changes from wall to rooms halfway through the document. A DC 13 Intelligence (Investigation) check catches the change. A character proficient with calligrapher's supplies, legal forms, or forgery tools finds it automatically after 1 minute.

#### Caldovian Recognizes the Voices

Caldovian names Zam Zam, Li'l Snoot, and Bottle Eater before Mela finishes describing the argument. He says the trio performs at the Red Door and has not returned from a private job. He does not pretend innocence. "All three steal," he says. "All three also eat breakfast, make children laugh, and deserve not to be compressed into a wall by civic architecture."

#### Sava's Question

Sava asks who has authority to invite the party. Mela has authority to request inspection, preserve public records, and protect staff. Mela cannot surrender House property or pardon burglary. Sava considers this sufficient for entry but not for seizure.

## Ianca's Warning

Ianca studies the auction notice's old parcel diagram. The House's interior support walls do not align with the exterior facade. A magical breach can open into a wall cavity, a stair void, or a counterweight shaft. She advises finding the lawful route or the old service road before creating a new opening. Ianca and Sava say they are there for breakfast but they are trying to recover a ceramic mug that was given to Caldovian by mistake.

## Caldovian's Offer

Caldovian offers to accompany the party, speak with the performers, and remain outside any vault. He means the first two promises. He phrases the third carefully enough that Sava makes him repeat it.

*The characters have a valid civic request, not unlimited authority. Mela can invite investigation; Mela cannot give away the Key.*

## A Building Without a Front Door

*Observation, neighbors, and six useful approaches*

### Read Aloud

The House of Roads and Measures occupies the middle of a block without touching the street in any useful way. A grand stair climbs to a stone alcove shallow enough to shelter one wet person and deep enough to suggest a missing door. Painted shutters cover blank masonry. Brass plaques name offices that cannot be reached from the pavement. Auction notices hang from three different walls, each notice claiming a different address. From somewhere inside comes a faint metallic knock, followed by a man shouting, "That was not the rescue rhythm."

### Watching the Block

Ten minutes of observation reveals that House clerks enter the East Weight Annex, cross no visible courtyard, and later appear at upper windows inside the House. Food deliveries go to the annex. Waste leaves through a repair-board cart. The roof hatch opens only when a city mason arrives with a numbered tag.

### Questioning Neighbors

Nearby workers know the House has always been "entered somewhere else." A carriage mechanic remembers an old tunnel beneath the lane. A tea seller hears three performers through a speaking pipe and confirms that Bottle Eater has been asking for hot water. A rope merchant saw a pale-gloved advocate paying for auction placards.

### The Handshake Trail

The liquidation notice passed through four ordinary businesses: a debt office, a printer, a cartage service, and a property clerk. Each business performed normal work. Only one line in each transaction served the seizure. No central warehouse, secret office, or master ledger exists to raid. Following the chain identifies Varo's document case and one compromised clerk, not the entire Handshake network.

| Approach              | What it requires                         | Primary consequence                                  |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| East Weight Annex     | Mela's request plus a recorded inventory | Lawful entry; slow and witnessed                     |
| Roof repair hatch     | Mason's tools, city tag, or persuasion   | Fast access to upper records; repair-board complaint |
| Rock Elf service road | Ianca's survey and physical exploration  | Reaches the cellar; risks structural damage          |
| Speaking tubes        | Patience and separate questioning        | Information without entry                            |
| Controlled breach     | Tools and Ianca's chosen wall section    | Immediate route; property damage and suspicion       |
| False authority       | A forged or borrowed order               | Fast while credible; strengthens Varo if exposed     |

*Magic is another approach, not the expected answer. Teleportation and magical passage trigger the House's rejection procedure.*

## **The House of Roads and Measures**

*A civic machine built from ownership, easement, and memory*

### **Purpose**

The House records road widths, bridge loads, public weights, route easements, carriage limits, winter closures, flood marks, and responsibility for repairs. The institution does not command every road. It records who must keep each road usable and who pays when that duty fails.

### **Midlands Foundation**

The first staff came from the Midlands and built a formal surveying office around local routes that already existed. Later clerks incorporated Rock Elf underroads, steppe caravan measures, Caldovi winter practices, and city custom. The result is bureaucratic, useful, and full of contradictions that remain visible rather than being forced into false unity.

### **The Legal Architecture**

The House interior is one property. Its west wall belongs to a defunct carriage concern. Its north facade belongs to a trust that maintains the street. The roof belongs to the repair board during daylight hours and reverts to the House at night. The East Weight Annex owns the public counter and grants an easement through the tunnel. The old service road belongs to no current office, but the House remains responsible for keeping it passable.

### **Why the House Works**

The system is awkward but stable because every route has a custodian. A visitor states a purpose, receives a witness, and enters through the route attached to that purpose. A surveyor uses the annex. A mason uses the roof. A body custodian uses the service road. An emergency team uses whichever route a clerk records first.

### **Why the House Is Failing Today**

The stolen seal created three incompatible purposes for the same visitors. The liquidation notice claims the building contents. Varo's receivership claims the exterior parcels. Mela's request protects staff and records. The House cannot decide which route represents authority, so Full Closure attempts to preserve everything by separating every person from every disputed object.

### **Sava and Ianca**

Sava can identify which claims have legal force and can place a temporary civic obligation on one route. Ianca can identify which route remains physically sound and can stabilize one mechanism. Neither woman chooses the party's objective. The characters decide which purpose to record and which route to defend.

|                         |                        |                         |
|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>ROOF HATCH</b>       | <b>UPPER RECORDS</b>   | <b>SURVEY WINDOWS</b>   |
| <b>WEIGHT HALL</b>      | <b>CENTRAL MEASURE</b> | <b>WEST SURVEY HALL</b> |
| <b>ROTATING CABINET</b> | <b>CELLAR ROUTES</b>   | <b>OLD SERVICE ROAD</b> |

*Schematic only. Routes change during Full Closure; the old service road lies below the cellar.*

## **The Lawful Entrance**

*The East Weight Annex and the price of being recorded*

### **The Annex**

The East Weight Annex is a narrow public office containing scales, axle gauges, stamped measures, and a queue of irritated merchants. Senior Clerk Dena Rusk controls the floor hatch. Dena is not corrupt. A

forged closure order instructs her to admit no one connected to Fume, the Scarlet Step, or Giftschrunk Priory. The order therefore names the party, Caldovian, Sava, and Ianca.

### **Opening the Route**

Dena opens the hatch if the characters provide two of the following: Mela's original request, evidence that people remain trapped, proof that the closure order uses Vara's stolen seal, a personal guarantee from a civic officer, temporary surrender of visible relics, or a signed responsibility statement accepting repair costs. A DC 14 Charisma check can substitute for one item, but no single check erases the need for accountable purpose.

### **The Inventory Desk**

Every entrant states a name, purpose, carried weapon, active spell, visible injury, and object expected to leave. A lie is possible. A discovered lie gives Varo advantage on one later claim that the entry was criminal. A truthful entry creates powerful evidence if Caldovian later hides the Key's movement.

### **The Tunnel**

The tunnel passes beneath the lane and descends beside old foundation stones. Brass lines mark legal boundaries. Blue stone lines mark older Rock Elf routes. A visitor crossing a brass line without a recorded purpose hears a bell and receives a dust mark visible for 1 hour. The dust is not magical damage and does not prevent movement.

### **The Rotating Cabinet**

The tunnel ends behind a cabinet of standard rods. A mechanical wheel rotates the cabinet into the House. It cannot turn while the interior route is blocked. A character can operate the counterweights with a DC 13 Intelligence check using thieves' tools or tinker's tools. Failure does not trap anyone; it makes enough noise to alert the nearest Measure Bailiff.

### **Caldovian at the Desk**

Caldovian truthfully records "rescue, interpretation, and witness." He does not list "future possession of a passage relic." A character who asks him to list every intended purpose gains Bond 1 if he complies. He writes "rescue, interpretation, witness, and disagreement concerning custody."

*The lawful route is not safe because it is lawful. It is useful because every decision leaves a record.*

### **The Road Beneath the House**

*A practical alternative older than the institution above it*

### **Finding the Service Road**

A blue survey mark on the south retaining wall indicates an old Rock Elf road. Ianca finds it automatically after examining the parcel plan. Without Ianca, a character can find the mark with a DC 14 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (History) check. The entrance lies behind a removable drain screen at street level.

### **Inside the Underroad**

The passage is narrow, dry, and built from fitted stone. Moon-shaped recesses hold extinct lamps. Names and distances appear in Old Elven beside practical Common repair notes added centuries later. If the Bracers are present, both inscriptions agree on one phrase: "A route remains a promise after the builder dies."

### **The Structural Problem**

Full Closure has lowered a counterweight into the road. The weight has cracked one support and narrowed the passage. Ianca can hold the unstable frame long enough for the party to work, but Ianca cannot complete the repair while supporting the load. Three successful actions are required before one failure: brace the frame with Athletics, reset the chain with thieves' or tinker's tools, or read the original alignment with Investigation or mason's tools. Use DC 14 for each action.

## Failure

On a failed action, each creature in the underroad makes a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage and becomes Restrained beneath loose stone. An action and a DC 13 Strength check frees a restrained creature. The passage remains usable after the rescue but Full Closure advances by one stage.

## Where It Leads

The road enters the House cellar beside funerary route maps and sealed civic emergency plans. This entrance has no current public owner. Sava can create temporary lawful authority by recording the route as an emergency obligation. Doing so protects the party's entry and forces the House to record the underroad for future repair.

## The First Cheval Mark

One old map shows the road continuing toward Cheval Oratorie before later construction blocked the route. A black heart symbol appears beneath the old tavern church. No label explains it.

*Ianca holds the problem still. The characters fix it.*

## Inside the House

*The building responds to declared purpose, custody, and movement*

## Read Aloud

The interior looks less like a mansion than an office built inside the memory of one. Brass lines cross the floors. Doors carry three labels each: room name, current custodian, and permitted purpose. Cabinets slide on wall tracks. Speaking tubes emerge beside portraits of long-dead surveyors. Every few seconds, a deep mechanism turns somewhere below, and one hallway becomes slightly narrower.

## How the House Responds

A creature entering through a recorded route receives a brass tally naming the declared purpose. The tally opens ordinary internal doors associated with that purpose. A creature without a tally can still move, pick locks, break barriers, or follow another person. The House records every mismatch and sends a bailiff to ask questions.

## No Room-Clearing

The House contains staff, trapped performers, and defensive machinery, not a sequence of enemies waiting in rooms. A conflict should change routes, custody, witnesses, or evidence. Once a purpose is clear, move to the next decision instead of requiring every chamber to be searched.

| Area              | What matters                                                         |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Receiving Cabinet | Entry ledger, brass tallies, and the first chance to declare purpose |
| Weight Hall       | Public staff, standard weights, and a safe place for negotiation     |
| Upper Records     | Seal gauges, parcel histories, and Varo's weak claim                 |
| West Survey Hall  | The trapped trio, speaking tubes, and broken stage glass             |
| Central Measure   | The route mechanism that assigns internal doors                      |
| Custody Archive   | Seized orders, burglar tools, and the Cheval Oratorie map            |
| Measure Vault     | The Key in a mechanical stone case                                   |
| Cellar Routes     | Underroad, emergency exits, and closing counterweights               |

## House Questions

A bailiff asks three questions: “Who invited you? What may leave with you? Who accepts the cost if your purpose changes?” A clear answer grants advantage on the next check involving an internal route. An evasive answer is permitted, but the House marks the character for interview.

## The Red Door Trio

*Guilty performers, genuine friendship, and three different jobs*

### Finding the Trio

Zam Zam, Li'l Snoot, and Bottle Eater occupy the West Survey Hall. Bottle Eater has used stage flats and measurement benches to keep a sliding wall from closing. Li'l Snoot watches every speaking tube and throws chalk instead of knives at anyone approaching without the agreed rhythm. Zam Zam has negotiated water, blankets, and a chamber pot from House staff while refusing formal surrender until she knows which order was genuine.

### Zam Zam

Zam Zam received an order to rescue a Scarlet Step courier trapped with the Key. No courier existed. Her order bears Vara's complete seal and uses a phrase Zam Zam heard Vara use once in person. Zam Zam entered because the instruction seemed personal and urgent. She does not sabotage the party, hide the seal evidence, or betray the rescue. Her love for Li'l Snoot and Bottle Eater is obvious and sincere.

### Li'l Snoot

Li'l Snoot received an order to retrieve the Key and destroy all copies of the route survey. His order says the House planned to sell access to foreign spies. He knew the job was theft. He did not know the rescue claim. He kept the order because the folding pattern was wrong for Vara's office.

### Bottle Eater

Bottle Eater received an order to stage a public intrusion, break one false window, and surrender peacefully. His order promised that Varo would convert the event into a property dispute that exposed civic corruption. Once inside, he discovered no public witnesses and refused to start a fight.

### What the Trio Agrees On

Each performer received payment from a different ordinary business. Each order used the same red thread, seal, and deadline. Each order required all three performers to be present. No order named Caldovian. All three orders warned that the other two performers might have compromised instructions.

### The Friendship at the Table

Let the trio argue about blame while protecting one another. Li'l Snoot insists the rescue was absurd. Bottle Eater admits that smashing a fake window sounded fun. Zam Zam refuses to let either man confess alone. A character who treats the trio as people rather than evidence gains Bond 1 with all three.

*Zam Zam is not the hidden trap in this adventure. Her later doctrinal choices matter because the party first sees her loyalty here.*

## The Three Orders and the Stolen Seal

*Evidence that proves preparation without solving the whole conspiracy*

### Examining the Orders

Place the three documents side by side. Each paper, ink, seal impression, and signature style is individually credible. The contradictions become visible only through comparison. The Bracers reveal that all three orders express the same hidden obligation: place the trio, the Key, and Vara's authority inside one witnessed dispute.

| Order                 | True detail                              | False claim                  | Useful evidence                                    |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| Zam Zam: rescue       | A Step courier once used the House route | A courier is trapped now     | Phrase associated with Vara's private speech       |
| Li'l Snoot: retrieval | The House holds the Key                  | The House plans foreign sale | Wrong folding pattern and a real inventory number  |
| Bottle Eater: protest | Varo filed a property claim              | Public witnesses will attend | Receivership language drafted before the intrusion |

## The Seal Gauge

The Upper Records room contains a mechanical seal gauge. A wax impression is pressed between two brass plates. The gauge compares depth, edge wear, defects, pressure, and handle angle. Any one of the three orders produces an exact match to Vara's archived original, including the crescent chip. The result proves use of the physical seal. It does not identify the hand that used it.

## Protecting the Proof

The characters can preserve the original orders, make rubbings, obtain Mela's witnessed measurement, or send a clerk through the speaking tubes to create a public record. One surviving route is enough to preserve the revelation. Varo attempts delay, not destruction, unless the party openly accuses him of stealing the seal.

## What Vara Knows

Vara believes her current seal is original. A trusted messenger can bring one measured impression to her. Vara's reply arrives after the immediate crisis: "No copy has that wound." Her Pressure toward Caldovian and Varo rises by 1, but Vara does not reveal fear in public.

## What Caldovian Knows

Caldovian recognizes the danger before anyone explains it. He advises making three independent records. This advice is useful and positions him as a defender of Vara's authority. A character watching him can notice that surprise reaches his eyes later than concern.

*The seal proves that Vara's identity and authority can be physically replaced. It does not reveal Lysa Quill or the Lady on the Xebec yet.*

## The Key Without a House

*Passage is not permission*

## Appearance

The Key is a long iron object with no repeated tooth and no sign of wear. Faded blue cloth wraps the bow. Near a barrier, its shadow points toward a door, seam, tunnel, window, servant route, or practical entrance that may be invisible from the bearer's position.

## Ordinary Locks

The Key opens a nonmagical lock it can physically enter. This uses no charge and leaves no damage.

## Charges

The Key has 3 charges and regains 1d3 expended charges daily at dawn.

## Temporary Doorway

As an action, expend 1 charge and touch a solid surface. A visible doorway opens through up to 5 feet of nonmagical material for 1 minute. The doorway closes early if the bearer dismisses it as a bonus action. A creature standing in the opening when it closes moves to the nearest safe side.

## Familiar Passage

As an action, expend 3 charges while touching a doorway, arch, gate, or frame. The frame opens for 1 minute onto a familiar passage within 1 mile that the bearer has personally crossed. The effect cannot cross planar boundaries.

## Rejection

When a magical ward or sovereign boundary blocks the Key, no charge is spent. The Key becomes painfully hot and points toward the nearest mundane route for 10 minutes. In the House, the Key points toward the East Weight Annex tunnel, then toward the old service road if that tunnel closes.

## Relic Recognition

Within 60 feet, the Bracers translate the Key as open, another side, barred, nearer, and permission absent. Fume's black channel produces one brief smoke curl toward any doorway made by the Key. Fume does not grant a charge unless a spell is cast and consumed normally.

## Using the Key Here

The Key can make escape immediate after the House drops its anti-passage ward. The ward drops when the Central Measure recognizes one accountable custodian, when Full Closure ends, or when the characters disable the three rejection pins. Using the Key before that point only reveals a mundane route.

## Destruction

The Key can be made vulnerable only after the bearer stands before a barrier, identifies a lawful route, receives permission to use it, and deliberately refuses both the Key and the route. The bearer says, "Passage is not permission." The Key becomes ordinary iron for 1 minute and can be broken with suitable tools or 20 points of nonmagical bludgeoning damage.

*Do not let the Key erase consequences. A doorway bypasses a wall, not ownership, invitation, custody, law, or memory.*

## The Measure of Purpose

*Opening the vault by proving more than physical access*

### The Central Measure

The central mechanism is a waist-high brass table with three rotating rings. The outer ring names routes. The middle ring names purposes. The inner ring names custodians. Full Closure begins because no current arrangement allows all three rings to agree.

### Opening the Measure Vault

The characters need three proofs. Each proof can be established in several ways. No required proof depends on one ability check.

| Proof                   | Possible sources                                                                                                   |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A real route            | East Weight Annex ledger, repaired underroad, roof tag, or controlled breach recorded by Mela                      |
| A declared purpose      | Rescue statement, evidence-preservation order, burglary surrender, or emergency repair duty                        |
| A responsible custodian | Mela, Dena Rusk, Sava under civic obligation, a character accepting liability, or Vara through authenticated reply |

## Resolving a Ring

Presenting a valid source resolves a ring automatically. Improvising a new source requires a DC 14 Intelligence or Charisma check using a relevant skill or tool. A failed check advances Full Closure by one step but does not erase previous proofs.

### **The Performance Solution**

Zam Zam, Li'l Snoot, and Bottle Eater can restage the three contradictory jobs as one public confession: entry route, real purpose, and accepted responsibility. The performance is funny, humiliating, and legally useful. A character must still decide who becomes custodian.

### **The Engineering Solution**

Ianca can expose the gear that physically links the rings. Three characters can hold or reset the rings with Athletics, thieves' tools, and Investigation. Each check is DC 14. Two successes before two failures open the vault but damage the mechanism and create a repair debt of 300 gp.

### **The Criminal Solution**

The vault case opens mechanically from a concealed floor lever. Li'l Snoot found the lever but refused to pull it while the House still held the trio's orders. Pulling it opens the case immediately and sounds every route bell. Varo uses the alarm as evidence of seizure unless the party already recorded a rescue purpose.

### **The Magical Solution**

Dispel magic or similar magic can suppress one rejection pin for 1 minute. Three suppressed pins open the vault. Each spell cast within 30 feet of Fume still uses the Smoke Drinker roll if Fume is present. Full Closure treats magical suppression as a breach and sends the Measure Guardian.

*The puzzle asks, "Who may open this?" The mechanical answer is easy. The campaign answer is not.*

### **Varo Files Receivership**

*A legal obstacle with a sword inside a walking stick*

#### **Arrival**

At Access Clock 2 or when the party reaches the Central Measure, Varo enters through the East Weight Annex with two document clerks, two Measure Bailiffs temporarily assigned by court order, and one Step Knife disguised as private security. Varo wears a neat coat, pale gloves, narrow spectacles, and the expression of a man arriving after every choice has already become paperwork.

#### **The Claim**

Varo states that the House has failed to control hazardous trespassers, disputed property, and a magical transit object. Emergency receivership, he argues, allows a neutral advocate to inventory all movable assets until the boundaries can be decided. Varo's order legitimately controls the auction placards and exterior parcels. A copied paragraph extends that control to the interior.

#### **Exposing the Extension**

The copied paragraph uses a road-width definition where a property definition should appear. A DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check exposes it. Mela's notes, the annex ledger, the original debt file, or Sava's comparison each grant advantage. Presenting two independent records disproves Varo's interior authority without a check.

#### **Varo's Offers**

Varo offers the party one of four settlements: leave the Key for inventory and take the performers; surrender all documents and keep the Key temporarily; accept paid civic appointment under Varo; or identify Caldovian as the person directing the intrusion. Each offer solves one immediate problem by creating a dangerous record.

#### **If Varo Loses**

Varo does not become irrational. He narrows the claim, protects his document cases, and attempts to leave with a witnessed copy of the trio's orders. He says, "The legal position has become unexpectedly mobile." Capturing Varo is possible, but Mela insists on a recorded charge.

### If Varo Wins

Varo takes temporary control of the vault room and orders an inventory. He does not immediately hand the Key to Caldovian or Vara. The party can still rescue the trio, challenge the order, negotiate custody, or prove the original seal was used. Receivership changes leverage; it does not end play.

*Authenticated documentary evidence makes a character immune to Varo's Objection reaction for the current scene.*



## When Procedure Becomes a Fight

*Objectives, moving walls, and nonlethal opposition*

### How Violence Starts

Combat begins only if someone attacks, forces the vault, attempts an arrest without accepted authority, or tries to remove the Key during Full Closure. Bailiffs use restraint and blocked routes. The Step Knife protects Varo's document cases and escapes if exposed. House constructs defend records and route machinery rather than pursuing fleeing creatures.

### Encounter Objectives

Use one or more objectives instead of a fight to the last Hit Point: protect Mela's seal measurement for 3 rounds; move all three performers to a recorded exit; keep Varo away from the vault lever; reset two closing walls; or escort a clerk carrying the original debt file to the Weight Hall.

### Moving Walls

At initiative count 20, choose or roll one route change. A brass wall slides 10 feet, an open doorway rotates to another hall, a speaking tube announces an incorrect room name, or a floor line rises into a waist-high barrier. A creature in the movement path makes a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, the creature moves to the nearest safe space and falls Prone.

### Nonlethal Defeat

A creature reduced to 0 Hit Points by a bailiff or Measure Guardian wakes in an interview room with stabilized wounds. Varo may use lethal force only after his disguised Step Knife is exposed or a character threatens his life. Zam Zam, Li'l Snoot, and Bottle Eater defend one another but avoid killing House staff.

### Caldovian in Combat

Caldovian protects civilians, directs attention, and uses movement or illusion outside the Key's 30-foot route ward when possible. He avoids becoming the person who physically removes the Key. If a character hands him the Key during combat, he uses it to open one rescue route, then claims the confusion prevented a clean return.

### Sava and Ianca

Sava can use an action to establish one temporary lawful purpose, causing one bailiff to pause until the end of Sava's next turn. Ianca can use an action to stop one moving wall or hold one collapsing route. Each woman creates space. The party completes the objective.

*Measure Bailiff - Challenge Rating 2. Measure Guardian - Challenge Rating 3. Varo - Challenge Rating 5.*

## Full Closure

*The building attempts to return every person and object to custody*

### Activation

At Access Clock 6, after three unauthorized breaches, or when two factions claim the Key at once, the House enters Full Closure. Bells ring in ascending order. Brass floor lines glow with reflected lamplight but no magic. Every cabinet locks. Route wheels turn. The House begins moving people toward the entrance associated with each brass tally.

### Closure Track

Begin at 0. Advance one stage at the end of each round or after about 1 minute outside initiative. A character at the Central Measure can delay one stage with a DC 14 check using Investigation, thieves' tools, tinker's tools, mason's tools, or Athletics. Each method works once.

| Stage | Effect                                                      |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| 0     | Warning bells; each person can choose a destination route.  |
| 1     | Unrecorded interior doors lock; speaking tubes remain open. |

|   |                                                                                           |
|---|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2 | West Survey Hall narrows; Bottle Eater must release one brace.                            |
| 3 | Upper Records separate from the Weight Hall; seal evidence risks                          |
| 4 | The vault case descends toward the cellar custody track.                                  |
| 5 | Every route chooses one custodian and rejects competing tallies.                          |
| 6 | Complete return: people exit, evidence enters archive, and the Key enters sealed transit. |

## Rescuing the Trio

Each performer needs one clear exit purpose. Rescue, surrender, medical evacuation, performance contract, or civic testimony can work. A single blanket statement works only if one character accepts responsibility for all three. Zam Zam refuses an exit that abandons either man.

## Saving the Evidence

A character can carry the orders, carry Mela's measurement, or leave both inside under witnessed archive custody. Destroying the evidence is not required to save anyone. Varo offers to carry it and should not be trusted without a copy.

## Saving the Key

The vault transit can be stopped through the Central Measure, the floor lever, the old service road, or a Temporary Doorway after the rejection pins drop at Stage 5. The party still must decide who receives the Key.

## Complete Closure Is Not Failure

At Stage 6, the trio exits through recorded routes, staff remain unharmed, and disputed objects enter deep custody. The party loses immediate control but gains a clean record. Later negotiation or a second operation remains possible. Advancement does not require possession.

*Full Closure is a clock, not a punishment. Every stage creates a different choice.*

## The Key Leaves the Vault

*A rescue tool, a custody crisis, and Caldovian's quiet opportunity*

## The First Use

When the anti-passage ward drops, the Key's shadow points toward the safest recorded exit. A bearer can spend 1 charge to create a doorway through the West Survey Hall wall and move the trio into the Weight Hall. If the characters use the Key for rescue before removing it from custody, Mela records the use as emergency access rather than theft.

## The Key's Reaction

Within 60 feet of the Bracers, both bracers warm. The silver bracer translates, "Open because need." The bronze bracer answers, "Need does not own." If Fume is nearby, smoke flows along the Key's teeth and stops at the blue cloth.

## Caldovian's Quiet Opportunity

Caldovian can hide the Key's theft only if all four conditions are true: no character holds the Key; no signed inventory names its custodian; Mela's notes are unavailable or incomplete; and Full Closure or combat creates an unwitnessed route change. Caldovian uses the smoky cup as a visible decoy, opens a short route to a prepared Red Door storage alcove, and replaces the Key with a weighted iron copy.

## Detecting the Theft

A character who checks the Key, watches Caldovian, maintains the inventory, or asks the Bracers about passage prevents the theft automatically. Otherwise, a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence

(Investigation) check notices the missing faded cloth, incorrect weight, or silence from the Bracers. Fume produces a smoke line toward the true Key when brought within 60 feet.

### If Caldovian Is Caught

Caldovian does not attack. He claims that Varo, Vara, and the House would each bury the Key in a different kind of prison. He returns it if the party blocks every exit or if Bond 2 or higher allows a direct appeal. At lower Bond, he asks the characters to choose him openly rather than forcing him to steal.

### If the Theft Succeeds

Do not hide the truth from the campaign forever. Fume, the Bracers, a later inventory, or Cheval Oratorie evidence reveals the substitution. Record who signed the false inventory and who trusted Caldovian. The revelation changes relationships; it does not remove the party's ability to act.

*The theft is conditional. Good custody defeats it without a surprise reversal.*

## Resolving the House and the Key

*People, proof, custody, and the price of a route*

### The Performers

The trio can leave as rescued civilians, surrendered burglars, protected witnesses, Step employees, or civic assistants. Mela favors protected testimony. Varo favors quiet release in exchange for the orders. Caldovian favors rescue without formal confession. Sava favors one honest record. Ianca favors any route that does not collapse.

| Decision                         | Immediate consequence                                                                    |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The party keeps the Key          | The characters gain a powerful route tool and responsibility for every use and transfer. |
| The House keeps the Key          | Civic custody is clear; but Varo and Caldovian know the route system.                    |
| Giftschrank Priory keeps the Key | Security improves; every vault still contains a conceptual entrance.                     |
| Vara Vay keeps the Key           | Handshake can move it through ordinary businesses, expanding criminal access.            |
| Caldovian keeps the Key          | He gains the passage function and begins testing protected routes.                       |
| Sava and Ianca transport it      | Both women accept only temporary written custody under Solice authorization.             |
| The Key is destroyed             | The final ritual loses reliable passage; one tooth opens one final ordinary lock.        |

## People and Proof

Rescue with a recorded purpose makes the trio reliable future contacts. Escape without a record lets Varo describe the event as organized theft. One original order plus one witnessed seal-gauge result proves Vara's physical seal was used. A rubbing or testimony alone creates strong suspicion.

### Varo and the House

Exposing Varo's interior claim raises Varo's Pressure by 1. Capturing him requires a recorded charge. Killing the current Varo removes one person, not the office. A peaceful result grants a House seal; destructive entry creates a repair debt and a city record.

### Relationships

Rescuing the trio raises Caldovian's Bond by 1. A clear custody rule earns his respect even when he hates the outcome. Recording the underroad as a public obligation raises Sava's Bond by 1. Completing the structural repair raises Ianca's Bond by 1.

## **Refusing All Custodians**

The House can place the Key into sealed transit and schedule a public custody hearing. This is a valid result. Advancement does not require one accepted owner.

*The strongest result protects people, preserves proof, and records custody. The campaign does not require one owner for all three.*

## **Cheval Oratorie and Advancement**

*The surviving route points toward the next death*

### **Document the Transfer**

A valid transfer names the Key, charge total, condition, bearer, destination, witnesses, and limits on use. Two independent copies prevent later alteration. If the Key is missing, Caldovian prepares a slower, more destructive passage substitute for the final ritual.

### **The Custody Archive**

Among the seized route surveys is a recent request from Cheval Oratorie. The old tavern church asked the House to certify a blocked undercroft, a funerary stair, and a sealed object described only as “black vessel; final beat retained; no soul.” The request bears Thosa Lham’s name.

### **The Old Map**

A Rock Elf road map shows a branch from the House service road to Cheval Oratorie. The branch was closed when the city raised the horse market. A black heart symbol marks the undercroft. Beside it, a later clerk wrote: “Do not call this resurrection.”

### **The New Message**

Before the party leaves, a messenger arrives from Cheval Oratorie. The note asks Mela to bring the original route survey and asks the characters to come without public announcement. One line has been added in a different hand: “Vara Vay has requested a private funeral measure for a woman who is not dead.”

### **Rewards**

The House pays 60 gp per character for preserving staff, records, and a usable route. A peaceful resolution grants one House seal. Rescuing the trio earns free lodging and meals at the Red Door for one week. Preserving the seal evidence grants advantage on one future check made to challenge a forged Vara order.

### **Milestone**

Characters reach 6th level after the trapped performers are no longer in immediate danger, the Key has a recorded or intentionally refused custody, and at least one clue points toward Cheval Oratorie. Possession of the Key, conviction of Vara, and perfect proof of the stolen seal are not required.

### **Downtime**

Give the characters several days before the next summons. Ask who studies the Key, who speaks with a performer, who checks on Vara, who helps repair the underroad, and who reviews the seal evidence. Show one visible consequence of Caldovian using the same time to improve access.

### **Lead to Adventure Four**

The Last Beat of the Scarlet Lady begins at Cheval Oratorie, where a funerary custodian, a criminal leader, a preserved heartbeat, and a public identity are about to become the same problem.

Advance to 6th level. The next chapter begins with a body-custody request, not a treasure map.

## House Personnel and Defenses

Table-ready statistics for civic containment

### Mela Dos, Civic Observer

Medium Humanoid, lawful neutral • Challenge Rating 2 (450 XP) • PB +2

AC 14; HP 45 (7d8 + 14); Speed 30 ft.

STR 10 (+0), DEX 14 (+2), CON 14 (+2), INT 17 (+3), WIS 15 (+2), CHA 13 (+1)

Saving Throws Int +5, Wis +4; Skills History +5, Investigation +7, Perception +4, Persuasion +3; Tools cartographer's tools +7, mason's tools +5

#### TRAITS

**Exact Minute.** Mela records one visible event each round. A creature using Mela's intact notes has advantage on one check made to establish timing, location, or custody.

**Measured Route.** Mela ignores difficult terrain caused by ordinary stairs, furniture, survey lines, and known civic construction.

#### ACTIONS

**Survey Rod.** Melee Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

**Mark the Safe Line (Recharge 5-6).** Mela marks a 20-foot line she can see. Allies crossing the line before the start of Mela's next turn do not provoke Opportunity Attacks and have advantage on the first saving throw against a moving wall.

#### REACTIONS

**Record the Contradiction.** When a creature within 30 feet uses a document or stated authority, Mela grants one ally advantage on the next check made to challenge that claim.

### Measure Bailiff

Medium Humanoid, any lawful alignment • Challenge Rating 2 (450 XP) • PB +2

AC 17 (reinforced coat, shield); HP 45 (6d8 + 18); Speed 30 ft.

STR 16 (+3), DEX 12 (+1), CON 16 (+3), INT 11 (+0), WIS 14 (+2), CHA 12 (+1)

Skills Athletics +5, Insight +4, Perception +4

#### TRAITS

**Custody Before Injury.** The bailiff can deal nonlethal damage with any attack and has advantage on checks made to Grapple a creature holding disputed property.

**Hold the Line.** A creature hit by the bailiff's Opportunity Attack has Speed 0 for the rest of the turn.

#### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The bailiff makes two Measure Staff attacks.

**Measure Staff.** Melee Attack: +5 to hit, reach 10 ft. Hit: 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

**Pin to the Line (Recharge 5-6).** One creature within 10 feet makes a DC 13 Strength saving throw. On a failure, the creature becomes Restrained until the end of its next turn.

#### REACTIONS

**Interpose Shield.** When a creature within 5 feet is hit, the bailiff grants +2 AC against the attack, possibly causing it to miss.

### Measure Guardian

Large Construct, unaligned • Challenge Rating 3 (700 XP) • PB +2

AC 17; HP 67 (9d10 + 18); Speed 25 ft.

STR 18 (+4), DEX 8 (-1), CON 15 (+2), INT 6 (-2), WIS 12 (+1), CHA 5 (-3)

Damage Immunities poison, psychic; Condition Immunities Charmed, Exhaustion, Frightened, Paralyzed, Poisoned

## TRAITS

**Route Bound.** The guardian cannot move more than 60 feet from the Central Measure. It ignores moving walls and floor barriers.

**Disputed Object Sense.** The guardian knows the direction of the Key, original orders, and seal gauge while each remains inside the House.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The guardian makes two Brass Fist attacks.

**Brass Fist.** Melee Attack: +6 to hit, reach 10 ft. Hit: 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

**Return to Custody (Recharge 5-6).** One creature within 30 feet carrying a disputed object makes a DC 14 Strength saving throw. On a failure, the creature is pulled up to 20 feet toward a custody line and falls Prone.

## REACTIONS

**Close the Route.** When a creature within 30 feet opens a door or passage, the guardian moves up to 15 feet toward it without provoking Opportunity Attacks.

## Varo and Zam Zam

*Convenient authority and sincere loyalty*

### Varo

*Medium Humanoid, lawful neutral • Challenge Rating 5 (1,800 XP) • PB +3*

AC 16; HP 82 (11d8 + 33); Speed 30 ft.

STR 8 (-1), DEX 14 (+2), CON 16 (+3), INT 18 (+4), WIS 15 (+2), CHA 18 (+4)

Saving Throws Int +7, Wis +5, Cha +7; Skills Deception +10, History +7, Insight +8, Investigation +7, Persuasion +10

## TRAITS

**Prepared Writs.** Varo carries 1d4 apparently valid orders, warrants, claims, or letters. Exposing one requires a DC 17 Intelligence (Investigation) check or a relevant tool check.

**Institutional Certainty.** Varo has advantage on Charisma checks against creatures acting in an official capacity until his authority is disproved in the current scene.

**Legal Escape (1/Day).** When targeted by an official arrest or seizure, Varo produces a conflicting order and moves up to Speed without provoking Opportunity Attacks.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Varo makes two Walking-Stick Blade attacks.

**Walking-Stick Blade.** Melee Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 6 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

**Procedural Delay (Recharge 5-6).** Up to three creatures within 60 feet that can hear Varo make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, a target cannot take Reactions and has disadvantage on the next ability check before the end of the target's next turn.

## REACTIONS

**Objection.** When a creature within 60 feet succeeds on a Charisma check, Varo forces a reroll. A creature presenting authenticated documentary evidence is immune.

### Zam Zam

*Medium Humanoid, neutral • Challenge Rating 6 (2,300 XP) • PB +3*

AC 17; HP 96 (15d8 + 30); Speed 40 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR 11 (+0), DEX 20 (+5), CON 14 (+2), INT 13 (+1), WIS 15 (+2), CHA 18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Cha +7; Skills Acrobatics +11, Deception +7, Performance +10, Persuasion +7, Sleight of Hand +8, Stealth +8

## TRAITS

**Evasion.** On a successful Dexterity save for half damage, Zam Zam takes no damage; on a failure, she takes half damage.

**High Wire.** Zam Zam ignores difficult terrain caused by ropes, rails, furniture, crowds, and narrow surfaces.

**Sneak Attack (1/Turn).** Zam Zam deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when she hits with a weapon attack and has advantage, or when an ally is within 5 feet of the target and she does not have disadvantage.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Zam Zam makes two Acrobat's Knife attacks.

**Acrobat's Knife.** Melee or Ranged Attack: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft. Hit: 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage.

**Curtain Drop (Recharge 5-6).** Zam Zam creates a 15-foot-radius Heavily Obscured area within 60 feet until the start of her next turn and can immediately Hide.

### BONUS ACTIONS

**Wire Step.** Zam Zam takes the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

### REACTIONS

**Catch the Fall.** When an ally within 10 feet falls or is moved, Zam Zam moves up to 10 feet and reduces falling or collision damage by 10 (3d6).

## Li'l Snoot and Bottle Eater

*The knife reader and the man who takes the fall*

### Li'l Snoot

*Small Humanoid, neutral • Challenge Rating 3 (700 XP) • PB +2*

AC 16; HP 55 (10d6 + 20); Speed 25 ft.

STR 8 (-1), DEX 19 (+4), CON 14 (+2), INT 15 (+2), WIS 14 (+2), CHA 15 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Int +4; Skills Acrobatics +6, Investigation +4, Perception +4, Sleight of Hand +6

### TRAITS

**Knife Reader.** Li'l Snoot cannot be Surprised by a visible thrown weapon and has advantage to detect altered, substituted, or poisoned stage weapons.

**Exit Counter.** Li'l Snoot knows the direction of every visible exit and has advantage on checks made to spot a newly opened or closed route.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Li'l Snoot makes three Throwing Knife attacks.

**Throwing Knife.** Melee or Ranged Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/90 ft. Hit: 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage.

**Pin the Costume (Recharge 5-6).** On a hit, the target makes a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or becomes Restrained until an action frees the target.

### REACTIONS

**Catch and Return.** Li'l Snoot reduces damage from a ranged weapon attack by 1d10 + 4. If reduced to 0, he makes one Throwing Knife attack.

### Bottle Eater

*Medium Humanoid, neutral • Challenge Rating 4 (1,100 XP) • PB +2*

AC 15; HP 76 (8d8 + 40); Speed 30 ft.

STR 18 (+4), DEX 12 (+1), CON 20 (+5), INT 12 (+1), WIS 14 (+2), CHA 16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +6, Con +7; Skills Athletics +6, Insight +4, Performance +5, Perception +4

### TRAITS

**Stage-Hardened.** Bottle Eater has resistance to damage from nonmagical glass, improvised stage hazards, and falls of 20 feet or less.

**Brace the Set.** Bottle Eater counts as Large for carrying, pushing, and holding a moving wall or closing route.

## ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Bottle Eater makes two Heavy Prop attacks.

**Heavy Prop.** Melee Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

**Shattering Entrance (Recharge 5-6).** Bottle Eater moves up to Speed through one nonmagical door, screen, window, or stage wall. Creatures within 5 feet of the exit make a DC 14 Dexterity saving throw or take 7 (2d6) slashing damage and fall Prone.

## REACTIONS

**Take the Fall.** When an ally within 5 feet is hit, Bottle Eater halves the damage to the ally and takes the other half.

*The trio fights to escape together. No performer abandons another performer while a safe route remains possible.*



## CHAPTER 10 — The Last Beat of the Scarlet Lady

### Adventure Four for characters of 6th level

#### Adventure Summary

Cheval Oratorie asks the characters to witness an unusual funeral measure for Vara Vay, a woman who is not dead. Vara suspects that someone has stolen more than her seal. She wants Thosa Lham to establish what would prove the death of her body, what would prove the continuation of her office, and whether the Obsidian Reliquary can preserve one without confusing it for the other.

Caldovian presents the same meeting as an execution plot. He shows the party a genuine order requiring him to appear alone and surrender all relic records. He omits the part stating that Vara intends to question him under funerary witness. He claims Vara plans to capture her own heartbeat, become impossible to remove, and kill everyone who knows too much.

The meeting is the center of Caldovian's coup. Paid witnesses, altered custody records, planted Fume residue, forged messages, succession papers, and Lysa Quill's rehearsed Vara identity are ready before anyone draws a weapon. Caldovian wants Vara dead or publicly absent, the Reliquary in his possession, and the party remembered as the people who brought violence into a holy house. Vara wants proof, control, and a way to survive betrayal without allowing another person to own her death. Thosa wants the body, heartbeat, and record kept distinct. Mother Solice arrives through a willing elderly vessel and demands that necessary work continue after the performance collapses.

#### Adventure Purpose

This adventure is the campaign hinge. Caldovian can remain sympathetic, become openly suspect, or be exposed. Vara can survive, die, disappear, or lose control. Lysa can remain hidden, become a witness, or inherit the public role. No outcome ends the campaign. Every outcome changes who controls the Scarlet Step, who possesses the Reliquary, and which version of the confrontation the city believes.

| Element            | At the Table                                                         |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Relic              | Obsidian Reliquary                                                   |
| Primary location   | Cheval Oratorie, an old tavern church and funerary house             |
| Apparent objective | Prevent Vara from murdering Caldovian or abusing the Reliquary       |
| Actual decision    | Protect body, identity, evidence, and custody during a prepared coup |
| Level              | Begin at 6th level; advance to 7th level after resolution            |

*The Reliquary can preserve a final heartbeat. It cannot decide who the dead person was, who inherits her office, or which witness deserves belief.*

#### Cheval Oratorie

*A tavern became a church because a hungry demigod finished the horse meal*

#### The Place

Cheval Oratorie stands between the old horse market and a district of laundries, kitchens, saddlers, and funeral workers. The building began as a roadside tavern. Later owners added a prayer hall, cellar crypt, public dining room, washing court, and narrow funerary stair. Every addition kept part of the tavern: the prayer rail is an old serving counter, the vestry was a wine room, and the main holy image hangs above a blackened cooking hearth.

## The Popular Story

Pilgrims say Elra came here as a beautiful blue child, ate an entire horse, drank a wine jar dry, and declared the place holy. Local paintings show a tiny goddess beside a heroic platter while terrified adults watch.

## The Older Account

Elra was nearly grown. Her people treated horses as family, labor, wealth, companions, and food. She ate wine-spiced horse shanks with a traveling household after a funeral and paid for the meal by repairing the tavern roof with soldiers who expected a miracle. The holiness came later. The repaired roof lasted two hundred years.

## Current Work

Cheval serves horse meals, keeps final words, washes bodies, hosts quiet wakes, settles disputed funeral customs, and records resurrection consent. Thosa Lham is the senior funerary custodian. He treats the building as a working institution rather than a shrine to appetite.

## The Undercroft

A blocked Rock Elf road reaches the undercroft from the House of Roads and Measures. The Obsidian Reliquary rests in a black stone cabinet beneath the old wine room. The cabinet is not a treasure vault. It is a custody room with two exits, three ledgers, and enough floor space for a family to sit beside a body.

| Level       | Primary spaces                                             |
|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Street      | Horse-market lane, washing court, stable arch, public door |
| Main floor  | Dining hall, old hearth, prayer rail, witness alcoves      |
| Upper floor | Clerk rooms, Vara's private chamber, roof bell access      |
| Cellar      | Body-washing room, final-word room, wine corridor          |
| Undercroft  | Reliquary cabinet, Rock Elf stair, sealed service road     |

*Cheval is holy because people kept feeding mourners, repairing the roof, recording the dead, and opening the doors the morning after Elra left.*

## The Truth of the Funeral Measure

*Vara suspects replacement; Caldovian needs a death that looks inevitable*

## Why Vara Comes

The seal evidence from the House Without an Entrance proves that Vara's original physical seal was used without her knowledge. Vara now suspects that her authority can be copied, inherited, or performed. She does not know about the Lady on the Xebec. She does not know Lysa Quill is the prepared long-term replacement. She knows enough to fear a second Vara appearing after her death.

## What Vara Requests

Vara asks Thosa for a private funeral measure: a recorded plan establishing how her body would be identified, who may capture her final heartbeat, what question may be asked through Last Answer, and how the Scarlet Step must distinguish a dead woman from a continuing office. She also brings evidence against Caldovian and Varo. Her request is cautious, criminal, and rational.

## What Caldovian Prepared

Caldovian learned of the measure through Step correspondence. He has arranged the public story before the private meeting begins. Witnesses have been paid to see the party arrive armed. Messages place one character near Vara's room. Records keep Fume legally connected to the party even if the sword is elsewhere or destroyed. Lysa has rehearsed a short Vara appearance. Emergency succession documents name Caldovian as temporary protector of the Step.

### What Caldovian Wants

He wants Vara's death to become the emotional heart of his future transformation. He wants the Reliquary because he mistakes preserved bodily continuity for preserved self. He wants control of the visible Scarlet Step. He also loves Vara. His grief, if she dies, is real and does not make the murder less planned.

### What Mother Solice Sees

Solice sees two separate duties: protect a living woman from murder and prevent a criminal office from turning a corpse into transferable property. Solice does not command the party to save Vara, kill Caldovian, or preserve the Step. She demands an honest record, a named custodian, and someone responsible for the body after the room empties.

*Vara is not secretly good. Caldovian does not need her to be good. He needs the party to believe he is better.*

### Adventure Flow and Last Beat Clock

*The story is prepared; the characters decide which pieces survive contact with reality*

#### Expected Flow

1. Thosa summons the party to witness Vara's funeral measure.
2. The characters inspect Cheval, the Reliquary, and the blocked undercroft.
3. Mother Solice enters through Eda Morn and establishes the two-record principle.
4. Vara arrives with Brannoc, evidence, and a request for controlled witness.
5. Caldovian presents his genuine order and false interpretation.
6. The party investigates witnesses, messages, payments, residue, and succession.
7. Lysa enters the crisis as herself, a prepared Vara, or an unseen contingency.
8. The murder apparatus activates when the party chooses a side or forces a precise accusation.
9. The party protects people, evidence, custody, and public memory across three crisis rounds.
10. The surviving clue leads through Zam Zam to the House of the Mother's perfumery.

#### The Last Beat Clock

Begin at 0 when the party reaches Cheval. Advance after about 30 minutes of unopposed preparation, when a faction gains exclusive control of one level, when the party publicly threatens Vara or Caldovian, or when a planted witness completes a prepared task. Investigation, negotiation, repair, and moving a vulnerable person to safety do not advance the clock unless another listed trigger occurs.

| Clock | Development                                                                    |
|-------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 0     | Thosa begins the measure; the Reliquary is empty and secured.                  |
| 1     | Paid witnesses take positions in the dining hall and horse-market lane.        |
| 2     | Forged messages and altered custody records enter public hands.                |
| 3     | Lysa receives the signal to prepare Vara's role.                               |
| 4     | Planted residue, a false scabbard, or authentic Fume enters the witness route. |
| 5     | Succession papers are opened; Cheval exits receive conflicting guards.         |
| 6     | The murder apparatus activates. Begin the Last Beat Crisis.                    |

#### Holding the Clock

Authenticating a message, removing one paid witness, securing one exit, or separating Vara and Caldovian holds the clock for one meaningful scene. The same tactic cannot hold it twice. Exposing Lysa's role reduces the clock by 1 once. Mother Solice can prevent one automatic advance, but the party must choose which duty her vessel protects.

## Scaling

For three characters, remove one Step Witness and reduce Brannoc to 100 Hit Points. For five or six characters, add two Step Knives and one prepared witness. For a party above 6th level, increase crisis DCs by 1 and give Vara and Caldovian 15 additional Hit Points.

## The Summons and the Horse Meal

*The adventure begins with work, food, and a request no funeral manual anticipated*

### Thosa's Message

The note asks the characters to arrive without public announcement and to bring the original House route survey if available. It states: "A woman who is not dead has requested a funeral measure. Her office may survive her body. Her body may be used to prove the office. Come before either fact becomes convenient."

### Read Aloud

Cheval Oratorie smells of hot wine, roasted meat, soap, old stone, and rain drying from wool. Mourners eat at long tables beneath a painting of a blue girl confronting an impossible platter. Funeral clerks move around the room with bowls, ledgers, and clean cloth. No one whispers. Grief here is private; necessary work is not.

### The Meal

Thosa offers wine-spiced horse shank, onions, sour greens, and ordinary bread. A vegetarian or horse-keeping guest receives beans, roasted roots, and the same wine sauce without mockery. Refusing food is permitted. Accepting food grants Advantage on the first Charisma check made with a Cheval worker because the character has joined the institution's ordinary rhythm.

### Thosa's Questions

Thosa asks who currently holds each relic, who witnessed the last transfer, whether Fume still exists, and whether any character has seen Vara without her mask. He does not ask from curiosity. Each answer changes the measure. A character who lies can make a normal Deception check, but Thosa records the exact wording rather than accepting a summary.

### The Reliquary Is Empty

Thosa shows the Obsidian Reliquary before Vara arrives. It is a palm-sized black vessel with a seamless lid. No pulse moves through the stone. Thosa states that it holds no soul, no memory, and no promise of resurrection. It can preserve one final bodily insistence. He refuses every metaphor that turns that fact into immortality.

### The Blocked Road

The old route from the House of Roads and Measures ends behind a collapsed cellar wall. Ianca can stabilize the stone if present, but the party must clear, map, or deliberately leave the route sealed. Opening it creates a quiet escape. Leaving it sealed makes the public stair and stable arch more important during the crisis.

*Thosa does not ask whether the party trusts Vara. He asks whether the party can distinguish protecting a body from preserving an office.*

## Mother Solice Enters

*Mummified dignity arrives in an elderly laundress and asks who remains responsible*

### Eda Morn

Eda Morn is an elderly laundress who has washed Cheval's funeral cloth for forty-three years. She volunteered long ago to serve as a vessel if Mother Solice required a mortal voice inside the Border City. Eda does not become divine. She lends posture, breath, and time to a goddess whose full presence would turn a private measure into a public event.

## **The Possession**

Eda enters carrying folded white cloth. She pauses beside the old serving counter. Her bent spine straightens without pain. Every fold in her dress settles. Her hands become perfectly still. When she speaks, the voice remains Eda's and every hesitation disappears.

### **What Solice Says**

"Prepare two records. One for the body. One for the office. A body does not inherit authority. An office does not inherit flesh. A final heartbeat belongs to neither without consent."

She asks the party to name one person responsible for each record. The same character may accept both duties, but doing so grants no extra authority and creates obvious risk.

### **The Body Record**

The body record includes scars, old injuries, blood type or magical equivalent, dental or bone marks, known curses, current clothing, last meal, witnesses, and one private fact chosen by Vara. It also states whether the Reliquary may capture her final beat.

### **The Office Record**

The office record includes Vara's current seal, active cells, emergency instructions, financial limits, succession claims, and a statement that continued use of the name Vara Vay does not prove bodily survival.

### **Solice's Limit**

Solice will keep one duty from immediate collapse: the body, the Reliquary, the office record, or Eda's safety. Ask the party to choose when the crisis begins. Solice does not protect all four. A divine counterpart of civic duty creates responsibility rather than removing it.

### **Challenging the Possession**

Thosa confirms Eda's consent. A character may still object. Solice answers direct questions and does not punish refusal. Attacking Eda ends the possession after the first damaging hit and raises Pressure with Sava, Ianka, Thosa, and Solice by 1.

*Elra fills a room by becoming impossible to ignore. Mother Solice fills a room by making every neglected obligation suddenly visible.*

## **Vara Vay's Private Measure**

*The red mask comes off only after every exit and witness has been named*

### **Vara Arrives**

Vara enters through the stable arch in her sealing-wax cloak and smooth red mask. Brannoc Tallow walks beside her. Two clerks carry sealed document cases. No Step procession follows. Vara chose Cheval because a holy working house has witnesses who owe her no loyalty.

### **Removing the Mask**

Vara removes the mask only inside the Final-Word Room after Thosa records every person present and Brannoc checks both exits. A character who has never seen her face now sees the small scar crossing her jaw. She allows the body record to include the scar's exact length and the older break beneath one rib.

### **Vara's Request**

Vara consents to the Reliquary capturing her final heartbeat if she dies during the measure. She authorizes one Last Answer: "Who prepared the witnesses?" She refuses any plan to use Refuse Death on her unless she is still alive at the instant of use. She refuses Borrowed Motion for her body under every circumstance.

### What She Admits

Vara admits that she employs actors for isolated appearances. She admits that Step orders can move goods, threaten people, and conceal crimes. She admits that Caldovian is her lover and accomplice. She does not know Lysa is the prepared successor, so she cannot admit that fact.

### What She Offers

Vara offers a temporary truce, the Black Ledger, sealed instructions from Brannoc, and records showing payments made before the current meeting. She asks the party to protect the measure, keep Caldovian alive for questioning, and prevent any person from leaving Cheval under her name unless the body record is checked.

### What Turns Her

Evidence that Caldovian planned her death, moved Step money, prepared succession, or arranged sacrifices turns Vara against him. Moral condemnation alone does not. Vara can become an ally without becoming a lawful or gentle person.

| Vara Bond or Pressure | Opening behavior                                                  |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Bond 2+               | She hands the party one sealed evidence packet without a price.   |
| Pressure 0-1          | She permits weapons if each weapon is recorded.                   |
| Pressure 2            | Brannoc keeps one character separated until evidence is compared. |
| Pressure 3            | Vara opens with accusation and a prepared exit, not negotiation.  |

### Caldovian's Request

*A genuine order, an omitted sentence, and a frightened man who arranged the fear*

#### The Order

Caldovian approaches the party before entering Cheval or sends a private message through the Red Door. Vara's order is genuine. It requires him to surrender relic records, attend alone, and submit to questioning under funerary witness. Caldovian shows the first two instructions and folds the page across the third.

#### His Story

He says Vara plans to use the Obsidian Reliquary to capture her own heartbeat, survive any assassination, and remove every witness who can challenge her. He says Cheval's body rooms will hide the murder. He asks the party to accompany him, expose Vara, and place the Reliquary in neutral custody.

#### What Is True

Vara is preparing for death. She has ordered Caldovian to appear alone. She has kept records of his relic work. She can kill him if the meeting turns violent. The Reliquary can prevent a death. Caldovian is genuinely afraid of losing Vara, the Step, the party, and the future he has arranged.

#### What He Omits

He omits the questioning clause, Vara's consent limits, the two-record principle, the prepared succession papers, the paid witnesses, Lysa's training, and his own plan to acquire the Reliquary. He describes preserved bodily continuity as preserved identity even after Thosa corrects him.

#### Fume State

If the party carries Fume, Caldovian urges one character to bring it openly "because Vara respects only dangers she cannot ignore." If Fume remains at the Priory, with another custodian, or destroyed, he accepts the absence with visible relief. The frame uses altered custody records, a black imitation scabbard, and residue recovered from an earlier carrying frame. If Caldovian has Fume, he keeps it concealed near a prepared exit.

## Key State

If Caldovian has the Key, he has prepared a private passage from the upper clerk room to a rented laundry office. If the party has the Key, he encourages its use in front of witnesses. If the Key remains under secure custody or is destroyed, a breakaway panel behind the wine corridor becomes his escape.

| Current Pressure toward Caldovian | How he argues                                                      |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 0-1                               | He asks for loyalty, protection, and one honest chance to speak.   |
| 2                                 | He admits Step work and claims he stayed close to reduce harm.     |
| 3                                 | He stops asking for trust and argues Vara still must be contained. |

*Play Caldovian as frightened. Prepared fear can still be fear.*

## Investigating Cheval Oratorie

*Every room is working; every route can become part of the frame*

## No Room-Clearing

Cheval contains diners, mourners, cooks, clerks, washers, guards, criminals, and divine attention. Search should change access, evidence, witnesses, or safety. Once a location's useful fact becomes clear, move to the next decision.

| Area               | Useful discovery or action                                          |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Public dining hall | Paid witnesses, horse-meal receipts, and the first prepared threat  |
| Old hearth         | A residue packet hidden behind the Elra painting                    |
| Witness alcoves    | Statements written before the named witnesses arrived               |
| Final-Word Room    | Body record, Vara's consent, and private confrontation              |
| Upper clerk rooms  | Forged messages, Lysa's rehearsal notes, and a laundry-office route |
| Roof bell walk     | Signal cord used to coordinate the false Vara appearance            |
| Body-washing room  | Clean cloth, blood evidence, and a second exit for the body         |
| Wine corridor      | Breakaway panel, staged scabbard, and planted Fume soot             |
| Undercroft         | Reliquary, Rock Elf record, and the blocked service road            |
| Stable arch        | Brannoc's guarded route and a Handshake delivery cart               |

## Ability Checks

Use DC 13 for visible inconsistencies, DC 15 for a prepared concealment, and DC 17 for a professional forgery or rehearsed identity. Tool proficiency can replace Investigation when a relevant tool provides a physical method. A failed check costs time, shifts a witness, or advances the clock; it never erases the only route to a necessary revelation.

## Three Routes to the Coup

The party can prove preparation through documents, witnesses, or physical staging. The Black Ledger and succession papers are documentary proof. Early payments and prewritten testimony are witness proof. Residue packets, false scabbards, marked exits, and rehearsal clothing are physical proof.

## The Bracers

If the Bracers are present, comparison reveals the same hidden obligation across several documents: place Vara, Caldovian, the party, and the Reliquary inside one witnessed story. The Bracers do not identify the author.

## Witness Routes and Handshake Payments

*The public story travels through ordinary jobs before the blood is spilled*

### The Witnesses

Six prepared witnesses occupy normal roles: a horse-meal server, a laundry clerk, a saddler, a mourning cousin, a stable porter, and a roof repairer. Most believe only part of the story. One was paid to remember a threat. One carries a written description of Fume. One expects to see Vara leave after the confrontation. One has been told Caldovian will try to prevent violence.

### Ordinary Payment Routes

No central warehouse funds the operation. A small office liquidated damaged theater assets. A criminal buyer purchased the paper value. A legal importer credited the amount against silk rope. A saddler received rope and sold it normally. The stable porter received a bonus from the saddler. Each step is ordinary enough to survive casual inspection.

### The Delivery Cart

A legal carriage-repair business delivers dark armor plates, red thread, and masterwork thieves' tools to a nearby shop. Hidden among twelve legitimate wheel fittings is the false scabbard used in the frame. The business owner does not know which fitting concealed it.

### Talking to Witnesses

A witness confronted gently admits instructions, payment, or uncertainty. Threatening a witness makes the prepared story stronger. A character who provides food, protection, or a way to return the payment gains Advantage on one check. A witness shown two contradictions becomes helpful without another roll.

| Witness task                   | What disables it                                             |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Remember a threat              | Show the threat was written before the speaker arrived       |
| Identify Fume                  | Reveal the witness has only seen a drawing or false scabbard |
| Place a character near Vara    | Establish the character was recorded elsewhere               |
| See Vara leave                 | Control the stable arch and expose Lysa's prepared role      |
| Hear Caldovian plead for peace | Find the same sentence in rehearsal notes                    |
| Confirm a violent entry        | Use the Cheval ledger to show lawful admission               |

*Most witnesses are not conspirators. Caldovian's method works because ordinary people can be paid to notice one true-looking piece.*

## Vara's Evidence

*The criminal leader has prepared proof because moral authority would not save her*

### The Black Ledger

Vara's Black Ledger records orders she did not issue, early witness payments, false names, relic transfers, and references to "the inheritance." It is not a confession to every Scarlet Step crime. Vara keeps separate books for criminal operations. This ledger exists specifically to track unauthorized uses of her authority.

## Brannoc's Sealed Instructions

Brannoc carries emergency instructions written before the adventure. The instructions name three senior Step figures who may preserve operations if Vara becomes unreachable. Caldovian does not appear among the three. A later inserted page names him as temporary protector. Ink age, folding, and witness sequence expose the insertion.

## The Fume Record

A transfer sheet claims Fume passed through the party's custody after the event at Giftschränk Priory. Compare the sheet with the actual chapter outcome. If Fume was destroyed, the record describes a transfer after the destruction. If Fume remained under secure custody, the witness signature belongs to a clerk who never left the Priory. If Fume went with the party, the record adds an unrecorded return and second release.

## The Six-Part Diagram

A partial ritual diagram uses six terms arranged around a human outline: interpret, consume, pass, remain, borrow, see. The term remain is linked to a black heart. The diagram does not prove Caldovian authored it, but the handwriting resembles his private corrections and the vocabulary matches phrases he used before learning the Reliquary's rules from Thosa.

## Prepared Witness Payments

The ledger lists payments before the current meeting was scheduled. One payment includes the exact phrase "the witnesses must be ready before the last beat." Vara interprets this as a murder plan. Caldovian can claim it referred to emergency succession unless another proof source is present.

| Evidence preserved   | Immediate leverage                             |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Black Ledger         | Cancel one forged-order or payment frame piece |
| Brannoc instructions | Cancel the succession claim or turn Brannoc    |
| Fume record          | Cancel altered custody or discredit residue    |
| Six-part diagram     | Prove the Reliquary serves a larger collection |
| Early payment list   | Turn two prepared witnesses at once            |

*One piece creates suspicion. Two independent pieces establish preparation. Three pieces let a neutral institution reject Caldovian's emergency authority.*

## Lysa Quill and the Continuing Vara

*The long-term replacement meets the woman whose life became her profession*

### Lysa's Role

Lysa is not a temporary actor-double. She has been trained to inherit Vara Vay's visible identity, authority, routines, handwriting, relationships, and expected mistakes. The present plan calls for one short appearance: after the crisis, Lysa leaves through the stable arch in Vara's cloak so witnesses can report that Vara survived, departed, or ordered the party's arrest.

### What Lysa Knows

Lysa knows she is a successor. She does not know the Lady on the Xebec exists. She believes Ra'av is an elderly attendant and historian. Lysa has no harbor, xebec, river-trade, or smuggling connection. She believes the replacement protects the Step from decapitation.

### Meeting Vara

Lysa has rehearsed Vara for years without expecting an unscripted face-to-face meeting. If the party brings both women together and presents proof of the replacement plan, each woman must confront a

different theft. Vara learns her office was designed to outlive her without consent. Lysa learns that a living person occupies the role she was taught to inherit.

### Fracture Check

When Lysa sees Vara alive while holding direct proof of succession, Lysa makes a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, she becomes Stunned until the end of her next turn and cannot willingly assume Vara's role for 10 minutes. On a success, she remains functional but Pressure toward Caldovian and Varo rises by 1.

### Turning Lysa

Compassion, proof, and a path to remain Lysa can turn her. Threatening exposure without protection pushes her toward the prepared role. Asking her to become Vara "for stability" repeats the system that consumed her identity and lowers Bond by 1.

### Rehearsal Material

The upper clerk room contains gait marks, scar diagrams, speech rhythms, copied signatures, and a list of private errors Lysa is supposed to reproduce. One line reads: "A perfect Vara is false. Leave one human mistake." The materials prove preparation before the confrontation.

| Lysa outcome          | Effect on the frame                                            |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| She refuses the role  | Disable the false Vara frame piece                             |
| She testifies as Lysa | Gain one independent proof source                              |
| She appears as Vara   | Witness confusion strengthens the public case                  |
| She escapes unseen    | A second Vara remains available later                          |
| She is killed         | The system loses one successor but not the idea of replacement |

## The Obsidian Reliquary

*Bodily continuity without ownership of the soul*

### Appearance

The Reliquary is a palm-sized black vessel with a seamless lid. A faint cage pattern can be felt beneath the polished surface. When empty it is silent. When holding a final heartbeat, the vessel taps against the bearer's hand with a slow dark-red pulse.

### Attunement

The Reliquary requires attunement. It can hold one final heartbeat. Capturing another releases and destroys the heartbeat already stored.

### Capture the Last Beat

When a living creature dies within 30 feet, the attuned bearer can use a Reaction to capture its final heartbeat. The soul is not captured, delayed, compelled, or returned. The body remains dead.

### Refuse Death

When the bearer or a creature within 30 feet drops to 0 Hit Points, the bearer can use a Reaction to release the stored heartbeat. The creature drops to 1 Hit Point instead, regains 22 (4d8 + 4) Hit Points, and gains one level of Exhaustion after 1 minute. This use does not resurrect a dead creature.

### Last Answer

Release the stored heartbeat into its original corpse. The corpse answers one question in one sentence using information possessed immediately before death. The answer can be mistaken, frightened, incomplete, evasive, or false if the creature believed something false. This is bodily memory, not perfect truth.

## Borrowed Motion

Release the heartbeat into a corpse that died within the previous 24 hours. For 1 minute, the corpse can stand, walk, carry objects, point, and follow simple instructions. It cannot attack, speak beyond sounds the body could make, cast spells, or use special abilities. The effect is not resurrection.

## Vara's Consent

Vara authorizes capture and Last Answer if she dies during this measure. She refuses Borrowed Motion. If another creature dies first, the bearer must choose whether to preserve that heartbeat or keep the Reliquary empty for Vara. Make the choice visible.

## Destruction: Permission to End

A stored heartbeat must be returned to its original body, named remains, or a place the dead creature sincerely recognized as final rest. Valid permission to end must come from prior testimony, Last Answer, or reliable evidence. The bearer opens the vessel and says, "No body is owed another moment." The Reliquary becomes vulnerable to ordinary damage for 1 minute.

*The Reliquary preserves one final physical insistence. Caldovian mistakes that insistence for a self that can survive any performance.*

## The Murder Apparatus

*Six prepared pieces turn confusion into a public verdict*

### Frame Pieces

Track the six frame pieces below. A piece is active until the party disables, disproves, seizes, or publicly contradicts it. Several pieces can remain active even if no murder occurs. Each active piece shapes the public account after the crisis.

| Frame piece              | Prepared purpose                               | How to disable it                                              |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Paid witnesses           | Repeat threats and place characters            | Turn two witnesses or expose prewritten statements             |
| Altered Fume custody     | Keep the party tied to the sword               | Compare with authentic records or chapter autopsies            |
| Fume residue or scabbard | Make wounds and room resemble a sword incident | Seize packet, identify imitation, or control Fume              |
| Forged messages          | Show motive, access, and planning              | Authenticate sender, ink, route, or timing                     |
| Succession papers        | Give Caldovian emergency authority             | Use Brannoc's earlier instructions or reject the inserted page |
| Lysa's Vara role         | Confuse survival, orders, and identity         | Expose Lysa, protect her choice, or control the stable arch    |

### Frame Strength

At the end of the adventure, count active pieces. With 0-1 pieces, the frame fails outside Caldovian's closest allies. With 2-3, the public story remains disputed and the party must defend evidence. With 4-5, guards and Step cells treat the characters as likely perpetrators. With all 6, Caldovian controls the first public account, but the party still leaves with at least two endangered proof sources.

### Do Not Erase Proof

A failed action can damage a ledger, scatter witnesses, burn one page, or make a statement disputed. Failure cannot destroy every route to the truth. If the apparatus activates at full strength, place the Black Ledger, a turned witness, Lysa, Brannoc's instructions, Vara's Last Answer, or the Reliquary within reach.

### No Required Fume

The frame works whether Fume is present, absent, destroyed, or held by another custodian. Authentic Fume makes the scene more dangerous. Absence makes the physical evidence easier to expose. Destruction makes the altered custody record an especially strong contradiction.

*Caldovian does not need one perfect lie. He needs six ordinary facts that point in the same wrong direction.*

## Preparing the Confrontation

*The party can turn a murder scene into a controlled hearing, an escape, or an open fight*

### Choose the Meeting Shape

The characters can arrange a formal hearing in the dining hall, a private interview in the Final-Word Room, separate questioning across speaking tubes, or a guarded exchange in the undercroft. Each shape favors a different priority.

| Meeting shape     | Advantage                              | Risk                                                    |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Public hearing    | Many neutral witnesses and open exits  | Paid witnesses gain easy access                         |
| Private interview | Better control of Vara and Caldovian   | Forged testimony describes what outsiders could not see |
| Separated rooms   | Harder to attack both principals       | Messages and impersonation become more powerful         |
| Undercroft        | Reliquary and body record remain close | One blocked route can trap everyone                     |

## Useful Preparations

Record every weapon. Place Vara and Caldovian more than 30 feet from the Reliquary unless capture is intended. Give the body record and office record to different custodians. Assign one character to the stable arch. Put a neutral clerk on the roof signal cord. Mark the authentic Fume scabbard or record Fume's absence. Move Eda Morn away from likely violence unless Solice's vessel is needed.

### Direct Accusation

A precise accusation forces a response. Ask Caldovian why witnesses were paid before the meeting, why "remain" appears in his handwriting, why Lysa rehearsed Vara, or why succession names him only on a later page. Ask Vara why she used actors, why her organization owns the forged-message routes, or what crimes sit outside the Black Ledger. Neither person can answer every charge cleanly.

### Early Exposure

If the party proves the coup before Clock 5, Caldovian does not attack merely because the chapter expects a climax. He abandons the clean murder, attempts to secure the Reliquary or one evidence packet, and retreats behind public sympathy. Vara may order arrest. Lysa may refuse the role. The Last Beat Crisis still begins if another faction forces violence, but the frame starts with two pieces disabled.

### Leaving

The party can attempt to leave with a person, evidence, or relic. Doing so triggers the crisis only if an opposing faction contests that custody. A lawful departure with Thosa's record can end the immediate meeting without combat. Caldovian then uses the surviving apparatus outside Cheval.

*The adventure does not require the party to choose Vara or Caldovian. A character can protect one body, arrest both conspirators, or refuse every succession claim.*

## The Last Beat Crisis

*Three rounds, four fronts, and more urgent work than one party can complete*

### Starting the Crisis

Begin when the clock reaches 6, a precise accusation leaves Caldovian no clean answer, the party attempts to remove the Reliquary, or a principal orders force. Roll initiative if combat matters. The crisis lasts three rounds or three equivalent action exchanges.

## The Four Fronts

At the start of each round, present all four fronts. A character can address a front through an action, spell, attack, tool check, social check, movement, or a previously prepared safeguard. A successful DC 15 check resolves a front for that round. A strong fictional solution can succeed without a roll. A failed check worsens the front but still reveals what must happen next.

| Front     | If addressed                                                       | If ignored or failed                                              |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Body      | Protect, move, heal, restrain, or separate Vara and Caldovian      | One principal takes 18 (4d8) damage or gains a dangerous position |
| Reliquary | Secure bearer, cabinet, heartbeat choice, or success               | Caldovian, Lysa, or a Step Knife reaches the vessel               |
| Records   | Save Black Ledger, body record, office record, or succession proof | One proof source burns, leaves, or becomes disputed               |
| Witnesses | Stop false Vara, signal, planted threat, or public exit            | One active frame piece becomes locked unless later contradicted   |

## Round One: Separation

Smoke, extinguished lamps, a closing door, or a staged alarm divides the room. Brannoc moves toward Vara. Caldovian appears to move toward the party. Lysa approaches the stable route. Solice's vessel asks which one duty she must hold.

## Round Two: The Prepared Story

A forged message is read aloud, a witness repeats the threat, and succession papers appear. If authentic Fume is present, any spell near the sword uses its normal Smoke Drinker rule. Do not force a FOOM. If Fume is absent, planted soot stains one weapon or doorway.

## Round Three: The Last Beat

One principal faces death, escape, arrest, or disappearance. If Vara dies within range and consent remains valid, the Reliquary bearer chooses whether to capture her final beat. If another creature dies first, the bearer chooses which final beat matters. Make the choice before revealing the future value of Last Answer.

## Ending Early

The crisis ends early if both principals are contained, the party establishes uncontested custody of the Reliquary and records, or Caldovian escapes after the frame collapses. Do not continue combat merely to spend remaining enemy Hit Points.

*Every round asks the party to choose what cannot be allowed to disappear: a person, a heartbeat, a record, or a truthful witness.*

## Violence in a Working Funeral House

*Combat changes evidence, bodies, and exits before it changes territory*

## Encounter Groups

Use only the groups required by the party's choices. Brannoc and two Step Knives protect Vara. Lysa and one Actor Double protect the false exit. Caldovian uses movement, charm, and psychic or radiant force while avoiding a direct killing blow in public. Cheval custodians protect bodies and records rather than either criminal leader.

## Nonlethal Intent

Brannoc, Vara, Thosa, and Cheval staff prefer nonlethal force until a principal faces death. Caldovian prefers other people to deal the decisive wound. Lysa prefers escape and identity control. A character can declare nonlethal melee damage normally.

| Hazard or feature   | Initiative effect or use                                                  |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Hot horse broth     | A tipped pot creates a 10-foot difficult area; DC 13 Dex or 7 fire damage |
| Funeral curtains    | Pull down to create Heavy Obscurement in a 15-foot line                   |
| Body washing table  | Grants half cover and can move a willing creature 10 feet                 |
| Roof bell           | An action rings it; all neutral staff move toward the public door         |
| Wine corridor panel | A creature with the route note escapes to a laundry office                |
| Rock Elf stair      | A cleared route reaches the House road without public witnesses           |

## Fume

If Fume is present, use its printed spell-consumption rule. Every spell within 30 feet risks consumption on a d20 roll of 1. If Fume is full and consumes another spell, it automatically produces a FOOM and ends at 11 charges. The Crooked Coin can alter a connected d20 but cannot choose or reroll the d100 FOOM result.

## Death Saves and the Reliquary

The Reliquary can use Refuse Death before a creature actually dies. Capture the Last Beat occurs only after death. A character cannot use both functions with the same stored beat. Clarify the timing before asking for the choice.

## Protecting the Building

Cheval has no desire to become a dungeon ruin. Extinguishing fire, moving diners, preserving bodies, or repairing an exit can resolve a crisis front and raise Thosa's Bond by 1.

## Defeating a Major NPC

Reducing Vara, Caldovian, Brannoc, or Lysa to 0 Hit Points does not automatically decide authority, custody, or public belief. Record who witnessed the fall, what happened to the body, which documents survived, and who left wearing Vara's cloak.

*A brilliant tactical victory can still lose the record. A quiet evacuation can defeat the murder apparatus without defeating every combatant.*

## Vara Lives, Dies, or Becomes Two People

*Resolve the body first, then the office, then the public story*

### Vara Survives

Vara keeps Brannoc, older crews, original records, and personal authority. Caldovian gains sympathetic cells, altered documents, Lysa or Varo if either remains loyal, and part of the accessible money. The Scarlet Step fractures. Vara may offer the party a limited alliance against Caldovian while continuing criminal operations.

### Vara Dies

If the Reliquary captures her final heartbeat, Last Answer can provide one sentence. Use Vara's chosen question if possible: "Who prepared the witnesses?" Suitable answers include "Caldovian paid before he begged," "Lysa was ready before I arrived," or "The inheritance was written before my death." The answer reflects Vara's final knowledge and can be incomplete.

### Vara Disappears

A hidden route, Key passage, body exchange, or deliberate retreat can remove Vara without proving death. Caldovian claims emergency authority. Brannoc refuses to accept the claim without body or direct order. Lysa may appear as Vara, creating two competing continuities.

## A Second Vara Appears

If Lysa completes the role, witnesses report Vara leaving. The body record can disprove bodily survival only if the party controls access to the actual Vara or corpse. The office record can reject Lysa's authority without exposing every detail of the replacement system. The Lady on the Xebec remains unaffected and unseen.

## Caldovian Is Exposed

If three independent proof sources survive and the party publicly links Caldovian to preparation, neutral Cheval officials reject his succession claim. He retreats through the best remaining route and describes the entire event as Vara's failed purge. He becomes more openly hostile but retains allies who believe the evidence was produced by criminals.

## Caldovian Dies

The campaign continues. His notes, substitutes, prepared contacts, and planned performance remain. Elra may notice a beautiful public death. Mother Solice insists upon body verification and a plain record. A surviving lieutenant can move the relic plan forward, but the final campaign becomes dismantling Caldovian's machinery rather than confronting the man.

| Outcome                 | Who controls the first Step response                                      |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Vara alive and visible  | Vara and Brannoc                                                          |
| Vara dead, Lysa hidden  | Caldovian or Varo claims emergency control                                |
| Vara dead, Lysa appears | Lysa controls visible orders; deeper Red Fist continuity remains          |
| Vara missing            | Competing cells wait for proof or act locally                             |
| Caldovian exposed       | Vara holds older cells; Caldovian holds public allies and prepared routes |

## Resolution, Custody, and the Scent After Blood

*Settle the body, office, relic, record, and road to the next crisis*

### Relic Custody

The party can keep the Reliquary, leave it with Thosa, transfer it to Giftschränk Priory, entrust it temporarily to Sava and Ianca, allow Vara to retain it, or lose it to Caldovian. A valid transfer names any stored heartbeat, consent limits, current bearer, destination, witnesses, and permitted uses. An empty Reliquary still requires a custody record.

| Custodian                   | Immediate consequence                                                                  |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The party                   | Powerful protection from death; every faction gains a reason to pursue the characters. |
| Thosa or Giftschränk Priory | Funerary legitimacy or stronger security; consent disputes continue.                   |
| Sava and Ianca              | Mother Solice gains temporary custody under exact written limits.                      |
| Vara                        | She keeps survival leverage and remains near the party.                                |
| Caldovian                   | He gains bodily continuity for Fume or a ritual substitute.                            |
| Destroyed                   | The finale loses reliable continuity; a fragment preserves one sensation               |

## People, Proof, and Payment

Showing Brannoc direct proof raises his Bond by 1 and Pressure toward Caldovian by 1. Protecting Lysa's right to remain Lysa raises her Bond by 1. Honest body and office records raise Thosa's Bond by 1. Cheval pays 75 gp per character for protecting staff, bodies, and records. Vara may add 100 gp per

character for recovering the Black Ledger or preventing her murder; accepting creates a public connection.

### Evidence Carried Forward

Before the chapter ends, place at least two proof sources in the party's reach: Black Ledger pages, Brannoc's instructions, authenticated Fume records, the six-part diagram, Lysa's rehearsal material, a turned witness, Vara's Last Answer, or a Cheval record rejecting Caldovian's succession. Mark each source secure, disputed, damaged, or missing.

### Milestone

Characters reach 7th level after the murder apparatus is broken, survived, or publicly complicated; the Reliquary has recorded or deliberately refused custody; and at least one meaningful proof source survives. Vara need not die, Caldovian need not be exposed, and public exoneration need not be complete.

### The Perfumery Clue

A payment list, residue packet, or rehearsal cloth carries goat milk, bitter orange, smoked salt, and blue mineral dust. Zam Zam recognizes the cleaning scent of a respectable Glass Coast perfumery run by "glass merchants." Private rooms serve the House of the Mother. Frightened, guilty, and still affectionate toward the troupe, she can reveal the address through confession, a receipt, or a warning. Her sect used the murder confusion to move information about the Crooked Coin and Mirror of the Unlived Moment.

### Lead to Adventure Five

After several days of witness protection, custody work, and contradictory Scarlet Step orders, the party reaches the perfumery. Zam Zam is inside, drunk and waiting. Cornelia Van Ghoul is already moving. Sava and Ianca arrive with Solice authority. The Coin at the Unlived Hour begins with perfume, doctrine, and a friend who has decided whom she will betray.

| Lead               | Route to the perfumery                                        |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Payment list       | Importer credit names the legal business.                     |
| Residue or cloth   | Scent, mineral dust, or laundry mark identifies the workroom. |
| Witness or Zam Zam | A delivery route or direct address leads to the shop.         |

*The strongest result preserves a living person, a truthful record, and a chosen custody. Advance to 7th level.*

### Thosa, Eda, and Cheval Staff

*Table-ready statistics for funerary custody and limited divine possession*

#### Thosa Lham

*Medium Humanoid (Elf), lawful neutral • Challenge Rating 5 (1,800 XP) • PB +3*

AC 17; HP 85 (10d8 + 40); Speed 30 ft.

STR 12 (+1), DEX 12 (+1), CON 18 (+4), INT 15 (+2), WIS 20 (+5), CHA 14 (+2)

Saving Throws Wis +8, Cha +5; Skills Insight +8, Medicine +8, Perception +8, Religion +5; Darkvision 60 ft.

#### TRAITS

**Custodian's Authority.** Creatures have Disadvantage on Deception checks made to conceal a corpse's identity, condition, custody, or treatment from Thosa.

**Spellcasting.** Spell save DC 16. At will: Guidance, Spare the Dying, Thaumaturgy. 3/day each: Aid, Gentle Repose, Protection from Evil and Good, Speak with Dead. 1/day each: Death Ward, Dispel Magic, Revivify.

#### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Thosa makes two Funerary Staff attacks.

**Funerary Staff (+2 Magic Weapon).** Melee Attack: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage, plus 9 (2d8) radiant damage against Undead.

**Name the Trespass (Recharge 5-6).** One Undead or possessing creature within 60 feet makes a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, it is Incapacitated until the end of Thosa's next turn.

### REACTIONS

**Final Witness.** When a creature within 30 feet dies, it may speak one sentence. This does not capture, delay, compel, or return the soul.

### Eda Morn, Solice's Vessel

*Medium Humanoid, lawful neutral • Challenge Rating 5 (1,800 XP) • PB +3*

AC 16; HP 72 (16d8); Speed 25 ft.

STR 8 (-1), DEX 10 (+0), CON 10 (+0), INT 18 (+4), WIS 20 (+5), CHA 18 (+4)

Saving Throws Int +7, Wis +8, Cha +7; Skills History +7, Insight +8, Investigation +7, Religion +7

### TRAITS

**Willing Vessel.** Eda is not Undead. While Solice possesses her, Eda has Advantage on saving throws against Charmed, Frightened, and possession. The possession ends if Eda chooses, if she becomes Unconscious, or after 1 hour.

**Divine Counterpart.** Damage cannot reduce Eda below 1 Hit Point while the possession continues unless the attacker is a deity, artifact bearer, or creature of CR 15 or higher. The first damaging hit still ends the possession.

### ACTIONS

**Quiet Command.** One creature within 60 feet makes a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or becomes unable to take Reactions and must speak only literal statements until the end of its next turn.

**Continue the Work (Recharge 5-6).** Up to three willing creatures within 30 feet move up to 15 feet and can each draw, stow, carry, or secure one object.

**Separate Body and Office (1/Day).** One illusion, disguise, possession, or identity-changing effect within 60 feet is suppressed until the end of Eda's next turn. Affected creatures and objects remain physically unchanged but every observer perceives the difference between body and performed role.

### REACTIONS

**Hold One Duty.** When a body, record, relic, or willing creature within 30 feet would be moved, destroyed, or taken, Eda prevents that event until the end of the current turn. She can use this Reaction once during the adventure.

### Cheval Custodian

*Medium Humanoid, any alignment • Challenge Rating 2 (450 XP) • PB +2*

AC 15; HP 44 (8d8 + 8); Speed 30 ft.

STR 13 (+1), DEX 12 (+1), CON 12 (+1), INT 14 (+2), WIS 16 (+3), CHA 13 (+1)

Skills Insight +5, Medicine +5, Perception +5, Religion +4

### TRAITS

**Body Before Evidence.** The custodian has Advantage on checks and saves made to protect, identify, move, or preserve a body.

**Recorded Admission.** A creature lawfully admitted by the custodian has Advantage on one later check made to disprove a violent-entry claim.

### ACTIONS

**Funeral Staff (+1 Magic Weapon).** Melee Attack: +4 to hit, reach 10 ft. Hit: 6 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

**Clear the Room (Recharge 5-6).** Up to three willing creatures within 30 feet move up to 10 feet without provoking Opportunity Attacks.

## REACTIONS

**Cover the Record.** When a document or Tiny object within 5 feet would be damaged or taken, the custodian moves it 5 feet and grants it total cover until the start of the custodian's next turn.

### Vara Vay and Brannoc Tallow

*The visible leader and the Door who protects her before the idea of her*

#### Vara Vay

*Medium Humanoid, neutral • Challenge Rating 8 (3,900 XP) • PB +3*

AC 18; HP 110 (13d8 + 52); Speed 30 ft.

STR 11 (+0), DEX 20 (+5), CON 18 (+4), INT 16 (+3), WIS 16 (+3), CHA 19 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Wis +6, Cha +7; Skills Acrobatics +8, Deception +10, Insight +9, Investigation +6, Perception +6, Persuasion +7, Stealth +8

#### TRAITS

**Prepared Ground.** Inside a location Vara inspected, she cannot be Surprised and adds +3 to Initiative.

**Command the Step.** Allied Step creatures within 30 feet that can hear Vara gain +1 AC and have Advantage on checks made to escape a Grapple or Restrained condition.

**Evasion.** On a successful Dexterity save for half damage, Vara takes no damage; on a failure, she takes half damage.

#### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Vara makes three Scarlet Rapier attacks.

**Scarlet Rapier.** Melee Attack: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage. Once per turn, Vara deals an extra 10 (3d6) damage if an ally is within 5 feet of the target or Vara has Advantage.

**Remove the Witness (Recharge 5-6).** Vara moves up to Speed without provoking Opportunity Attacks and makes one Scarlet Rapier attack. On a hit, the target cannot take Reactions and cannot speak above a whisper until the end of its next turn.

#### BONUS ACTIONS

**Hidden Exit.** Vara takes the Disengage or Hide action.

#### REACTIONS

**Change the Order.** When an ally within 30 feet is targeted by an attack, Vara moves that ally up to 10 feet. If the ally leaves the attack's range, the attack misses.

#### Brannoc Tallow

*Medium Humanoid, lawful neutral • Challenge Rating 6 (2,300 XP) • PB +3*

AC 18; HP 119 (14d8 + 56); Speed 30 ft.

STR 18 (+4), DEX 12 (+1), CON 18 (+4), INT 11 (+0), WIS 15 (+2), CHA 12 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +7, Con +7, Wis +5; Skills Athletics +7, Insight +5, Intimidation +4, Perception +5

#### TRAITS

**Bodyguard.** Creatures adjacent to Brannoc have half cover against attacks made by creatures he can see.

**Hold the Passage.** Brannoc has Advantage against being moved or knocked Prone. A creature hit by his Opportunity Attack has Speed 0 for the rest of the turn.

**Read the Room.** Brannoc has Advantage on Insight checks to determine who is in immediate physical danger.

#### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Brannoc makes two Guard Blade attacks.

**Guard Blade.** Melee Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

**Driving Blow (Recharge 5-6).** Melee Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 17 (3d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage, and the target makes a DC 15 Strength saving throw or is pushed 15 feet and knocked Prone.

## REACTIONS

**Interpose.** When a creature within 5 feet is hit, Brannoc becomes the target and reduces the damage by 7 (1d10 + 2).

### Caldovian and Lysa Quill

*The author of the prepared story and the woman trained to continue it*

#### Caldovian, Performer

*Medium Humanoid, chaotic neutral • Challenge Rating 8 (3,900 XP) • PB +3*

AC 16; HP 112 (15d8 + 45); Speed 30 ft.

STR 9 (-1), DEX 18 (+4), CON 16 (+3), INT 15 (+2), WIS 12 (+1), CHA 20 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +6, Wis +4, Cha +8; Skills Deception +11, Insight +4, Performance +11, Persuasion +11, Religion +5

#### TRAITS

**Fragile Brilliance.** When Caldovian starts his turn below half Hit Points, his Speed increases by 10 feet and Opportunity Attacks against him have Disadvantage.

**Turn Reality into Theater.** Once per round when a creature within 60 feet fails an ability check or saving throw, Caldovian gives one creature Advantage on its next check or attack before the end of the next turn.

**Spellcasting.** Spell save DC 16, +8 to hit. At will: Friends, Minor Illusion, Vicious Mockery. 3/day each: Charm Person, Dissonant Whispers, Healing Word, Misty Step, Suggestion. 1/day each: Dimension Door, Greater Invisibility, Hypnotic Pattern.

#### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Caldovian makes two Silvered Rapier attacks or one attack and one Steal the Scene.

**Silvered Rapier.** Melee Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing plus 7 (2d6) psychic damage.

**Steal the Scene.** One creature within 60 feet makes a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, it is Charmed until the end of its next turn and must use its Reaction, if available, to move up to half Speed toward a point Caldovian chooses.

#### BONUS ACTIONS

**Cue the Entrance.** Caldovian teleports up to 20 feet to an unoccupied space he can see adjacent to a doorway, curtain, witness, or light source.

#### REACTIONS

**That Was the Cue.** When a creature within 30 feet moves willingly, Caldovian moves up to 15 feet without provoking Opportunity Attacks.

### Lysa Quill

*Medium Humanoid, neutral • Challenge Rating 7 (2,900 XP) • PB +3*

AC 17; HP 88 (16d8 + 16); Speed 30 ft.

STR 9 (-1), DEX 19 (+4), CON 12 (+1), INT 16 (+3), WIS 13 (+1), CHA 20 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Int +6, Cha +8; Skills Deception +11, Insight +4, Performance +11, Persuasion +8, Sleight of Hand +7, Stealth +7

#### TRAITS

**Perfect Rehearsal.** After observing a Humanoid for 10 minutes, Lysa has Advantage to imitate voice, posture, habits, and expected knowledge. A DC 18 Intelligence (Investigation) check exposes the performance.

**Sneak Attack (1/Turn).** Lysa deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage on a weapon hit when she has Advantage or an ally is within 5 feet of the target and she lacks Disadvantage.

**Fracture.** When confronted by Vara while holding direct proof of replacement, Lysa makes a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, she is Stunned until the end of her next turn and cannot assume Vara's role for 10 minutes.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Lysa makes two Concealed Blade attacks.

**Concealed Blade.** Melee or Ranged Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft. Hit: 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

**False Opening (Recharge 5-6).** One creature within 30 feet makes a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or uses its Reaction to move up to half Speed toward a point Lysa indicates.

### BONUS ACTIONS

**Become Vara.** Lysa draws or discards one prepared costume piece and takes the Hide action. Until exposed, creatures without personal evidence have Disadvantage on Insight checks to challenge the role.

### REACTIONS

**Wrong Woman.** When targeted by an attack while an Actor Double or similarly dressed ally is within 5 feet, Lysa imposes Disadvantage on the attack.

### Prepared Witness

*Medium Humanoid, any alignment • Challenge Rating 1/2 (100 XP) • PB +2*

AC 12; HP 22 (4d8 + 4); Speed 30 ft.

STR 12 (+1), DEX 12 (+1), CON 12 (+1), INT 11 (+0), WIS 13 (+1), CHA 15 (+2)

Skills Deception +4, Perception +3, Performance +4

### TRAITS

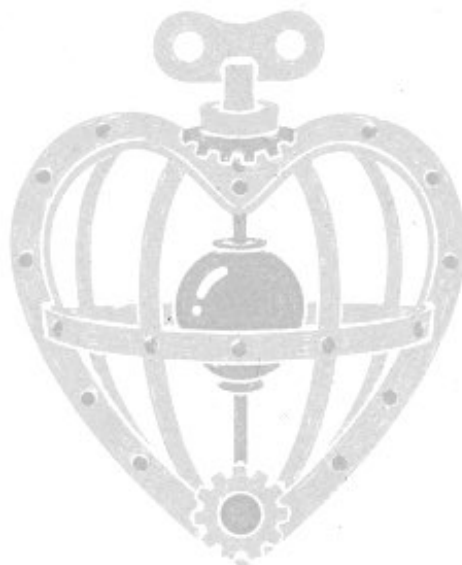
**One Prepared Fact.** The witness has Advantage on one Deception or Performance check involving a rehearsed sight, phrase, or time. After seeing two contradictions, the witness loses this trait.

**Ordinary Role.** Until the witness attacks or is exposed, creatures have Disadvantage on checks made to identify the witness as part of an operation.

### ACTIONS

**Improvised Weapon.** Melee Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 3 (1d4 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

**Repeat the Story.** One creature within 30 feet makes a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or has Disadvantage on its next check made to contradict the prepared account.



## CHAPTER 11 — The Coin at the Unlived Hour

Adventure Five for characters of 7th level

### Adventure Summary

The trail from Cheval Oratorie leads to the Bitter Orange Perfumery, a respectable business operated by people who use the term glass merchants. The public rooms sell perfume, scented oil, soap, colored bottles, and funeral washes. Private rooms serve a House of the Mother cell that rejects resurrection for every person, not only for members of the sect.

Zam Zam waits inside, drunk, frightened, and guilty. She loves Li'l Snoot, Bottle Eater, the Red Door troupe, and several people she has betrayed. Her affection was never false. Her doctrine is stronger. She helped the cell identify when the Crooked Coin and Mirror of the Unlived Moment could be moved without Vara, the Priory, or Mother Solice seeing the whole route.

Lady Cornelia Van Ghoul arrives to remove both relics. She wants the Coin because deferred consequence proves that failure cannot be erased. She wants the Mirror because immediate consequence suits her genius for the next ten seconds. She does not work for Caldovian and has never collaborated with him. She intends to keep both relics away from resurrectionists, the Priory, Caldovian, and any authority she considers willing to turn death into property.

Sava and Ianca arrive under Solice authority. Cornelia uses the Coin whenever play gives her a meaningful failed d20 test. Every use creates Luck Debt. The Mirror and Coin enter resonance, beginning the Unlived Hour. Sava and Ianca hold Cornelia while the party pursues the Mirror, protects civilians, secures evidence, or changes the custody outcome. Cornelia usually escapes without the Coin and later drowns in her bath when debt is collected. Her family removes the body before dawn.

### Adventure Purpose

This adventure makes borrowed success visible. The characters can use powerful relics, refuse easy victories, expose a friend's betrayal, and decide whether immediate safety justifies later harm. Powerful allies create the opening; the party decides who gets the Mirror, who carries the Coin's debt, and whether Cornelia leaves the perfumery alive and free.

| Element            | At the Table                                              |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Relics             | Crooked Coin and Mirror of the Unlived Moment             |
| Primary location   | Bitter Orange Perfumery and hidden House rooms            |
| Apparent objective | Raid a cult front and recover two stolen relics           |
| Actual decision    | Choose immediate success, later debt, truth, and custody  |
| Level              | Begin at 7th level; advance to 8th level after resolution |

*The Crooked Coin does not erase failure. It moves failure somewhere the successful person does not have to look at yet.*

## From Cheval to Bitter Orange

*The previous chapter determines who trusts the party and who arrives first*

### The Perfumery Clue

A receipt, residue packet, rehearsal cloth, or confession from Zam Zam carries the same cleaning scent: goat milk, bitter orange, smoked salt, and blue mineral dust. The combination belongs to the Bitter Orange Perfumery, a legal business that fills colored glass bottles, supplies funeral washes, and sells strong masking scents to theaters, laundries, hospitals, and criminal clients.

### Several Days Later

Allow several days for witness protection, funerary records, repairs, and the consequences of Chapter 10. The delay is not inactivity. The House cell moves papers, Cornelia travels to the Border City, Sava obtains Solice authority, and Caldovian begins describing the perfumery as proof that every faction now needs him.

### What the Party Knows

The missing objects from the opening story were the Crooked Coin and Mirror of the Unlived Moment. Both relics were removed from a concealed compartment before the campaign began. The perfumery scent links the theft route to the House cell. The House rejects resurrection absolutely. Cornelia is a Glass Coast noblewoman, a terrifying swordmaster, and the sect's most visible champion.

### What the Party Does Not Know

Zam Zam gave the cell schedules and cleaning routes. Aliraia prepared a transfer through legal perfume shipments. Cornelia intends to move the Mirror immediately and decide the Coin's fate later. Caldovian has arranged no alliance with Cornelia; he wants the party to believe every enemy belongs to one conspiracy because a single conspiracy makes him look necessary.

| Chapter 10 outcome                    | Opening change                                                                   |
|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Vara survives and trusts the party    | She supplies a sealed route ledger and keeps Step agents away for one hour.      |
| Vara survives but distrusts the party | A red-masked courier watches the street and reports every public mistake.        |
| Lysa assumes Vara's office            | Conflicting Step orders surround the business; no order authorizes a slave raid. |
| Vara dies or disappears               | Handshake operators begin liquidating nearby leases and records.                 |
| Reliquary with the party              | The Mirror reacts to its faint heartbeat if both objects come within 60 feet.    |
| Caldovian exposed                     | He offers information through an intermediary and avoids the scene.              |
| Caldovian still trusted               | He asks to accompany the party and accepts refusal with visible hurt.            |

*Do not make the clue depend upon Zam Zam confessing in Chapter 10. A receipt, residue sample, witness, or Handshake payment route reaches the same address.*

**The House of the Mother**

*A divine title, a sincere heresy, and a doctrine capable of atrocity*

**The Heresy**

The House of the Mother teaches “Peaceful Life and Glorious Death,” reversing the orthodox Path of Glorious Life and Peaceful Death. Members reject resurrection entirely. A dead person must remain dead because risk, courage, sacrifice, grief, and consent lose meaning when another person can reverse the ending.

**Mother Solice**

Mother Solice is divine, mummified dignity: quiet where Elra is loud, civic duty where Elra is divine anger, continuity where Elra is appetite and immediate passion. The House claims Solice as patron while rejecting Solice’s authority to define necessary exceptions. Solice considers this theft of her title and distortion of her duty.

**The Necessary Undead**

House doctrine attacks the orthodox faith’s central hypocrisy. Elran worshipers condemn undeath while protecting Solice as a necessary Undead proto-lich. Cornelia calls the exception proof that institutions always preserve a favored corpse and condemn every competing exception. This criticism is powerful. Her conclusion—that no resurrection can ever be permitted—is still fanaticism.

**What the Cell Does**

The Bitter Orange cell counsels mourners, prevents coerced resurrection, hides bodies from wealthy families, destroys resurrection contracts, and sometimes saves a dead person from magical exploitation. The same cell steals relics, falsifies consent, kidnaps custodians, and may kill a living rescuer to keep a dead stranger from returning.

**Using the House**

Do not write every member as a cackling cultist. A funeral washer may have joined after a noble resurrected an unwilling heir. A clerk may protect poor families from resurrection debt. A guard may believe Cornelia’s sword prevents a worse violation. Give each member one duty worth respecting and one boundary the doctrine has damaged.

| House belief                      | Practical consequence                                                      |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Death completes consent           | No later priest, relative, ruler, or lover may reverse it.                 |
| Resurrection makes risk dishonest | Members oppose resurrection even when a soul would willingly return.       |
| Bodies are not property           | The cell steals corpses from owners who claim contractual control.         |
| Solice is a contradiction         | The sect honors her dignity and rejects her protected undeath.             |
| Immediate courage is sacred       | Cornelia prizes decisive acts and ignores long institutional consequences. |

*Cornelia can be correct about a hypocrisy and still be wrong about what everyone else must be forced to do.*

## Adventure Flow and Three Tracks

*The business closes, the Coin lends success, and the Mirror stops showing the present*

### Expected Flow

1. The party approaches the working perfumery through law, stealth, purchase, employment, or criminal contacts.
2. Public workers and customers establish that the front is a real business.
3. Zam Zam asks for a private conversation, attempts to delay the party, or is found in the blending room.
4. Evidence reveals the hidden House rooms and the planned relic transfer.
5. Sava and Ianca arrive with Solice authority.
6. Cornelia and Aliraia enter through separate routes.
7. The Crooked Coin produces at least one borrowed success unless the party prevents Cornelia from reaching it.
8. Coin and Mirror resonance begins the Unlived Hour.
9. Sava and Ianca hold Cornelia while the party chooses among pursuit, rescue, evidence, custody, and direct intervention.
10. The party resolves each relic separately.
11. Cornelia escapes, is captured, dies, or accepts a settlement.
12. The surviving evidence points toward Caldovian's Circle of Embers production.

### Closing Track

Start at 0. Advance when the party makes a public accusation without evidence, leaves a watched exit uncontrolled, spends more than 30 minutes without changing access, or permits a House member to complete a transfer task. Do not advance for careful investigation, protecting a worker, or changing approach after a failed check.

| Closing | Development                                                              |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 0       | Business open; both relics remain in hidden custody.                     |
| 1       | Public customers are politely cleared from one room.                     |
| 2       | Bottle crates and funeral washes begin leaving through legal carriers.   |
| 3       | Zam Zam receives a signal to delay the party for ten minutes.            |
| 4       | Aliraia moves the Mirror into a false shipment case.                     |
| 5       | Cornelia enters; House doors close and Solice authority is rejected.     |
| 6       | Transfer begins. Start the Unlived Hour at the first Coin or Mirror use. |

### Luck Debt Track

Record every use of Borrowed Success beside the beneficiary's name. Cornelia begins with 0 Luck Debt. She uses the Coin only after a real failed d20 test occurs during play. The count is not predetermined. Debt remains after the Coin changes custody, becomes suppressed, or is destroyed.

### Unlived Hour Track

The Hour begins when Borrowed Success is used within 60 feet of the Mirror, when the Mirror expends its final charge near the Coin, or when Closing reaches 6. Run six stages in order. Outside the perfumery, less than one minute passes.

*Use clocks to make factions act, not to punish discussion. A clever action can hold, reverse, or skip a listed development when the fiction supports it.*

## Bitter Orange Perfumery

*A profitable business with illegal rooms rather than a fake shop waiting to be raided*

### Public Business

Bitter Orange occupies a narrow corner building near laundries, apothecaries, funeral suppliers, and legal import offices. The street level sells finished perfume, oils, soap, colored bottles, corks, sealing wax, and body washes. The rear yard receives goat milk, citrus peel, salt, charcoal, alcohol, and glassware. Most employees perform ordinary work.

### The Glass Merchants

The owners use the term glass merchants because bottles, stoppers, mirrored labels, and shipping cases provide most revenue. Perfume creates repeat customers. House business hides inside bottle orders, funeral contracts, destroyed consent forms, and shipments with one illegal compartment among dozens of legal containers.

### Daily Life

A clerk argues about bottle sizes. A washer scrubs returned funeral jars. A perfumer tests bitter orange against smoked salt. A carrier complains that twelve legal crates are delayed by one disputed seal. A grieving family selects a wash for a body. Violence here endangers people who know nothing about Cornelia or the relics.

### No Central Cellar

The House does not keep every record, body, relic, or member in this building. This site holds the Coin and Mirror only because the transfer window is brief. Other cells use funeral homes, estates, legal offices, ships, and private households. Destroying Bitter Orange harms one route and exposes one network; it does not end the heresy.

### Scent as Procedure

Every room has a scent code. Bitter orange marks public business. Goat milk marks body care. Smoked salt marks documents awaiting destruction. Blue mineral dust marks a room where magical residue must be tracked. Mixing two codes without authorization alerts trained staff.

| Public person        | What he or she knows                                                  |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mera, front clerk    | Which rooms are rented, which crates are legal, and who paid cash.    |
| Dovan, bottle washer | A mirror case came back empty and much heavier.                       |
| Sal, carrier         | One legal shipment has changed destination three times.               |
| Anca, perfumer       | Zam Zam has been drinking bitter concentrate instead of wine.         |
| Orel, funeral buyer  | A House counselor protected his wife's body from a coercive contract. |

*The business is not guilty as a single object. Every room contains a different mixture of labor, belief, ignorance, and crime.*

## Perfumery Areas

*Every useful location changes access, custody, or the transfer clock*

### Running the Location

Do not clear the building room by room. Choose the areas reached through the party's approach and move when each area's useful fact becomes clear. A locked door should offer law, tools, disguise, social leverage, a carrier route, or force.

| Area           | Useful fact, danger, or action                          |
|----------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| I. Public shop | Customer cover, bottle records, and innocent witnesses. |

| Area                   | Useful fact, danger, or action                                |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2. Glass counter       | False-bottom cases; DC 14 Investigation or glassworker tools. |
| 3. Blending room       | Zam Zam, strong fumes, and the scent-code ledger.             |
| 4. Wash room           | Funeral contracts, body-care records, and clean water.        |
| 5. Bottle yard         | Legal carriers, roof access, and twelve similar crates.       |
| 6. Account office      | Transfer payments, forged consent, and a Caldovian purchase.  |
| 7. Blue room           | Mirror stand, covered walls, and Unlived Hour anchor.         |
| 8. Salt room           | Documents prepared for destruction; choking dust hazard.      |
| 9. Quiet room          | House counseling, doctrine texts, and a concealed stair.      |
| 10. Underfloor passage | Cornelia's entry, lanca's hold point, and an old drain.       |
| 11. Roof drying walk   | Mirror pursuit, bottle lines, and city sightlines.            |
| 12. Bath chamber       | Cornelia's private recovery room and later death echo.        |

### Scent Hazards

A creature that enters the blending room during a spill makes a DC 14 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the creature is Poisoned until the end of its next turn. A wet cloth, a wind effect, or opening both roof vents grants Advantage. Fire in the room creates a 15-foot flash: DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, 14 (4d6) fire damage on a failure, half on a success.

### Glass Hazards

Broken bottle lanes count as Difficult Terrain. A creature forced 10 feet or more across broken glass makes a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or takes 7 (2d6) slashing damage and loses 10 feet of Speed until it receives healing or a creature uses an action with a healer's kit.

*The strongest route may be a worker's route: receive a crate, wash a bottle, reconcile an invoice, or ask why a legal shipment keeps changing destination.*

### Approaching the Perfumery

*Open the investigation before Cornelia closes the building*

### Solice Warrant

Sava can obtain a narrow divine-civic order to inspect resurrection-consent records and magical body washes. The order does not authorize seizure of every document or relic. Public workers cooperate. House members delay, separate records, and dispute Solice's standing as an Undead authority.

### Scarlet Step Route

Vara or Lysa can supply a delivery reference tied to red thread, dark armor, or a legal bottle carrier. The route enters through the yard. A Step order creates access but also allows House members to claim the party is conducting criminal seizure rather than lawful recovery.

### Customer Route

Characters can buy funeral wash, stage scent, soap, or bottles. A purchase reveals staff behavior, public exits, and scent codes. A character with a funerary, theatrical, merchant, or criminal background receives Advantage on one relevant check.

### Employment or Carrier Route

A short shift unloading bottles, repairing a cart, testing seals, or reconciling invoices provides ordinary access. The work should take one scene and reveal one concrete inconsistency. Do not require the party to perform a full day of fictional labor before reaching the adventure.

## Covert Entry

Roof vents, the underfloor drain, a neighboring laundry wall, and a false shipment case provide covert routes. Use DC 14 for ordinary locks, DC 16 for a professional concealed entry, and DC 18 for the Blue Room seal. Failure changes position, alerts one worker, or advances Closing; it does not end the approach.

## Direct Raid

A violent entry starts Closing at 3, clears most customers, and gives Cornelia time to enter through the underfloor passage. It also prevents several innocent injuries if the party announces a clear evacuation before breaching. A raid is not automatically wrong; it is expensive and visible.

| Evidence route     | Revelation                                                              |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Invoices           | A mirror case and Coin-sized insurance entry share a false destination. |
| Scent ledger       | Zam Zam signed for blue dust and smoked salt after Chapter 10.          |
| Carrier statements | Aliraia changed the legal shipment without touching the goods.          |
| House text         | Cornelia ordered retrieval, not cooperation with Caldovian.             |
| Caldovian purchase | He bought stage perfume and mirrored labels for Circle of Embers.       |

*Give the party three routes to the transfer plan: documents, workers, and physical cases.*

## Zam Zam

*A friend who loves the troupe and has decided which belief matters more*

### Finding Her

Zam Zam sits in the blending room beside a stoppered bottle of bitter concentrate and a cup of water she has forgotten to drink. She is not helplessly intoxicated. She is using alcohol and perfume fumes to slow panic while waiting for the people she betrayed.

### What She Did

Zam Zam identified Cheval cleaning scents, copied one funeral schedule, passed the perfumery address to a House courier, and confirmed that the Mirror and Coin had separate custodians. She did not plant the Chapter 10 murder evidence. She did not collaborate with Caldovian. She gave Cornelia a transfer window because she believes both relics will become tools for reversing death if an orthodox custodian keeps the relics.

### What She Loves

She loves Li'l Snoot and Bottle Eater. She loves rehearsals, shared meals, costume repairs, and the Red Door's ugly backstage rooms. She does not want either friend arrested, converted, resurrected, or used as leverage. A character who treats that love as false loses her attention immediately.

### What She Wants

Zam Zam wants the party to leave for ten minutes. She promises that no one at the Red Door will be harmed. She asks the characters to let Cornelia remove the Mirror and offers the Coin's location in exchange. This is a real compromise, not a trick: Cornelia prefers both, but Zam Zam believes the Coin is too dangerous to move.

### Breaking the Delay

A character who shows that Caldovian bought mirrored labels, proves Cornelia plans to abandon local workers, or offers protected custody for Li'l Snoot and Bottle Eater may change Zam Zam's choice. No single Persuasion roll erases doctrine. Use two strong contradictions, one costly promise, or one act that protects a worker without gaining advantage.

## If Violence Begins

Zam Zam protects public workers first, House records second, and Cornelia's route third. She fights friends only to restrain, disarm, or delay. If Cornelia orders a civilian death, Zam Zam turns against the order without abandoning the doctrine.

| Zam Zam response                        | Result                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Party condemns her as a liar            | She ends the conversation and advances Closing by I.    |
| Party names her real affection          | She reveals one safe exit or one transfer case.         |
| Li'l Snoot or Bottle Eater is protected | She reveals the Blue Room stair.                        |
| Party offers neutral custody            | She gives the Coin location but not the Mirror route.   |
| Party proves Caldovian's purchase       | She admits the House underestimated his separate plan.  |
| Party accepts a meaningful loss         | She stops delaying and asks what record should survive. |

*The betrayal hurts because the love was real. Do not solve the scene by declaring that affection secretly defeated belief all along.*

## Aliraia and the Transfer

*Cornelia's valet turns conviction into schedules, clothing, exits, and bodies*

### Aliraia's Role

Aliraia is Cornelia's valet, doctrinal logistics officer, and quiet custodian of clothing, witnesses, schedules, exits, and bodies. She makes Cornelia's impossible certainty materially possible. Aliraia does not seek attention and does not mistake service for weakness.

### The Legal Shipment

Twelve bottle crates leave the yard. Eleven contain legal glassware, funeral wash, or stage scent. One has a mirrored inner lining and a frame that fits the Mirror of the Unlived Moment. A second case can conceal the Crooked Coin inside a cork-testing weight. Aliraia changes destinations through ordinary invoices rather than a single false manifest.

### The Route

The legal carrier goes to a funeral supplier. A House courier receives one case there. A private carriage moves it to a noble guesthouse. Cornelia leaves by another route. No participant except Aliraia sees the entire chain.

### Why the Plan Breaks

The Mirror dislikes the case. Reflections in nearby bottles move early. The Coin balances upright inside the testing weight. Sava's warrant reaches the front room. Caldovian's mirrored-label purchase creates an unexpected record. Zam Zam has delayed rather than removed the party.

### Talking to Aliraia

Aliraia respects a precise custody plan, a named body custodian, or a serious accepted loss. She ignores moral performance. A character who proves the carrier will be blamed for House business can persuade her to reroute public workers before the crisis. She still attempts to move the Mirror.

### If Captured

Aliraia requests that Cornelia's body, if any, remain untouched by resurrection magic. She provides no spontaneous confession. A documented contradiction, a failed route, or Cornelia's direct release can make her cooperate. She knows the family removal protocol but not every destination.

| Transfer component | How the party interrupts it                                   |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mirrored case      | Remove one inner panel or expose it to full daylight.         |
| Cork weight        | Compare mass, use glassworker tools, or let the Coin balance. |
| Carrier invoice    | Show three destination changes or contact the legal buyer.    |
| Roof signal        | Cut the blue drying cord or ring the yard bell twice.         |
| Underfloor route   | Ianca blocks it, or a character floods the old drain.         |

*Aliraia is not the “real mastermind.” She is the person who ensures a brilliant immediate decision has shoes, witnesses, and a carriage.*

## **Lady Cornelia Van Ghoul**

*Immediate genius, sincere heresy, and no plan for the week after victory*

### **Arrival**

Cornelia enters through the underfloor passage in a dark traveling dress cut for movement, a plain coat, and a Glass Coast sword. She is beautiful, controlled, and already aware of the most dangerous person in the room. She greets Sava, Ianca, Zam Zam, and the party by name if records made the names available.

### **What She Wants**

She wants both relics removed from the Border City. The Mirror will show which immediate route succeeds. The Coin will force a failed step into success. After escape, she intends to separate the relics and decide whether either can be destroyed without increasing resurrection access.

### **What She Believes About the Coin**

Deferred failure still belongs to death. The Coin proves that a miraculous success does not cancel consequence; it only chooses another time and victim. Cornelia considers this confirmation of House doctrine. She is still willing to borrow success because she believes her purpose justifies accepting the later account.

### **What She Believes About the Mirror**

The Mirror appeals to her greatest strength. It reveals the first direct consequence of an immediate act, which is exactly the scale Cornelia understands brilliantly. It does not reveal institutional response, long-term retaliation, family panic, or what Caldovian does next week. Cornelia treats that limit as purity rather than danger.

### **Negotiation**

Cornelia offers three terms: the party leaves with Zam Zam and the public workers; the House takes both relics; no person in the building receives resurrection. She may accept a split custody plan if the party proves Caldovian has a separate route to one relic. She never agrees to give Caldovian access.

### **Pressure Points**

Courage earns respect. A precise argument about consent earns attention. Mentioning Cornelia's noble status does not. Threatening resurrection makes negotiation impossible. Showing that a long plan has already failed can stagger her confidence for one scene.

### **Combat Role**

Cornelia is Challenge 10 and is not a fair stand-alone fight for a 7th-level party. Sava and Ianca engage her when the crisis begins. The party decides whether to assist, pursue the Mirror, secure the Coin, protect workers, or change the battlefield.

| Cornelia sees                        | Immediate response                                  |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| A character accepts real risk        | She offers a direct bargain rather than a threat.   |
| A character invokes Solice authority | She names Solice's undeath and rejects the warrant. |
| Caldovian evidence                   | She believes parallel exploitation, not alliance.   |
| A resurrection spell prepared        | She attacks or disables the caster first.           |
| A complete custody record            | She pauses long enough for one free party action.   |

*Cornelia controls the room. The adventure is larger than the room.*

## The Crooked Coin

*Pale electum, a crowned woman, an empty throne, and an account that survives the object*

### Wondrous Item

Rare; requires attunement. The Crooked Coin is pale electum, a Caldovi metal also called aluminum. It is bent through the portrait of a crowned woman. The reverse shows an empty throne. When deliberately flipped, it lands standing on its edge unless another magical force interferes.

### Charges

The Coin has 3 charges and regains all expended charges daily at dawn.

### Borrowed Success

When the bearer fails an attack roll, ability check, saving throw, or death saving throw, the bearer can use a Reaction and expend 1 charge. Treat the d20 as a natural 20. The result is a real natural 20 for rules that care about the number. The beneficiary gains 1 Luck Debt.

### Luck Debt

Luck Debt belongs to the beneficiary, not the current bearer. Debt remains if the Coin is lost, sold, stolen, suppressed, destroyed, carried to another plane, or placed inside an antimagic effect.

### Collecting Debt

After the debtor later succeeds on an attack roll, ability check, saving throw, or death saving throw, the GM may collect 1 Luck Debt and treat that successful d20 as a natural 1. Announce collection before resolving the natural 1. Collection must be visible, dramatically fair, proportionate to the borrowed success, and unable to erase an accomplishment already completed.

### Settling Accounts

The GM may offer a serious voluntary failure as payment. The player must agree before the failure occurs. Suitable settlements include arriving too late, losing an important object, being recognized while disguised, allowing an enemy to escape, revealing a secret, accepting lawful custody, or refusing an easy victory. A cosmetic inconvenience never settles debt.

### Communication

The Coin is courteous, patient, and exact. Through the Bracers it uses approved, borrowed, later, account, owed, and sufficient. It never threatens. It behaves as though collection is ordinary administration.

### Distinct Relic

The Coin of the Phoenix is a separate resurrection relic and does not appear in this adventure. The Crooked Coin cannot resurrect a corpse.

| Borrowed success        | Fair later collection or settlement                                      |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Survive a lethal attack | A later death save becomes 1, or escape from another lethal scene fails. |

| Borrowed success          | Fair later collection or settlement                                 |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Prove innocence publicly  | A later truthful claim is disbelieved at a crucial moment.          |
| Steal an essential object | A different important object is seized or deliberately surrendered. |
| Stop an enemy's escape    | Another dangerous person escapes when success seemed certain.       |
| Resist control            | A later save against restraint, fear, or compulsion becomes I.      |

*Never collect debt on an unrelated innocent. The account belongs to the person who borrowed success.*

## d20 Luck Debt Collection Prompts

*Use the table to find a fair shape for collection, not to replace judgment*

### Using the Table

Roll when a debtor has an eligible successful d20 and several fair collections are possible. Reroll a result that has no connection to the borrowed success. The mechanical core remains simple: one successful d20 becomes a natural I and one Luck Debt is removed.

| d20 | Collection prompt                                                                                    |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | A successful attack becomes I; position or cover now favors the target.                              |
| 2   | A successful saving throw becomes I; the debtor is restrained, frightened, or exposed by the effect. |
| 3   | A successful physical check becomes I; a route closes or a carried object is dropped.                |
| 4   | A successful knowledge check becomes I; the right fact arrives after a costly choice.                |
| 5   | A successful social check becomes I; a truthful statement sounds rehearsed or self-serving.          |
| 6   | A successful stealth check becomes I; recognition occurs without automatic combat.                   |
| 7   | A successful pursuit check becomes I; another quarry gains distance or reaches cover.                |
| 8   | A successful tool check becomes I; the work holds, but evidence of tampering remains.                |
| 9   | A successful initiative-related check becomes I; the debtor acts after the crucial movement.         |
| 10  | A successful custody check becomes I; lawful authority demands surrender or a second witness.        |
| 11  | A successful deception becomes I; one listener believes the truth behind the lie.                    |
| 12  | A successful insight becomes I; the debtor reads fear as guilt or certainty as honesty.              |
| 13  | A successful concentration or endurance save becomes I at the next proportionate danger.             |
| 14  | A successful death save becomes I after Borrowed Success prevented death.                            |
| 15  | A successful escape becomes I; the debtor must abandon an object or ally to continue.                |
| 16  | A successful recovery becomes I; the Coin offers a voluntary confession instead.                     |
| 17  | A trusted contact becomes suspicious after a successful negotiation turns to a lie.                  |

| d20 | Collection prompt                                                                           |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 18  | A valuable object is available, but taking it requires accepting a serious visible loss.    |
| 19  | The Coin offers to settle through a refusal: leave one easy success unused.                 |
| 20  | The debtor names a proportionate voluntary failure; the GM accepts, narrows, or rejects it. |

### Cornelia and the Coin

Cornelia begins the adventure with 0 Luck Debt. The first time she fails a meaningful d20 while holding the Coin, she uses Borrowed Success. After that, she spends another charge only when success protects the Mirror, secures escape, prevents capture, or defeats an immediate resurrection attempt. Record every use openly.

### The Mirror of the Unlived Moment

*It shows what happens first, not what happens best*

#### Wondrous Item

Very rare; requires attunement. The Mirror is a dark palm mirror that never reflects the exact present. A raised hand appears a fraction early. A falling bottle is already broken. An unopened door briefly shows the first person who will pass through it.

#### Charges

The Mirror has 3 charges and regains 1d3 expended charges daily at dawn.

#### A Moment Ahead

While holding the Mirror, the bearer gains a +2 bonus to Initiative, cannot be Surprised while conscious, and has Advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks made to notice a creature drawing a weapon or beginning a hostile action.

#### Unlived Defense

When an attack hits the bearer, the bearer can use a Reaction and expend 1 charge. The attacker rerolls the attack and uses the lower result.

#### Choose the Better Instant

After the bearer makes an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw, but before the outcome is resolved, the bearer can expend 1 charge to roll a second d20 and choose either result.

#### Immediate Consequence

As an action, the bearer expends 1 charge and describes one action being considered within the next minute. The GM describes the first significant direct consequence shown by the Mirror. The vision is truthful, incomplete, based on the most likely immediate result, and not a fixed future. It does not reveal secret motives, distant consequences, or the best choice.

#### Confusion of Possibility

After the bearer expends the second or third charge before completing a Long Rest, the bearer makes a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, until the end of the bearer's next turn, the bearer cannot take Reactions, Speed is halved, and attack rolls have Disadvantage.

#### Asking Fair Questions

Good questions describe an action: "What happens first if I open this case?" or "What is the first direct result if I surrender the Coin to Cornelia?" Questions about guilt, morality, a distant plan, or another person's secret intent receive only the first visible consequence.

| Question             | Mirror response                                        |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| "Is Cornelia lying?" | The first thing she does after the proposed agreement. |

| Question                            | Mirror response                                                    |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| "Will we win?"                      | The first significant result of the next stated action.            |
| "Which route is safest?"            | No answer until one specific route and action are proposed.        |
| "What happens if I break it?"       | The first direct physical and magical consequence.                 |
| "What will Caldovian do next week?" | Only the first immediate result of contacting or refusing him now. |

*The Mirror can prevent an obvious mistake. It cannot accept responsibility for the choice.*

## The Unlived Hour

*Six stages of immediate possibility inside less than one minute of ordinary time*

### Beginning the Hour

The Hour begins when Borrowed Success is used within 60 feet of the Mirror, when the Mirror expends its final charge near the Coin, or when Closing reaches 6. Every clock in the perfumery stops at the same minute. Reflections move independently. Outside, less than one minute passes before the Hour ends.

### Running Stages

In combat, each stage lasts one round. Outside combat, each stage lasts long enough for every character to take one meaningful action. A stage ends after all characters act or after the listed objective is resolved. Spent Hit Dice, spell slots, charges, Hit Points, and limited features never return through repetition.

| Stage      | Manifestation and rule                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Before  | Reflections move a heartbeat early. Each character learns one immediate danger and gains Advantage on one response to that danger.                                                |
| 2. Again   | The last six seconds repeat with small changes. Each character can return to the space occupied at the start of the previous turn. No resource, damage, or condition is restored. |
| 3. Another | One Unlived Double appears for every two characters. A Double uses a familiar face and one remembered tactic. It may fight, bargain, or insist that <del>is required</del> .      |
| 4. Choose  | The Mirror shows the first direct result of two visible routes. The party may ask one additional specific action question without spending a charge.                              |
| 5. Owed    | Every Luck Debt appears as a pale mark across the debtor's reflection. Cornelia or another debtor may settle one debt through a serious voluntary failure accepted now.           |
| 6. Lived   | Unchosen possibilities collapse. Doubles vanish, glass settles, and one custody action completed during this stage cannot be undone by the Hour.                                  |

### Suppressing the Hour

Covering the Mirror, moving it more than 60 feet from the Coin, and completing a DC 17 Arcana, Religion, or glassworker-tools test ends the current stage and advances directly to Lived. Sava can supply the doctrinal wording. Ianca can supply the physical separation. A character must perform the decisive action.

### Destroying the Mirror

Breaking the Mirror during the Hour ends it after Lived. Every creature within 20 feet makes a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, the creature loses Reactions and has Disadvantage on the next d20 test before the end of the next turn. Caldovian loses the authentic foresight function in the finale and prepares a prophetic substitute.

*Again is information, not time travel. Never restore resources or erase a completed consequence.*

## **The Crisis Begins**

*Solice authority reaches the front door as Cornelia enters beneath the floor*

## **Sava and Ianca**

Sava enters publicly with a narrow inspection order, a plain evidence case, and no patience for devotional theater. Ianca arrives through the bottle yard after confirming the old drain can bear weight. Both women know Cornelia's reputation. Neither expects the House to surrender the relics.

## **Cornelia's Opening**

Cornelia enters below the Quiet Room. She asks Zam Zam whether the workers are clear, tells Aliraia to move the Mirror, and names Sava's warrant invalid because an Undead divinity cannot define peaceful death. If the party has not reached the Coin, Cornelia takes it from the cork weight.

## **The First Failure**

Call for a real d20 test when Cornelia attempts the first contested act: passing Sava, resisting Ianca's hold, taking the Coin, or preventing a character from sealing the Blue Room. If Cornelia fails while holding the Coin, she uses Borrowed Success and gains 1 Luck Debt. The Hour begins if the Mirror is within 60 feet.

## **Four Objectives**

Once initiative begins, announce four visible objectives. Cornelia is engaging Sava and Ianca. Aliraia or a courier is moving the Mirror toward the roof. The Coin is changing hands near the underfloor passage. Public workers remain in the shop and yard. The party can divide, choose, or create another solution.

## **Do Not Pause for the NPC Duel**

Sava and Ianca do not finish Cornelia while the party watches. Use the Hold Track below. Describe one sharp exchange at the end of each round, then return to the characters. A character can alter the Hold Track by attacking, restraining, changing terrain, presenting a decisive contradiction, or accepting a relevant loss.

| Hold | Sava and Ianca against Cornelia                                                         |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 0    | Both women control the passage. Cornelia cannot leave without changing the battlefield. |
| 1    | Cornelia forces Sava away from the Coin route.                                          |
| 2    | Ianca takes a severe hit while keeping the drain blocked.                               |
| 3    | Sava loses Reactions; Cornelia reaches an exit line.                                    |
| 4    | Cornelia breaks free and joins the Mirror route or escapes with one relic.              |

## **Changing Hold**

Advance Hold by 1 at the end of a round in which no character changes Cornelia's options. Reduce Hold by 1 when a character removes Cornelia's Reaction, blocks an exit, reveals that Aliraia's route failed, or forces Cornelia to spend a Coin charge. Hold cannot fall below 0 or rise above 4.

## **Choosing Objectives**

The party can help Sava and Ianca, pursue the Mirror, secure the Coin, protect public workers, preserve records, or create another solution. Announce all visible work before the first full round. There is no perfect choice, but the party should understand what each choice risks. A character who changes terrain, custody, witness access, or a legal carrier can matter as much as a character who deals damage.

| Objective completed | Immediate benefit                                          |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Cornelia contained  | Hold becomes 0 and one negotiation scene begins.           |
| Mirror recovered    | Pursuit ends; custody is decided during Lived.             |
| Coin secured        | Cornelia cannot create new Luck Debt without regaining it. |
| Workers evacuated   | One House Blade stands down and Zam Zam reveals evidence.  |
| Records preserved   | Caldovian cannot credibly claim a House alliance.          |
| Hour suppressed     | Doubles vanish and one custody action becomes final.       |

## The Mirror Pursuit

*Twelve legal cases, a roof drying walk, and one reflection moving before its carrier*

### The Carrier

Aliraia carries the Mirror if she remains free. Otherwise a House Courier takes the mirrored case. The carrier avoids killing workers and uses doors, bottle carts, drying lines, and false cases to gain distance. The route runs from the Blue Room through the account office, bottle yard, roof walk, and a neighboring funeral supplier.

### Pursuit Track

Start at 0 when the Mirror case leaves the Blue Room. Each round or meaningful pursuit scene, a character can attempt one relevant action. Use DC 14 for an open physical route, DC 16 for a professional obstacle, and DC 18 for identifying the correct case among legal shipments. Success holds the track; success by 5 or more reduces it by 1. Failure advances it by 1.

| Pursuit | Development                                                                         |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 0       | The case remains inside Bitter Orange.                                              |
| 1       | The carrier reaches the bottle yard among twelve legal crates.                      |
| 2       | The carrier reaches the roof drying walk; reflections reveal the route.             |
| 3       | The case enters the neighboring funeral supplier.                                   |
| 4       | A private carriage accepts the case; one final interception remains.                |
| 5       | The Mirror leaves the immediate district. Use later recovery or substitution rules. |

### Useful Actions

Athletics moves a bottle cart. Acrobatics crosses drying lines. Investigation identifies a false mirrored case. Sleight of Hand changes a seal. Persuasion stops a legal carrier. Glassworker tools expose the altered weight. The Key can create passage but does not grant permission. The Bracers may translate the Mirror's repeated impulse: COVER / FIRST / LEAVE.

### Inside the Hour

Before reveals one trap or route. Again lets a character return to a better starting position without restoring an action. Another places Doubles in the pursuit. Choose gives two visible route results. Lived makes one completed seizure, handoff, or destruction final.

### If the Party Ignores the Pursuit

The Mirror reaches Pursuit 5 unless Zam Zam changes sides, the legal carrier refuses, or the party previously disrupted the shipment. This is a real consequence, not campaign failure. Caldovian later uses a substitute or attempts another theft.

*A carrier shown one lawful contradiction can stop a shipment more effectively than a rooftop duel.*

## **Unlived Doubles and Perfume Hazards**

*Discarded immediate possibilities wear familiar faces but do not own the lived world*

### **Unlived Doubles**

At Another, create one Double for every two player characters, rounded down, minimum one. Choose faces from the party, Zam Zam, Sava, Ianca, Cornelia, Vara, Lysa, Caldovian, or a trusted contact. A Double remembers an immediate possibility that did not occur.

### **Not Automatically Hostile**

A Double may attack, ask for protection, insist the party chose the wrong route, or offer one fact from an unlived possibility. The fact is supporting evidence only. A Double disappears at 0 Hit Points, when the Hour ends, or when it freely accepts that its possibility was not lived.

### **Recognizing a Double**

A Double has no scent, reflects one heartbeat late, and cannot state what happened more than one minute before appearance. A DC 15 Insight, Perception, or perfume-tools check identifies one sign. The original person is not required to prove identity through violence.

### **Bottled Possibilities**

During the Hour, a bottle may show its first break, first buyer, or first use. A character can use an action to inspect a bottle and gain Advantage on one check involving that bottle, case, or route. On a failed DC 13 Wisdom saving throw, the character loses Reactions until the start of the next turn.

### **Blue Dust Cloud**

A disturbed Blue Room tray fills a 10-foot cube. A creature entering the cloud makes a DC 14 Constitution saving throw. On a failure, the creature cannot benefit from invisibility and leaves visible blue prints until washed. The effect lasts 10 minutes.

### **Smoked Salt**

Burning documents in the Salt Room produce a choking cloud. The area is Heavily Obscured. A creature starting a turn inside makes a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or takes 5 (1d10) poison damage and cannot speak above a whisper until the start of the next turn.

| <b>Double claim</b>               | <b>Useful response</b>                                       |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| "I am the version that survived." | Ask for a fact older than one minute or check scent.         |
| "Cornelia already killed Sava."   | Treat as a warning, then verify the lived room.              |
| "Give me the Mirror."             | Demand a custody reason and a named destination.             |
| "Caldovian is coming."            | Check an immediate route; do not infer alliance.             |
| "You promised me."                | Ask when and where; the answer cannot reach beyond the Hour. |

*A Double may deserve compassion without gaining custody, legal identity, or authority over the original person.*

## Resolving the Crooked Coin

*Possession, custody, destruction, and debt are four different questions*

### Priory Custody

Sava proposes immediate transport to Giftschränk Priory in a plain nonmagical case. The Priory records every Luck Debt known at transfer. Tessel refuses to call the Coin safe merely because it is quieter than Fume. This is the intended campaign route, not the only valid route.

### Party Custody

A character can keep and later attune to the Coin. Record the custodian, storage method, charges, and all Luck Debt. Caldovian becomes interested in every use. Cornelia's debt does not transfer to the character.

### House Custody

Cornelia or Aliraia may retain the Coin if the party accepts a split. The House promises not to use resurrection magic because the Coin has no such power. The real risk is continued Borrowed Success and later collection.

### Neutral Custody

Thosa, a court, a funeral guild, or a named neutral custodian can hold the Coin. A good plan names who records debt, who may refuse a use, and what happens at dawn when charges return.

### Destroying the Coin

A bearer must refuse Borrowed Success during a meaningful failure, say "This loss remains mine," accept the immediate consequence without arranging a substitute victory, and break the Coin by ordinary means while still vulnerable to that consequence. A staged or harmless loss causes the Coin to reform at the next dawn. Existing Luck Debt remains.

### Coin Fragment

A surviving fragment can turn one failed noncombat ability check into a success. The user's next d20 before the end of the following day becomes a natural 1. The fragment then tarnishes and loses magic.

| Coin outcome | Chapter 12 consequence                                            |
|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Priory       | Caldovian needs theft, coercion, or a substitute.                 |
| Party        | Circle of Embers pressures the custodian directly.                |
| House        | Cornelia's network becomes a separate relic front.                |
| Neutral      | Custody law and public witnesses become central.                  |
| Destroyed    | Caldovian loses authentic Borrowed Success but uses a substitute. |
| Missing      | Track charges and debt offscreen; do not assume who has it.       |



*Destroying the object does not cancel an account already borrowed.*

## Resolving the Mirror

*The immediate future is useful enough that every custodian can justify keeping it*

### Priory Custody

Sava proposes a covered case, nonreflective transport, three witnesses, and a rule that no person may ask the Mirror whether another person is guilty. The Priory stores it away from Fume and the Coin whenever possible.

### Party Custody

A character can keep and attune to the Mirror. The item's powers are strong, but every Immediate Consequence answer remains incomplete. Record every use that shapes a major custody or trust decision.

### House Custody

Cornelia treats the Mirror as a tool of pure immediacy. House custody makes her more dangerous in a room and no wiser across a month. Aliraia can use it more cautiously, but service keeps the relic aligned with Cornelia's plans.

### Neutral Custody

A court, funerary witness house, or magical archive can hold the Mirror under a no-guilt rule. A valid plan covers reflective surfaces, limits questions, records exact wording, and separates interpretation from decision.

## Destroying the Mirror

The Mirror has AC 17, 25 Hit Points, immunity to poison and psychic damage, and resistance to all other damage. Breaking it during the Hour triggers the Wisdom save on page 14. Breaking it outside the Hour shows the first direct consequence in every nearby reflective surface before magic ends.

### False Mirror

A skilled glassworker, illusionist, and forger can create a ritual substitute. The substitute can occupy Caldovian's station but cannot provide authentic Unlived Defense, Better Instant, or immediate-consequence answers. The deception may survive until relic recognition occurs.

| Mirror outcome | Chapter 12 consequence                                           |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Priory         | Attacks and forged custody target a covered transport route.     |
| Party          | Caldovian learns which character depends upon advance warning.   |
| House          | Cornelia or Aliraia remains an active immediate-future rival.    |
| Neutral        | Public records can expose later false prophecy.                  |
| Destroyed      | Caldovian lacks authentic foresight and stable self-recognition. |
| Escapes        | Use a later theft, House message, or prepared substitute.        |

*A vision may be completely truthful and still be the wrong reason to act.*

## Cornelia's Exit

*The intended escape creates a quiet death; player success can change the route*

### Intended Outcome

Cornelia spends Borrowed Success at least once, loses the Coin during the Unlived Hour, and escapes without the Mirror or with only a false case. She leaves through the underfloor drain, roof route, or a

doorway opened during Lived. Sava and lanca are hurt but alive. The party carries one or both relics toward the Priory.

### Why the Coin Falls

A collected debt can turn Cornelia's successful grip, concealment, or escape check into a natural 1. Sava may redirect her wrist. A character may seize the Coin. Lived may collapse an unlive version that still held it. Use the cause created by play rather than announcing that fate simply demands the drop.

### If Cornelia Is Captured

She requests a no-resurrection record, refuses ordinary remorse, and argues that the party has proven only superior custody in one room. Aliraia attempts legal and family recovery. Chapter 12 gains a House pressure front instead of the bath report.

### If Cornelia Dies in the Perfumery

She refuses resurrection. House members attempt to recover the body. Sava insists upon a witnessed custody record. Mother Solice does not celebrate. The death can still become a public argument, but it does not end the House or remove the family from Book Two.

### If Cornelia Keeps Both Relics

She leaves the district through the legal shipment chain. The campaign continues. Caldovian prepares substitutes, pressures the party to retrieve the relics, and may exploit House custody during Circle of Embers.

### If Cornelia Accepts a Settlement

A complete custody record, a named neutral custodian, proof of Caldovian's separate plan, and a serious accepted loss can produce a temporary settlement. Cornelia leaves without one relic and with no promise of future peace.

| Cornelia state       | Immediate follow-up                                               |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Escaped with debt    | Use The Bath before the next adventure.                           |
| Escaped without debt | She remains active and sends a doctrinal challenge.               |
| Captured             | Family lawyers, House witnesses, and body-custody demands arrive. |
| Killed               | Record consent, body custody, and who refused resurrection.       |
| Missing during Hour  | No faction may assume which possibility survived.                 |

*Cornelia's usual death is a consequence of borrowed success, not a mandatory cutscene that erases a player victory.*

### The Bath and the Family

*Luck Debt is collected in private after the glorious room is gone*

### The Quiet Death

Use this scene only if Cornelia escapes with at least 1 Luck Debt. Later that night she bathes in a noble guesthouse, exhausted, bruised, and certain she survived the decisive part. A minor accident requires a d20 test she would normally succeed: a slipping foot, a fainting spell, a loose bath rail, or a moment of weakness while rising.

### Collection

Collect one Luck Debt. The successful d20 becomes a natural 1. Cornelia falls, cannot recover in time, and drowns. Keep the description brief. The point is not gruesome punishment. The point is that the Coin waited until no audience remained.

## Scale

If Cornelia borrowed success only for a modest advantage, the first debt may cause injury rather than death. A second unresolved debt can cause the drowning. If Borrowed Success prevented capture, defeat, or death, one collected debt is proportionate to a fatal private failure.

## Family Removal

Cornelia's family removes the body before dawn. Aliraia arranges the route if free. The removal occurs offscreen and leaves a legal receipt, a washed bath, one missing service carriage, and no body for the party to inspect. The family cites noble custom and anti-resurrection consent.

## What the Party Learns

A report reaches the party through Sava, a funeral clerk, House correspondence, or a Scarlet Step rumor. No witness can prove exactly how the debt collected. The Coin may be in Priory custody while the account remains attached to Cornelia.

## Book Two Boundary

Do not introduce the Coin of the Phoenix, a corpse-in-alcohol resurrection cycle, or the Glass Coast escort in Book One. Cornelia's body removal is the handoff. The next campaign explains what the family does after this book ends.

| Evidence left         | Meaning                                               |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Bath rail pulled free | A successful recovery failed at the worst instant.    |
| No forced entry       | The death was not an ordinary assassination.          |
| Family receipt        | The body left through legal noble procedure.          |
| Washed scent          | Bitter orange, goat milk, and smoked salt return.     |
| Coin elsewhere        | Debt followed the beneficiary rather than the object. |

*Cornelia wanted a glorious death. Luck Debt gives her a quiet one.*

## Ending and Transition

*Resolve two relics, one betrayal, and a theater production already hiding four operations*

## Resolution

The adventure ends when the Unlived Hour collapses, each relic has a recorded custody state, public workers are safe from immediate harm, and Cornelia's status is known or honestly marked unknown. Perfect recovery is not required.

## Zam Zam, Sava, and Ianca

Zam Zam may return to the Red Door under protection, remain with the House, enter custody, flee, or stay beside an injured worker. Li'l Snoot and Bottle Eater learn that her love was real and her betrayal was chosen. Sava and Ianca insist upon separate custody records for Coin and Mirror. If the party protected workers or pursued the Mirror while both women held Cornelia, increase Bond with both women by 1.

## Caldovian's Purchase

The account office contains a legal order for mirrored labels, blue body paint, red thread, stage perfume, false relic stands, and reinforced costume panels. Caldovian bought the materials for a Red Door production called Circle of Embers before the perfumery crisis. The order is not proof of House cooperation. It proves that Caldovian planned an Elra-centered spectacle while relic custody was collapsing.

## Advancement

Advance the characters to 8th level after resolution even if one or both relics escape. The party has survived the Hour, learned how Luck Debt works, and made a decision strong enough to change the next front.

## Opening Chapter 12

Within two days, Caldovian invites the party to inspect or protect Circle of Embers. The performance conceals an Elra impersonation crisis, attacks on relics and custodians, a Scarlet Step succession coup, and a treasury theft. Chapter 12 begins during technical rehearsal: a performer is painted blue, a relic stand is heavier than its paperwork, two Vara orders contradict one another, and a treasury carriage arrives early.

| Record before Chapter 12 | Options or adjustment                                                  |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Crooked Coin             | Priory, party, House, neutral, destroyed, or missing.                  |
| Mirror                   | Priory, party, House, neutral, destroyed, false, or missing.           |
| Cornelia                 | Escaped, drowned, captured, killed, settled, or unknown.               |
| Zam Zam                  | Returned, protected, detained, House-aligned, fled, or injured.        |
| Both relics secure       | Caldovian attacks two custody routes and uses two substitutes.         |
| One relic secure         | The authentic relic supports one front; a substitute supports another. |
| Both relics lost         | Caldovian and House agents compete during the show.                    |

*Caldovian does not wait for the investigation to finish. He turns the investigation into publicity for opening night.*

## Statistics: Cornelia and Zam Zam

*Use objectives, movement, and restraint before reducing the scene to Hit Points*

### Lady Cornelia Van Ghoul

*Medium Humanoid, lawful neutral • Challenge Rating 10 (5,900 XP) • PB +4*

AC 18; HP 168 (16d8 + 96); Speed 40 ft.

STR 12 (+1), DEX 20 (+5), CON 22 (+6), INT 16 (+3), WIS 14 (+2), CHA 18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +9, Con +10, Wis +6, Cha +8; Skills Acrobatics +9, Deception +8, Insight +6, Perception +6, Persuasion +8; Passive Perception 16

### TRAITS

**Peaceful Life, Glorious Death.** Cornelia has Advantage on saving throws against effects that restore life, control a corpse, or compel acceptance of resurrection. She cannot willingly receive resurrection.

**Immediate Genius.** Cornelia has Advantage on Initiative and on checks made to read a room, identify the most dangerous creature present, or exploit the next ten seconds. She has Disadvantage on checks made to predict consequences more than one day away.

**Borrowed Success.** While holding an attuned Crooked Coin with charges, Cornelia uses its Reaction when a meaningful failed d20 would protect the Mirror, secure escape, prevent capture, or stop resurrection. Record 1 Luck Debt per use.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Cornelia makes three Glass Coast Blade attacks.

**Glass Coast Blade.** Melee Attack: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 16 (1d8 + 5 piercing plus 2d6 psychic damage).

**Unlived Hour (Recharge 5-6).** Cornelia moves up to her Speed without provoking Opportunity Attacks and makes one Glass Coast Blade attack against each of up to three different creatures. A creature hit cannot take Reactions until the end of its next turn.

### BONUS ACTIONS

**Chosen Instant.** Cornelia takes the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

### REACTIONS

**Perfect Riposte.** When a creature misses Cornelia with a melee attack, she makes one Glass Coast Blade attack against that creature. On a hit, Cornelia moves 10 feet without provoking Opportunity Attacks.

### Zam Zam

*Medium Humanoid, neutral • Challenge Rating 6 (2,300 XP) • PB +3*

AC 17; HP 97 (15d8 + 30); Speed 40 ft., Climb 30 ft.  
STR 12 (+1), DEX 19 (+4), CON 14 (+2), INT 13 (+1),  
WIS 15 (+2), CHA 17 (+3)  
Saving Throws Dex +7, Wis +5; Skills Acrobatics +10,  
Deception +6, Insight +5, Performance +9, Sleight of Hand +7, Stealth +7

### TRAITS

**Evasion.** On a Dexterity save for half damage, Zam Zam takes no damage on a success and half damage on a failure.

**Doctrine Stronger.** Zam Zam has Advantage on saves against being Charmed when the effect would make her reveal House routes or permit resurrection. If Li'l Snoot or Bottle Eater is in immediate danger, this trait does not apply.

**Stage Acrobat.** Zam Zam can move through another creature's space and ignores Difficult Terrain made by furniture, rigging, counters, or bottles.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** Zam Zam makes two Curtain Knife attacks or one Curtain Knife attack and one Vaulting Kick.

**Curtain Knife.** Melee or Ranged Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft. Hit: 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

**Vaulting Kick.** Melee Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 9 (1d10 + 4) bludgeoning damage, and the target makes a DC 15 Strength saving throw or is pushed 10 feet.

### BONUS ACTIONS

**Tumble.** Zam Zam takes the Dash or Disengage action.

### REACTIONS

**Catch the Fall.** When a creature within 10 feet falls or is pushed, Zam Zam moves up to 10 feet and reduces falling or collision damage by 10 (3d6).



Cornelia should try to win the next ten seconds. Zam Zam should try to stop love and doctrine from occupying the same square.

## Statistics: House and Unlived Creatures

*Compact profiles for pursuit, restraint, and the Hour*

| Ally combat summary | Key numbers                                                                                                    |
|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sava Dren, CR 7     | AC 18; HP 112; Speed 50 ft.; save DC 16; removes Reactions and redirects movement.                             |
| Ianca Mereș, CR 8   | AC 17; HP 136; Speed 40 ft.; +8 melee; resistance while carrying a burden; controls doors and forced movement. |

## Aliraia

*Medium Humanoid, lawful neutral • Challenge Rating 2 (450 XP) • PB +2*

AC 14; HP 52 (8d8 + 16); Speed 30 ft.

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

Skills Insight +5, Investigation +7, Medicine +5, Sleight of Hand +5, Stealth +5

### TRAITS

**Prepared Departure.** Allies within 10 feet of Aliraia add 1d4 to Initiative and Dexterity saving throws.

**Custodian of Details.** Aliraia has Advantage on checks involving clothing, routes, schedules, bodies, evidence cases, or concealed Tiny objects.

### ACTIONS

**Hidden Needle.** Melee Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

**Direct the Exit (Recharge 5-6).** Up to three allies within 30 feet move up to half Speed without provoking Opportunity Attacks.

### REACTIONS

**Remove the Evidence.** Aliraia conceals or retrieves one unattended Tiny object within 5 feet, or grants Half Cover to an adjacent creature until the start of her next turn.

## Unlived Double

*Medium Aberration, unaligned • Challenge Rating 3 (700 XP) • PB +2*

AC 15; HP 52 (8d8 + 16); Speed 30 ft.

STR 12 (+1), DEX 16 (+3), CON 14 (+2), INT 11 (+0), WIS 14 (+2), CHA 14 (+2)

Skills Deception +4, Insight +4, Perception +4; Damage Resistances psychic; Condition Immunities Charmed; Passive Perception 14

### TRAITS

**Borrowed Face.** The Double resembles one creature present or recently remembered. A DC 15 Insight, Perception, or perfume-tools check notices no scent, a late reflection, or a memory limit of one minute.

**Unchosen.** The Double disappears when the Unlived Hour ends, at 0 Hit Points, or when it willingly accepts that its possibility was not lived.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The Double makes two Mirrored Strike attacks.

**Mirrored Strike.** Melee or Ranged Spell Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 60 ft. Hit: 10 (2d6 + 3) psychic damage.

**Claim the Better Moment (Recharge 5-6).** One creature within 30 feet makes a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, the creature cannot take Reactions and has Disadvantage on the next attack or ability check before the end of its next turn.

### REACTIONS

**I Did That First.** When a creature the Double resembles makes a d20 test within 30 feet, the Double imposes Disadvantage. The Double then cannot use this Reaction again until it moves at least 10 feet.

### House Blade

*Medium Humanoid, any non-good alignment • Challenge Rating 2 (450 XP) • PB +2*

AC 15; HP 45 (7d8 + 14); Speed 30 ft.

STR 14 (+2), DEX 16 (+3), CON 14 (+2), INT 11 (+0), WIS 13 (+1), CHA 12 (+1)

Skills Athletics +4, Insight +3, Perception +3, Stealth +5

### TRAITS

**Body Before Relic.** When an adjacent ally carrying a body, record case, Coin, or Mirror is hit, the Blade can use a Reaction to become the target instead.

**No Resurrection.** The Blade has Advantage on saves against effects that control a corpse or compel acceptance of resurrection.

### ACTIONS

**Multiattack.** The Blade makes two Short Blade attacks.

**Short Blade.** Melee Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

**Smoked-Salt Flask.** Ranged Attack: +5 to hit, range 20/60 ft. The flask creates a 10-foot-radius Heavily Obscured cloud until the end of the Blade's next turn.

*For Sava and Ianca, use Chapter 6 statistics if full combat becomes necessary. In this adventure, Hold measures the duel more cleanly than complete NPC turns.*



## CHAPTER 12 — The Circle of Embers

*Adventure Six for characters of 8th level*

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### Adventure Summary

Caldovian invites the characters to inspect the technical rehearsal for Circle of Embers, his new Red Door production. He claims the show will expose the danger of impersonating Elra, celebrate Mother Solice's quieter divinity, and raise money for workers injured during the recent relic crises.

The production is a clock and camouflage. Caldovian has built four operations into one crowded opening night: a forbidden Elra impersonation that may become possession or sacrifice; coordinated attacks against relics and custodians; a Scarlet Step coup meant to kill Vara Vay in public; and the theft of the visible guild's mobile settlement reserve.

The party can discover every operation before the curtain rises. Each success reduces the opening-night crisis. Each failure changes the starting position rather than cancelling the investigation. Caldovian remains charming, useful, and attentive until the moment the party can finally see that his kindness, the relic emergencies, and his love for Vara have all become material for one masterpiece.

### Adventure Purpose

This adventure reveals Caldovian without requiring one confession or one perfect clue. The characters protect performers, workers, custodians, and criminal witnesses while deciding which relics or substitutes leave the Border City. Powerful allies can hold a door or a dangerous opponent. The party must decide what matters most when four emergencies become active at once.

### At the Table

Relic focus: all six relics or Caldovian's prepared substitutes.

Primary location: the Red Door, surrounding streets, and connected service buildings.

Apparent objective: inspect and protect a dangerous theatrical production.

Actual objective: break Caldovian's four-part operation and determine what reaches Oraş Cald.

Advancement: begin at 8th level and advance to 9th level after the opening-night crisis is resolved.

### Before Rehearsal

*Record the results of the previous five adventures*

### Relic State Sheet

Before play, record the location and custodian of every relic. Use one of six states: Caldovian, party, Priory, allied institution, hostile faction, destroyed or missing. If an authentic relic cannot reach the Red Door, Caldovian has prepared a substitute. A substitute supports his final ritual imperfectly but does not reproduce the relic's full adventuring powers.

### Campaign Outcome Adjustments

Vara alive and active: she arrives in person, distrusts contradictory orders, and expects proof before turning against Caldovian.

Vara injured or hidden: Brannoc guards her route. A red-masked actor may appear publicly, but the real Vara remains the intended victim.

Lysa holds the office: Lysa receives two incompatible instructions in Vara's voice. She knows one order is false but cannot prove which office issued it.

Vara dead or missing: Caldovian stages a memorial and attempts to kill or expose Lysa as the "false Vara." The coup becomes a struggle over visible continuity rather than Vara's body.

Cornelia active: House agents attack the Coin or Mirror route for separate reasons and do not cooperate with Caldovian.

Zam Zam returned: she works backstage under watch and can identify House scent codes, mirrored labels, and one altered costume seam.

Zam Zam absent: Li'l Snoot or Bottle Eater finds the same alteration through prop work.

Fume destroyed: use the black kiln blade substitute. Fume cannot FOOM, but Caldovian loses authentic magical consumption.

Fume loose or hostile: the show's spell cues may draw Fume toward the Red Door even if Caldovian does not control it.

### **Caldovian's Substitutes**

Bracers: paired silver and bronze script cuffs that translate rehearsed lines but cannot interpret living speech.

Fume: a black kiln blade with a concealed smoke reservoir and thunder charge.

Key: an oversized iron stage key attached to a door-lattice rig.

Reliquary: a black-glass heart drum holding a recorded final beat.

Coin: a bent electum token weighted to land on a chosen face.

Mirror: a silvered stage mirror with a delayed image mechanism.

Mark every substitute clearly on the Game Master's state sheet. The characters can discover, replace, sabotage, or steal each prop independently.

### **The Red Door During Technical Rehearsal**

*A working theater, tavern, guild office, and escape machine*

#### **Public Rooms**

The Red Door remains open during rehearsal. The taproom serves performers, carpenters, costumers, musicians, couriers, and curious patrons. The scarlet-painted entrance is visible from the main street. A public stair reaches the balcony and musicians' gallery. Cheval Oratorie stands two streets away and can receive injured people, bodies, or an unexpected goddess.

#### **Backstage**

The stage has a curtain line, two wing passages, a trapdoor, three overhead walkways, and a rear scenery door large enough for a carriage wheel. Dressing rooms occupy the second floor. A prop room, costume room, script office, and locked money office sit behind the stage. Narrow service passages connect the kitchen, cellar, neighboring laundry, and Handshake-controlled wheelwright yard.

#### **The Four Important Routes**

Blue Route: dressing room to center stage. Nela Vos follows this route while painted and costumed as Elra.

Black Route: covered relic cases arrive through the laundry passage and leave through the scenery door.

Red Route: Vara or Lysa enters through the public stair, crosses the balcony, and descends for the final scene.

Gold Route: the settlement carriage enters the wheelwright yard early, receives scenery panels, and is meant to leave during the curtain call.

A character who walks a route and succeeds on a DC 14 Investigation, Perception, Performance, or relevant tool check finds one inconsistency. On a failure, the character still learns the route but alerts one saboteur.

#### **Ordinary Workers**

Most people here are doing real jobs. A carpenter repairs a warped platform. A cook counts stew bowls. A seamstress argues about reinforced blue panels. A musician wants payment before opening night. A clerk compares payroll lists. Violence endangers people who know nothing about the coup or the

relics. Give workers names, concerns, and useful observations instead of treating the theater as an empty dungeon.

## **Four Fronts and Two Clocks**

*Investigation changes the opening-night crisis*

### **Fronts**

Impersonation: Nela is being transformed into a dangerous likeness of Elra.

Relics: authentic objects or substitutes are being brought together under false protection orders.

Coup: contradictory Scarlet Step commands place Vara, Lysa, Brannoc, Xyom, and Harl on collision courses.

Treasury: the visible Scarlet Step settlement reserve is being converted into a scenery shipment and removed.

Each front begins at Readiness 2. A strong rehearsal success reduces one front by 1. A serious mistake, thirty minutes of inaction after discovering danger, or completion of a sabotage task increases one front by 1. Readiness cannot fall below 0 or rise above 4 before opening night.

### **Rehearsal Clock**

Run four rehearsal turns. Each turn represents about thirty minutes. During a turn, each character chooses one meaningful task: inspect a route, question a worker, protect a custodian, follow paperwork, alter a prop, test a cue, or watch Caldovian. A character can assist another character instead.

At the end of each turn, advance one neglected front. Do not advance a front that received a meaningful success during the turn. After four turns, Caldovian opens the doors unless the party has exposed enough evidence to force a delay.

### **Opening-Night Beats**

Opening night runs for six Beats. A Beat is a flexible dramatic interval, usually one to three combat rounds or several minutes of social action. At the end of each Beat, every unresolved front produces its listed event. A front at Readiness 0 begins one Beat late. Readiness 1 uses the normal schedule. Readiness 2 adds one complication. Readiness 3 starts one step ahead. Readiness 4 begins in open crisis.

Characters can move between adjacent theater areas during one Beat. Reaching Cheval Oratorie, the wheelwright yard, or a street route normally takes a full Beat unless magic, a prepared shortcut, or the Key changes movement.

### **Stopping the Show**

Closing the Red Door prevents a full audience but does not cancel the operations. Caldovian reframes the emergency rehearsal as an exclusive performance for workers, Scarlet Step members, and custodians. Reduce Impersonation Readiness by 1, but increase Coup or Treasury Readiness by 1 because fewer witnesses allow harder action.

## **Investigating the Rehearsal**

*Every indispensable revelation has several routes*

### **Scripts**

The public script condemns divine impersonation and ends with an abstract blue line rather than a bodily portrayal. The prompt copy adds a final hidden cue: Nela steps into full light, raises both hands, and says "Glory to Elra."

A DC 14 Investigation or Performance check finds the inserted page. A printer recognizes different ink. Nela remembers Caldovian rehearsing the line privately. A stagehand saw the page delivered after midnight.

### Costumes and Paint

The blue paint contains ordinary mineral color, animal fat, strong wine, and a small amount of sacred festival pigment. The costume's reinforced panels form Elra's contrasting curves when Nela stands beneath three mirrors. A Solice cleric, costumer, painter, or character proficient with alchemist's supplies identifies the sacred mixture without a check after careful examination.

Removing the festival pigment, breaking one mirrored angle, replacing the full-body costume with abstract ribbons, or keeping Nela's face unpainted reduces Impersonation Readiness by 1.

### Orders

Two orders carry Vara's signature. One says the settlement carriage must remain sealed until Vara presents her physical red seal. The other releases the carriage early to Circle of Embers under emergency succession procedure.

If Vara is alive, the hold order is genuine. If Lysa holds the office, the release procedure is genuine but its destination line has been replaced. If both women are absent, each order contains one authentic element and one forged element.

A character can expose the contradiction through handwriting, red-thread knotting, seal pressure, witness memory, office copies, or direct comparison with Vara or Lysa.

### Cases and Weight

One relic stand is heavier than its paperwork. The false bottom holds a narrow harness made to fit Caldovian beneath his costume. Six attachment points correspond to the relic functions, not to six identical objects.

A DC 15 Investigation check, carpenter's tools check, or simple comparison with the listed weight reveals the false bottom. Opening it finds destination labels for Oraş Cald, a map of the three civic anchors, and a note reading: "Authentic where possible. Meaning where necessary."

### Three Routes to Caldovian's Plan

Documents: the prop manifest, treasury order, and route labels share one private scribe.

People: Nela, Li'l Snoot, a payroll clerk, and a frightened Red Cell runner each know one operation.

Physical evidence: the relic harness, altered stage marks, carriage panels, and mirrored costume align only when viewed from the balcony.



No single clue proves everything. Any three clues from two different categories prove that the production conceals coordinated operations.

### **Nela and the Blue Completion**

*Possession and sacrifice are preventable crises*

#### **Preventing Completion**

The Blue Completion occurs when Nela enters full mirrored light while wearing the complete costume and sacred paint. The exact phrase is not required for possession, but the phrase makes the danger immediate.

The party prevents Completion by achieving any three of the following before Beat 5: remove or neutralize the sacred pigment; break one mirror angle; replace the costume silhouette; convince Nela to refuse the final cue; remove the hidden choir; trace Solice's civic claim around the stage; move the final scene outside public view; or expose Caldovian's private script to the audience.

A clever equivalent counts. Record each intervention visibly.

#### **Possession or Sacrifice**

If Blue Completion occurs, roll 1d20.

1–10, Possession. Elra enters Nela. Her posture becomes loose, delighted, hungry, and overwhelmingly present. She asks, "What is this place known for eating?" She does not attack unless restrained violently, insulted publicly, or denied every answer.

11–20, Sacrifice. Nela's blue paint hardens, her shadow vanishes, and her heartbeat slows. She dies at the end of the next Beat unless the party completes three rescue interventions.

If Nela suddenly cries "Glory to Elra" without following a script or prompting cue, do not roll. Elra has chosen sacrifice as a warning.

#### **Rescue Interventions**

A character can spend an action or meaningful scene effort to strip one costume panel, wash away sacred paint, break a mirror, carry Nela beyond the blue line, invoke Mother Solice's civic duty, interrupt the audience's attention, or give Nela a reason to speak in her own name.

Most interventions require no check when physically possible. A contested or magical intervention uses DC 16. Three successes save Nela. One character cannot repeat the same intervention.

#### **If Elra Possesses Nela**

The safest response is hospitality rather than combat. Cheval Oratorie serves spiced horse shanks. If guided there, Elra eats the meal, asks for more wine, says, "Needed more black bread," and leaves.

Nela wakes with her face and hands covered in animal grease, full of wine and meat, and unable to remember the journey. She gains 1 level of Exhaustion but survives.

Elra's arrival pauses Impersonation, Coup, and Relic events for one Beat because almost everyone watches her. Treasury continues. Caldovian uses the pause to move toward his exit.

## **The Relic Harness**

*Authentic objects, substitutes, and six independent thefts*

### **Why the Relics Come Near the Theater**

Caldovian never asks one custodian to deliver all six relics. He creates separate reasons.

Bracers: a translation dispute in the printed script.

Fume: a warning that stage magic may trigger the sword at its current location.

Key: a request to inspect emergency exits and locked scenery doors.

Reliquary: a memorial scene requiring a verified final heartbeat.

Coin: a security exercise involving chance and false seals.

Mirror: a request to inspect immediate consequences of the forbidden costume.

Each request sounds reasonable in isolation. If a relic remains elsewhere, Caldovian's team attacks its route, custodian, or records rather than teleporting the object into the theater.

### **The Six Stations**

The harness contains six stations. A relic within 60 feet produces recognition: vibration in the Bracers, smoke from Fume, turning teeth in the Key, a single beat in the Reliquary, warmth in the Coin, or a delayed reflection in the Mirror.

A character can remove one station, replace its fastener, attach a false relic, or mark the harness for tracking. Each station has AC 15 and 12 Hit Points if attacked directly. Destroying a station prevents Caldovian from carrying that function in the harness but does not destroy the relic.

### **Authentic and Substitute Effects**

An authentic relic makes one final-adventure function reliable. A substitute makes the same function unstable or limited. A false item prepared by the party may survive until recognition occurs.

The party does not need to keep every relic away from Caldovian. Securing one authentic object, replacing one prop, marking one case, or forcing him to carry a visibly false piece changes the final ritual.

### **Custodian Attacks**

Use one attack for each authentic relic brought near the Red Door. Choose an attacker that fits current relationships: Red Cell seizure, forged Priory transfer, House retrieval, frightened official, bribed carrier, or Caldovian's personal request.

An attack should target movement, documents, or custody before Hit Points. A carrier runs. A door locks. A seal changes. A frightened custodian hands the case to the wrong uniform. Combat begins only when someone chooses violence or refuses to release a person.

### **Tracking Relic Movement**

At the end of every Beat, record each object as stage, custodian, street, carriage, Caldovian, destroyed, or unknown. Never write "Caldovian gets the relic" without showing how the object crossed each route.

## **Relic Front Events**

*What happens when the party cannot protect every route*

### **Readiness 0–I**

Beat 1: a nervous courier arrives and asks for verification.

Beat 2: one case produces relic recognition near the wrong stand.

Beat 3: a forged custodian attempts a handoff.

Beat 4: a stage blackout covers movement between two stations.

Beat 5: Caldovian fastens available objects or substitutes to the harness.

Beat 6: the harness moves toward the scenery door.

## **Readiness 2**

Add one complication: a second case has the same seal; the real custodian is detained in the laundry; a substitute is more convincing than expected; or a hostile faction attacks the same relic for independent reasons.

## **Readiness 3**

Begin at Beat 2. One relic or substitute is already beneath the stage. The first recognition effect occurs during the opening speech, exposing one hidden object but also telling Caldovian where another object is located.

## **Readiness 4**

Begin in open crisis. A custodian is missing, one authentic relic has entered the harness, and an armed seizure team controls the laundry passage. The party still has routes through the public stair, kitchen, trapdoor, roof, or neighboring wheelwright yard.

## **Ways to Win the Front**

Secure the custodians and keep records consistent.  
Move authentic relics beyond 60 feet before harness fitting.  
Replace authentic objects with tracked substitutes.  
Destroy or disable harness stations.  
Expose false orders to carriers and witnesses.  
Turn one attacking cell against another.  
Let a dangerous relic escape Caldovian even if the party cannot claim custody.

Resolve the front when no uncontrolled object can enter Caldovian's harness before departure. The party may still decide to follow or escort an object toward Oraş Cald.

## **Relic Recognition as Warning**

Recognition is not automatic theft. Use it as an alarm the party can act upon. The Key turns toward a false door. The Mirror shows a case leaving in the next instant. The Reliquary beats inside a stage drum. Fume exhales smoke toward a spell cue. Every signal should reveal a choice, not announce that the choice has already been lost.

## **The Scarlet Step Coup**

*A lover, a replacement, and three incompatible ideas of loyalty*

## **Caldovian's Intended Scene**

During the Dagger Chorus, Xyom's Red Cell surrounds the red balcony stair. A forged emergency order accuses Vara of selling the guild treasury and exposing Step cells. Caldovian plans to draw her onto the stage, where one real strike inside the choreography becomes a public execution.

Her death is meant to crown the performance. He wants grief, applause, rage, sacred symbolism, and witnesses who can repeat the story in Oraş Cald.

## **Vara**

Vara turns against Caldovian only after proof. Strong proof includes the altered chorus marks, the relic harness note, the treasury destination, a Red Cell kill order, or testimony from a trusted Step member. Once convinced, she does not flee automatically. She wants to preserve the visible guild, protect the treasury, and punish betrayal.

## **Lysa**

Lysa may arrive in her own face, in Vara's mask, or under escort. She knows enough of Vara's life to expose a forged order but risks revealing the replacement program. Asking Lysa to appear as Vara may save the office while consuming more of Lysa's identity.

A character who gives Lysa a meaningful choice gains her cooperation. A character who orders her to "be Vara" raises Pressure even if she complies.

### **Brannoc, Xyom, and Harl**

Brannoc protects Vara, witnesses, doors, and evidence. Show him proof and he holds the balcony stair.

Xyom wants permanent armed command. Caldovian promises it. Expose the treasury theft or show that Xyom's cell is meant to take the blame, and his loyalty fractures.

Harl protects members from avoidable slaughter. He evacuates performers, opens a safe route, or shields Lysa if the party explains who is in danger.

### **Coup Readiness**

0–1: the forged order is questioned before the chorus begins.

2: Xyom moves during Beat 3.

3: Xyom controls the balcony stair at the start of Beat 3.

4: Vara or Lysa begins opening night isolated inside a guarded dressing room.

### **Resolving the Coup**

The coup ends when Vara or Lysa is safe, the kill order is exposed or defeated, and Step members know enough truth to choose a side. Killing Xyom is not required. Saving Vara is not required if Vara has already died or chooses a fatal stand. The essential result is that Caldovian does not control the public meaning without opposition.

### **The Settlement Carriage**

*A mobile reserve, not a secret central warehouse*

### **What the Carriage Holds**

The carriage carries one quarter's visible Scarlet Step settlement reserve: payroll coin, bribe money, bearer notes, gemstone collateral, cell pensions, seal plates, and copies of property claims. It is valuable enough to finance Caldovian's road to Oraş Cald and hire outside muscle.

It is not the whole Red Fist treasury. Handshake remains decentralized across ordinary offices, carriers, workshops, legal importers, repair yards, and businesses.

### **Why It Arrives Early**

After the Cheval crisis, Vara ordered several exposed funds consolidated for redistribution. Caldovian altered the destination and moved the arrival into rehearsal day. The carriage appears to be scenery transport. Reinforced panels conceal lockboxes and document tubes.

### **The Liquidation Route**

If the carriage leaves the Red Door, it reaches the wheelwright yard, where one stolen carriage becomes parts for twelve legal working carriages. Coin moves into payroll. Bearer notes move through an asset-liquidation office. gemstone collateral enters criminal sales and later returns to a legal importer. Seal plates move separately.

The party can catch the carriage tonight. After dawn, no single raid recovers everything.

### **Treasury Readiness**

0–1: the carriage remains sealed in the yard.

2: scenery panels are fitted during Beat 2.

3: the carriage enters the rear lane at the start of opening night.

4: two decoy wagons depart before Beat 1 and the real reserve is already moving through the laundry lane.

### **Ways to Stop or Change the Theft**

Verify Vara's physical seal.

Remove one wheel and document the repair.

Replace the driver.

Move the bearer notes separately.

Warn the payroll clerks.  
Mark the panels with visible dye or magic.  
Let the carriage leave under party surveillance.  
Transfer the reserve to Lysa, Vara, or a neutral civic office.  
Steal the reserve first and accept the criminal consequences.

### **Reward**

If the party preserves most of the reserve, Vara or Lysa offers 1,200 gp in legal payment, safe transport toward Oraş Cald, and one Scarlet Step favor. If the party keeps the money, record a major theft rather than pretending no one notices.

## **Opening Night: Beats 1 and 2**

*The audience enters while every operation still looks ordinary*

### **Beat 1: The Doors Open**

Caldovian greets the audience personally. He thanks workers, praises the party, and calls Circle of Embers a warning against confusing beauty with authority.

Impersonation: Nela receives the first layer of sacred paint.

Relics: the first case enters through the laundry route.

Coup: Brannoc, Xyom, and Harl receive different seating instructions.

Treasury: the carriage driver requests final release.

A character can publicly interrupt, remain backstage, follow a route, inspect the case, speak with Nela, or verify the carriage. Public accusation without evidence raises Caldovian's apparent innocence but still forces witnesses to look.

### **Beat 2: The Village Burns**

The first act shows the false Elra demanding a feast while Mother Solice silently restores a public ledger.

Impersonation: mirrored panels move into position.

Relics: recognition exposes one authentic object or convincing substitute.

Coup: Xyom places armed members near the balcony.

Treasury: scenery panels close around the reserve.

At Readiness 2 or higher, choose one added complication: a child wanders backstage; a Priory custodian refuses criminal help; a House agent attacks the Mirror case; or a false fire cue creates real smoke.

### **Using Initiative**

Do not roll initiative merely because several fronts advance. Roll when violence, a chase, or a timed rescue requires turn order. While initiative is active, opening-night events occur at initiative count 20. A Beat ends after three rounds or after the immediate objective changes decisively.

### **Caldovian's Help**

During Beats 1 and 2, Caldovian still helps the party in small ways. He catches a falling lantern, identifies a forged seal, or guides a frightened worker out of danger. His help is sincere and calculated. It preserves his self-image and keeps the characters near the stage.

## **Opening Night: Beats 3 and 4**

*The performance and the coup become the same event*

### **Beat 3: The Dagger Chorus**

A whisper of “Glory to Elra” passes through the aisles. Twenty-four choristers begin the coordinated dagger fight.

Impersonation: Nela receives the final costume panels.

Relics: a blackout or crowd movement covers a case transfer.

Coup: Xyom’s cell closes around the red stair.

Treasury: the real or decoy carriage begins moving.

A character can redirect choristers with Performance, Religion, or visible floor marks. A DC 15 check changes the chorus lane. A direct warning allows each chorister to choose safety without a check if the altered marks are shown.

### **Beat 4: The Scarlet Lady**

Caldovian invites Vara, Lysa, or a red-masked representative to stand beneath the balcony light. His speech praises a woman who made crime into art and calls betrayal “the final honest payment.”

Coup unresolved: Xyom presents the kill order and attacks.

Coup partly resolved: Step members hesitate, creating one round for proof or command.

Coup resolved: Vara or Lysa turns the scene into a public accusation against Caldovian.

Relics: the harness rises through the trapdoor.

Treasury: the carriage reaches the rear lane.

Impersonation: Nela sees the private final cue for the first time.

### **The Real Strike**

If the coup remains unresolved, one Dagger Chorus lane crosses Vara’s position. Xyom or a Red Cell striker makes one attack with Advantage. A character can interpose, change the mark, disarm the striker, drag Vara aside, or present proof before the attack.

Do not make Vara’s death automatic. Do not make survival free. Her choices, current injuries, and the party’s preparation matter.

### **If Vara Dies**

Lysa can preserve visible continuity, reject the office, or expose the replacement system. Brannoc protects the body and evidence. Caldovian attempts to turn grief into applause. A character who denies him the speech reduces his control of the public story.

## **Opening Night: Beats 5 and 6**

*Blue Completion, the relic harness, and Caldovian’s exit*

### **Beat 5: Glory**

Nela enters full mirrored light.

If the party completed three interventions, the costume remains a performance. Nela speaks in her own voice and the audience sees the danger without feeding it.

If Completion occurs, resolve possession or sacrifice. Elra’s presence pauses most violence for one Beat. Caldovian does not control Elra and is briefly frightened before delight returns.

Relics: Caldovian fastens every available authentic object, substitute, or party-planted false piece to the harness.

Coup: surviving Step leaders choose sides.

Treasury: the carriage turns toward its final street route.

### **Beat 6: Curtain Call**

Caldovian removes the Witness costume and reveals the harness. He thanks every faction for proving his argument: no institution could protect meaning without turning it into possession.

He moves toward the scenery door, trapdoor route, balcony line, or a doorway opened by the Key. He prefers escape with witnesses, but survival matters more than the perfect speech once the party attacks.

### **Stopping Caldovian**

Characters can capture him, strip the harness, force him to abandon relics, follow the carriage, block every exit, or expose his plan to the audience. Caldovian uses mobility, charm, and prepared exits rather than standing for a final battle.

If reduced to 0 Hit Points inside the prepared theater, he can use Final Exit once. He falls through a marked trap or doorway and stabilizes at 1 Hit Point in the wheelwright yard. A character who disabled every marked exit prevents this feature.

### **If Captured**

The campaign continues. Arulea orders Caldovian and the relic records brought to Oraş Cald under civic authority. Chapter 13 begins as an escorted transport rather than a pursuit.

If Caldovian dies, the harness, scripts, and destination records still reveal the Unbound Circle. Elra's favor may preserve a final breath in the Obsidian Reliquary if present. Do not secretly resurrect him. The final adventure becomes the party's attempt to stop the prepared ritual, a surviving Hollowed echo, or a faction trying to complete his design. Use this branch only when the party truly defeats him.

### **If He Escapes**

Record his route, companions, injuries, relics, substitutes, and treasury resources. The party may pursue immediately or travel by a faster civic route after reading Arulea's warning.

## **Resolving the Four Fronts**

*Success is measured separately*

### **Impersonation Result**

Safe performance: Nela survives and the doctrine becomes public warning rather than divine bait.

Possession: Elra leaves after hospitality or another negotiated exit.

Sacrifice prevented: Nela survives but the faith treats the event as a warning.

Sacrifice completed: Nela dies, and Solice authorities demand exact responsibility rather than poetic blame.

### **Relic Result**

Record every authentic relic, substitute, and false piece separately. Note the current carrier and whether Caldovian knows the item is false. A relic can remain with the party, Priory, House, Vara, Lysa, neutral custody, a hostile faction, or Caldovian.

### **Coup Result**

Vara remains in command, Lysa assumes the office, both women reject the system, Xyom controls an armed fragment, Brannoc holds the old guard, or the visible Scarlet Step breaks into cells. No result destroys the deeper Red Fist network. Ra'av and the Lady on the Xebec remain beyond this adventure unless the party has already discovered the truth.

### **Treasury Result**

The reserve remains intact, divides among claimants, leaves under surveillance, is stolen by Caldovian, is taken by the party, or dissolves into Handshake routes by dawn. Record how much financial and documentary power Caldovian carries into the finale.

## **Advancement**

Advance the characters to 9th level after the opening-night crisis. Perfect victory is not required. The party has exposed Caldovian's design, protected or lost real people, and determined the material conditions of the finale.

## **Relationship Changes**

Increase Bond with any person the party protected without using rescue as leverage. Increase Pressure with every faction whose relic, money, identity, or sacred practice the party publicly controlled. Caldovian's Bond can remain high even after exposure; affection and betrayal are not opposites for him.

## **The Road to Oraş Cald**

*An official warning and the final inventory*

## **Arulea's Message**

Before dawn, a sealed civic dispatch arrives from Oraş Cald. The paper carries the mark of continuity administration and a wavering blue line drawn with exact, joyless care.

"Caldovian has filed three arrival notices under three incompatible legal identities. Each notice claims ceremonial cargo, municipal exemption, and divine urgency. Do not let him arrive as a procession. Do not announce him. Bring records, seals, practical tools, and every honest account of what is missing. Reach the capital before the performance does."

The message is signed Arulea, Continuity Minister.

## **Final Inventory**

For each function, record one entry.

Interpretation: Bracers, script cuffs, false cuffs, or absent.

Consumption: Fume, kiln blade, broken station, or absent.

Passage: Key, door lattice, false key, or absent.

Continuity: Reliquary, heart drum, empty vessel, or absent.

Probability: Coin, weighted token, fragment, or absent.

Foresight: Mirror, stage mirror, false glass, or absent.

Also record the settlement reserve, Caldovian's condition, Vara's status, Lysa's choice, Xyom's allegiance, Nela's fate, and Elra's appearance.

## **Travel Options**

Fast civic post: Arulea's order grants priority horses, road gates, and official lodging.

Scarlet Step route: Vara, Lysa, Brannoc, or Harl provides hidden changes of vehicle and criminal intelligence.

Priory convoy: Sava, lanca, Tessel, or a warden provides sealed cases and strict custody.

Immediate pursuit: the party follows Caldovian's carriage, portal, or hired riders.

Escorted prisoner: Caldovian travels in custody under witnesses from at least two factions.

Every route reaches Chapter 13. The route determines who arrives first, which supplies remain available, and whether Caldovian enters Oraş Cald as celebrity, fugitive, prisoner, corpse, or rumor.

## **Closing Image**

The Red Door's scarlet paint is scorched, wet, or untouched according to play. Workers count missing tools. A chorister wraps a cut hand. Someone carries a blue costume away without folding it. The road east is already busy.

The Border City does not wait for the campaign to finish. Kitchens open. Records are copied. Wheels are repaired. The party leaves for a capital where those ordinary actions will become the answer to a divine masterpiece.

## Statistics: Caldovian and Nela

*Use objectives and routes before reducing the scene to Hit Points*

### Caldovian, Performer

Medium Humanoid, chaotic neutral • Challenge Rating 8 (3,900 XP) • Proficiency Bonus +3

Armor Class 16; Hit Points 112 (15d8 + 45); Speed 30 ft.

STR 9 (–1), DEX 18 (+4), CON 16 (+3), INT 15 (+2), WIS 12 (+1), CHA 20 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +6, Wis +4, Cha +8

Skills Deception +11, Insight +4, Performance +11, Persuasion +11, Religion +5

Senses passive Perception 11; Languages Common, Caldovi, Elven; CR 8

**Fragile Brilliance.** While Caldovian has 56 Hit Points or fewer, his Speed becomes 40 feet, opportunity attacks against him have Disadvantage, and he can move 10 feet after casting a spell or using Steal the Scene.

**Invited by Procedure.** Caldovian has Advantage on checks to enter, remain in, or redirect a scene after a recognized authority, performer, custodian, or character invites him to assist.

**Actions — Multiattack.** Caldovian makes two Silvered Rapier attacks or one Silvered Rapier attack and uses Steal the Scene.

**Silvered Rapier.** Melee Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 11 (1d8 + 4 piercing plus 1d6 psychic damage).

**Steal the Scene.** One creature Caldovian can see within 60 feet must succeed on a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or move up to half its Speed in a direction Caldovian chooses and lose Reactions until the start of Caldovian's next turn.

**That Was the Cue (Recharge 5–6).** Each enemy of Caldovian within 20 feet makes a DC 16 Charisma saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 18 (4d8) psychic damage and is pushed 10 feet. On a success, a creature takes half damage and is not pushed.

**Bonus Action — Cue the Entrance.** One ally within 60 feet moves up to half its Speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

**Reaction — Final Exit (1/Day, Theater Only).** When Caldovian would drop to 0 Hit Points inside the prepared Red Door, he moves through an intact marked exit and appears in the wheelwright yard at 1 Hit Point. If every marked exit was disabled, he cannot use this reaction.

### Nela Vos

Medium Humanoid, neutral good • Challenge Rating 3 (700 XP) • Proficiency Bonus +2

Armor Class 14; Hit Points 58 (9d8 + 18); Speed 30 ft.

STR 10 (+0), DEX 16 (+3), CON 14 (+2), INT 12 (+1), WIS 14 (+2), CHA 18 (+4)

Skills Acrobatics +5, Performance +8, Religion +4; passive Perception 12

**Stage Fighter.** Nela has Advantage on checks to move through scenery, conceal a stage weapon, or perform choreographed combat.

**Actions — Multiattack.** Nela makes two Stage Blade attacks.

Stage Blade. Melee Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage.

Blue-Line Cry (Recharge 6). Each creature of Nela's choice within 15 feet must succeed on a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or become Frightened until the end of Nela's next turn. This is performance magic, not divine impersonation.

**Reaction — Take the Mark.** Nela adds 3 to her Armor Class against one attack she can see, potentially causing it to miss.

## Statistics: Scarlet Step and Stage Threats

*Challenge Ratings for opening-night encounters*

### Xyom Kulth

Medium Humanoid, lawful evil • Challenge Rating 7 (2,900 XP) • Proficiency Bonus +3

Armor Class 18; Hit Points 128 (15d8 + 60); Speed 30 ft.

STR 18 (+4), DEX 16 (+3), CON 18 (+4), INT 12 (+1), WIS 13 (+1), CHA 15 (+2)

Saving Throws Str +7, Con +7, Wis +4; Skills Athletics +7, Intimidation +5, Perception +4

**Actions — Multiattack.** Xyom makes three Red Saber attacks.

Red Saber. Melee Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 12 (1d8 + 4 slashing plus 1d6 necrotic damage).

Command the Cell (Recharge 5–6). Up to three allies within 60 feet use Reactions to move up to half Speed or make one weapon attack.

Reaction — Punish Hesitation. When an ally within 30 feet misses, Xyom makes one Red Saber attack against a creature in reach.

### Brannoc Tallow

Medium Humanoid, lawful neutral • Challenge Rating 6 (2,300 XP) • Proficiency Bonus +3

Armor Class 18; Hit Points 118 (14d8 + 56); Speed 30 ft.

STR 19 (+4), DEX 12 (+1), CON 18 (+4), INT 11 (+0), WIS 15 (+2), CHA 13 (+1)

Saving Throws Str +7, Con +7, Wis +5; Skills Athletics +7, Insight +5, Perception +5

**Actions — Multiattack.** Brannoc makes two Door Hammer attacks.

Door Hammer. Melee Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Hold the Passage. Brannoc creates a 10-foot line adjacent to his space until the start of his next turn.

Hostile creatures treat the line as Difficult Terrain and provoke an opportunity attack when crossing it.

Reaction — Protect the Witness. Brannoc moves up to 10 feet and takes the damage from one attack that would hit an adjacent ally.

### Harl Fen

Medium Humanoid, neutral • Challenge Rating 4 (1,100 XP) • Proficiency Bonus +2

Armor Class 16; Hit Points 68 (8d8 + 32); Speed 30 ft.

STR 14 (+2), DEX 16 (+3), CON 18 (+4), INT 12 (+1), WIS 15 (+2), CHA 14 (+2)

**Actions — Multiattack.** Harl makes two Short Sword attacks.

Short Sword. Melee Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 7 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Clear the Room (Recharge 5–6). Up to four willing creatures within 30 feet move up to half Speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Bonus Action — Protective Route. Harl opens or identifies one ordinary exit, concealed door, or safe lane within 30 feet.

### Red Cell Striker

Medium Humanoid • Challenge Rating 2 (450 XP) • Armor Class 15; Hit Points 45; Speed 30 ft.

Multiattack. Two blade attacks, +5 to hit, 7 (1d6 + 4) damage each.

Chorus Cover. While within 5 feet of two choristers, the striker can Hide as a Bonus Action.

False Order. Once per encounter, the striker has Advantage on one Deception check involving a Scarlet Step command.

### Stage Rigging Saboteur

Medium Humanoid • Challenge Rating 1 (200 XP) • Armor Class 13; Hit Points 27; Speed 30 ft., climb 20 ft.

Rigging Knife. +4 to hit, 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

Drop the Line (Recharge 5–6). One creature beneath rigging makes a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) bludgeoning damage on a failure or half on a success.

Quick Release. The saboteur disengages or interacts with two stage mechanisms as a Bonus Action.

### **Dagger Chorister**

Medium Humanoid • Challenge Rating 1/2 (100 XP) • Armor Class 13; Hit Points 22; Speed 30 ft.

Ceremonial Dagger. +4 to hit, 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

Choreographed Step. The chorister moves through another chorister's space and does not provoke opportunity attacks from creatures that have not identified the altered floor marks.

A chorister stops fighting after clear proof that the choreography was changed to cause a real killing.



## CHAPTER 13 — Oraş Cald

*Adventure Seven for characters of 9th level*

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### Adventure Summary

The final adventure begins as a civic visit rather than a triumphal arrival. Arulea, Continuity Minister of Oraş Cald, receives the characters through guest entry, customs, medical inspection, and a review of every relic, substitute, seal, witness, and missing document. Caldovian may arrive as a celebrity, fugitive, prisoner, corpse, or rumor. The city treats every version as a problem of continuity and public safety.

Arulea asks the characters to help with three ordinary failures before Caldovian reaches the center of the city: a damaged heat manifold at the Public Furnace, a displaced standard in the Hall of Measures, and a warped shear assembly at the Necessary Gate. Each repair teaches how one civic anchor can be turned inward. Caldovian has already filed orders that turn all three outward.

When the Unbound Circle activates, the three anchors convert the city into a public transformation engine. The Bracers define meaning. Fume consumes power. The Key moves bodies and routes. The Reliquary preserves a final beat. The Crooked Coin postpones failure. The Mirror shows the next consequence. Substitutes reproduce weaker versions of the same functions.

The party must reverse the three stakes, protect workers and witnesses, control Elra's attention, and decide what kind of ending Caldovian receives. A complete Hollow Circle suppresses the relics and ritual without cancelling ordinary magic. The ideal victory is practical, quiet, and too undramatic to become the masterpiece Caldovian wants.

### At the Table

Primary location: Oraş Cald, especially the Central Works district.

Relic focus: every authentic relic, substitute, false piece, and fragment recorded at the end of Chapter 12.

Primary objective: reverse the Public Furnace, Hall of Measures, and Necessary Gate before Caldovian completes the Unbound Circle.

Secondary objectives: evacuate civilians, preserve evidence, contain Fume, protect custodians, and keep Elra from claiming the ending.

Campaign conclusion: the characters remain 9th level at the end of Book One.

### Finale State Sheet

*Carry every consequence from the Border City into the capital*

### Arrival Form

Choose the entry that matches Chapter 12.

Celebrity. Caldovian arrives publicly with performers, supporters, hired guards, and at least one visible relic or substitute. Increase starting Elra Attention by 1.

Fugitive. Caldovian uses service roads, false papers, and Handshake carriers. He begins with one hidden route into the Central Works district.

Prisoner. Caldovian enters in civic custody with witnesses from at least two factions. He begins restrained and separated from the harness, but his filed orders and prepared agents can still activate the Circle.

Corpse. Caldovian is truly dead. No secret resurrection occurs. His harness, scripts, recorded voice, and any preserved final heartbeat can create a Last Echo.

Rumor. No reliable witness can place Caldovian in the city. He uses another legal identity, an actor, or a route opened by the Key. Increase the difficulty of locating him, not the difficulty of reversing the anchors.



### Record the Six Functions

Interpretation: Bracers, script cuffs, false cuffs, fragment, or absent.

Consumption: Fume, kiln blade, broken station, fragment, or absent.

Passage: Key, door lattice, false key, fragment, or absent.

Continuity: Reliquary, heart drum, empty vessel, fragment, or absent.

Probability: Crooked Coin, weighted token, bent copy, fragment, or absent.

Foresight: Mirror, delayed stage mirror, false glass, fragment, or absent.

Mark an authentic relic A, a substitute S, a false piece F, and an absent function X. Caldovian may not know a false piece is false until relic recognition occurs.

### Other Consequences

Record Caldovian's Hit Points and injuries, the settlement reserve, Vara's status, Lysa's choice, Xyom's allegiance, Nela's fate, Fume's charge total, outstanding Luck Debt, and whether Elra appeared during Circle of Embers.

The finale must reflect this record.

Do not restore a lost relic, missing ally, spent heartbeat, broken station, or stolen reserve for convenience.

### Arrival in Oraş Cald

*No procession, no applause, and several forms to complete*

#### The North Road

Oraş Cald appears first as smoke, pale stone, black roofs, and blue-white steam caught beneath a low sky. The outer road divides before reaching the walls. Freight uses one lane. Guests use another. Funerary traffic has a third lane with no toll and no right to delay. Every road has measurements painted at wheel height. Every bridge carries a repair date.

#### Guest Entry

A clerk asks for names, cargo, known curses, contagious magic, current legal pursuit, dead bodies, borrowed bodies, and objects capable of opening doors without permission. The clerk does not treat a "yes" as guilt. A false answer creates a record that can be used later.

Characters carrying Fume receive a red metal tag and an escort to a spell-free lane. Characters carrying the Reliquary receive a funerary custody form. The Crooked Coin is weighed twice. The Mirror is covered. The Bracers are asked to translate one sentence in both directions. The Key is placed on a table with no lock nearby.

## Continuity Reception

Arulea receives the party in a plain room with four chairs, one standing desk, and a stove that works. She is tall, severe, and pale-haired. Her plain sleeves are rolled to the same exact height. She offers hot broth before questions.

Arulea does not ask whether Caldovian is evil. She asks what he filed, what he moved, who witnessed each transfer, which object answered another object, and which person can contradict the public version. She copies every answer into three ledgers. One copy remains in her office. One goes to Central Records. One goes into a sealed case marked for continuity review.

## What Arulea Says

“A city is not an audience. It is a collection of obligations with roofs.”

“Do not bring me a prophecy. Bring me a route, a tool, a witness, and the name of the person who signed the wrong line.”

“If Caldovian arrives as a prisoner, he remains dangerous. If he arrives dead, his paperwork remains dangerous.”

## Oraş Cald at Street Level

*A capital built for heat, records, food, and repair*

### Central Works District

The final adventure uses six connected zones. Each zone is a short walk from the next. During the finale, moving from one zone to an adjacent zone uses 30 feet of movement. A creature with a Speed below 30 feet uses an action to change zones.

Central Works Court. A broad service yard where coal, timber, water carts, and measuring wagons turn around. Caldovian uses the court as the center of the Unbound Circle.

Public Furnace Yard. Heat pipes, ash bins, refractory brick, and a covered worker platform.

Measures Arcade. A long civic hall with stone standards, hanging balances, survey marks, and public counters.

Necessary Gate. A heavy inner gate that controls emergency access between the old city and the northern road.

Records Walk. A roofed passage linking the Hall, gate office, and continuity archives.

Guest Street. Food stalls, a community bath, public lodging, and the route used by curious citizens.

### Ordinary Places

Oraş Cald Community Bath North charges one copper piece for a wash and refuses magical heating after dusk. Public Kitchen East serves stew, horse sausage, pickled roots, and strong tea. Wood Goods by Tean & Sons sells handles, wedges, braces, pins, ladders, and repair timber. Metal Goods Office Three issues tools against a signed deposit. Guest House Seven has clean blankets and walls thick enough to block street noise.

### What the City Feels Like

No one stops work because adventurers have arrived. A cook asks a character to move away from the serving line. A surveyor complains that armor scratches floor marks. A child recognizes Caldovian's name and receives a sharp correction from a grandmother. Officials know he is famous. Fame does not change pipe diameter.

### Using a Map

Draw the six zones as a triangle. Place Central Works Court in the middle. Place the Furnace, Hall, and Gate at the three points. Records Walk connects the Hall and Gate. Guest Street connects the Hall and Furnace. A fuel lane connects the Furnace and Gate. This map supports movement without requiring exact building dimensions.

## Lead Time and Civic Work

*The party can prepare without stopping the city*

### Determine Work Turns

Caldovian arrives in custody: 4 Work Turns, but one character must spend the first turn on prisoner processing or trust a civic marshal.

Fast civic post or successful immediate pursuit: 4 Work Turns.

Scarlet Step or Priory route: 3 Work Turns.

Caldovian arrives first: 2 Work Turns.

No reliable route information: 2 Work Turns and one hidden entrance remains available to Caldovian.

One Work Turn represents about one hour. During each turn, every character completes one meaningful task.

### Repair Tasks

Each civic anchor has three repair tasks. A character attempts a listed check or offers a reasonable equivalent. The standard DC is 15. A success earns 1 Repair Mark. A failure produces the listed complication and consumes the task, but another character can attempt a different method during a later turn.

At 1 Repair Mark, the anchor becomes operational. At 2 marks, the anchor becomes stable and causes no collateral hazard during the finale. At 3 marks, the party understands the inward reversal and gains Civic Insight for that anchor.

### Other Tasks

A character may investigate Caldovian's filings, purchase supplies, arrange evacuation, secure a relic, recruit an ally, examine the Central Works geometry, reduce Elra Attention, or watch one suspected agent. Each relevant page provides results.

Do not force every character into repair work. The system rewards practical labor without making one proficiency mandatory.

### Civic Insight

A character with Civic Insight can turn the matching stake inward with one action and no check. Without Civic Insight, a creature adjacent to the stake must spend two actions across one or more turns, or succeed on a DC 18 check listed for that anchor. An interrupted two-action attempt retains no progress.

## The Public Furnace

*Heat is a service before it becomes a symbol*

### Civic Function

The Public Furnace heats bath water, sterilizes medical tools, dries civic records after floods, warms emergency shelters, and keeps several public kitchens operating during severe cold. It is not one giant fire. It is a controlled network of combustion chambers, draft channels, heat exchangers, and distribution valves.

### Furnace Stake

The stake is a black iron manifold lever marked OUTWARD, SERVICE, and INWARD. SERVICE is the correct ordinary position. Caldovian's filed emergency order moves the lever to OUTWARD, allowing the ritual to treat every connected flame, chimney, and heated pipe as one source of transformation fuel.

Turning the stake INWARD isolates the ritual from the city and suppresses Consumption and Continuity: Fume or its substitute, and the Reliquary or its substitute.

### Repair Tasks

Refractory breach. Replace cracked firebrick before the outer chamber heats. DC 15 Athletics, Mason's Tools, or a suitable cold or force effect used with precision. Failure: the worker takes 10 (3d6) fire damage and smoke fills the platform until the next Work Turn.

Draft imbalance. Reset two counterweighted air doors. DC 15 Investigation, Smith's Tools, or Perception. Failure: one furnace worker gains 1 level of Exhaustion unless helped immediately.

Mineral scale. Clear a blocked geothermal preheat pipe without breaking it. DC 15 Nature, Tinker's Tools, or Thieves' Tools. Failure: scalding water deals 7 (2d6) fire damage in a 10-foot area.

### **Furnace Complication During the Finale**

If the Furnace has fewer than 2 Repair Marks when the Circle activates, each outward Furnace pulse also ignites one civilian work area. A character or ally must spend an action to contain the fire. After three unattended fires, Guest Street evacuates in panic and Elra Attention increases by 1.

### **The Important Discovery**

Heat does not flow because a lever points toward a destination. It flows because pressure differences, valve order, and return lines create a complete path. The OUTWARD position opens every feed line and closes the return. The INWARD position closes the city feed and opens the return into the Furnace's own ash chamber.

This is the first lesson of the Hollow Circle: an anchor is not defeated by destroying it. The anchor must be made to contain its own function.

### **Worker Knowledge**

Master furnace worker Doru Neme knows every valve by sound. He has no magical training. Doru can maintain an inward stake after a character turns it, but he cannot fight through hostile agents to reach the lever.

If treated with respect, Doru gives the party three heat-resistant aprons. A wearer gains Resistance to fire damage from the Furnace's civic hazards, not from spells or Fume.

### **Investigating Caldovian**

A stamped order claims that Caldovian's "ceremonial arrival heat" requires all city furnaces to share one draft for seven minutes. The document contains a valid continuity code and an invalid fuel code. A DC 14 Investigation check, a conversation with Doru, or comparison with Arulea's copy reveals the mismatch.

The invalid code was entered through a clerk who never met Caldovian. The clerk received a correction from a respected performer using a legal courier. This is another example of Caldovian making ordinary procedure carry extraordinary danger.

### **Useful Supplies**

A character who spends a Work Turn here can obtain two buckets of furnace sand, a six-foot iron hook, three lengths of chain, and one portable smoke hood. These supplies may grant Advantage when restraining Fume, pulling a stake, or moving through smoke.

### **The Hall of Measures**

*A city cannot share work without agreeing what numbers mean*

#### **Civic Function**

The Hall keeps public standards for weight, length, capacity, road grade, beam thickness, pipe width, and contract tolerances. Merchants complain about it until a bridge fails, a grain measure shrinks, or a repair part does not fit. The building is quiet because most disputes become louder outside.

#### **Measures Stake**

The stake is a vertical brass standard set into the floor beneath the city's master balance. In ordinary service, the standard defines local units and compares copies. Caldovian's order turns its engraved face OUTWARD, allowing the ritual to define the whole city as one ceremonial body and every witness as part of one audience.

Turning the standard INWARD defines only Caldovian, the harness, and the ritual boundary as the measured object. This suppresses Interpretation and Probability: the Bracers or script cuffs, and the Crooked Coin or weighted token.

### **Repair Tasks**

Displaced length bar. Reset a stone-and-bronze standard that shifted during winter frost. DC 15 Athletics, Mason's Tools, or History. Failure: the bar drops, dealing 9 (2d8) bludgeoning damage to one worker or character in reach.

False counterweight. Identify and remove a substitute weight from the master balance. DC 15 Investigation, Jeweler's Tools, or Perception. Failure: the false weight passes inspection and increases Probability's first Circle effect by one die.

Survey line. Restore a blue plumb line from ceiling mark to floor point. DC 15 Acrobatics, Carpenter's Tools, or Sleight of Hand. Failure: a hanging frame swings through the arcade, forcing a DC 14 Dexterity save or 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage.

### **Hall Complication During the Finale**

If the Hall has fewer than 2 Repair Marks, each outward Hall pulse changes one public measurement. A stair becomes too long, a door too narrow, or a weapon's reach deceptive. Until the next initiative count 20, all movement in the Hall zone costs twice as much and opportunity attacks in that zone have Advantage.

### **The Important Discovery**

The master standard does not create truth. It creates a shared comparison. OUTWARD tells every copy to answer one central claim. INWARD forces the central claim to compare against itself.

This is the second lesson of the Hollow Circle: Caldovian's masterpiece depends upon every person, object, and witness accepting the same definition of completion. Turn the definition inward and the ritual must prove itself against its own contradictions.

### **Public Examiner**

Mira Stanc is the senior examiner on duty. She is patient with honest mistakes and merciless with impressive excuses. Mira can maintain an inward standard after a character reverses it. If shown the Bracers, she asks each inscription to define "complete." The disagreement in the metal gives the party Advantage on one check to expose a false relic or false legal identity.

### **Caldovian's Three Identities**

The Hall has three active filings.  
Caldovian, citizen returning with cultural property.  
The Witness of Embers, a religious performer entering under ceremonial exemption.  
Caldovian Unbound, a proposed civic object requesting placement and permanent recognition.

Each filing is legally incomplete. Together the filings attempt to make a man, a performance, and an object count as the same claimant. A character who spends a Work Turn comparing the records discovers the ritual's intended legal transformation and reduces starting Elra Attention by 1, because Arulea can close the public gallery before activation.

### **Useful Supplies**

The Hall lends one calibrated chain, two plumb bobs, a folding survey rod, chalk, sealing wax, and a certified blank identity notice. A certified blank notice can invalidate one false order when completed by a witness and filed at Records Walk.

### **The Necessary Gate**

*A gate exists to close, but this gate must still serve life*

### **Civic Function**

The Necessary Gate separates the old city from the northern road. It can close against an army, riot, fire, or magical breach. It must still admit food, fuel, medical aid, funerary traffic, and workers needed to

prevent a greater disaster. The gate's law is carved on the inside: CLOSED IS NOT THE SAME AS ABANDONED.

### **Gate Stake**

The stake is a three-part shear assembly built into the gate's service winch. In ordinary use, it separates public passage from emergency passage. Caldovian's order turns it OUTWARD, making every legal entrance, service lane, stage door, and remembered route answer the Key.

Turning the stake INWARD closes the ritual's routes around Caldovian and the harness. This suppresses Passage and Foresight: the Key or door lattice, and the Mirror or delayed glass.

### **Repair Tasks**

Warped shear pin. Remove and replace a bent iron pin while the gate rests under partial load. DC 15 Athletics, Smith's Tools, or Thieves' Tools. Failure: the winch releases, forcing a DC 14 Dexterity save or 13 (3d8) bludgeoning damage.

Route ledger conflict. Reconcile two emergency permissions with different seals. DC 15 Insight, Investigation, or Calligrapher's Supplies. Failure: one false service route remains active during the finale.

Dropped gate leaf. Raise the inner leaf six inches and brace it. DC 15 Athletics, Carpenter's Tools, or Animal Handling with draft animals. Failure: the gate closes Guest Street for one Work Turn and delays one ally.

### **Gate Complication During the Finale**

If the Gate has fewer than 2 Repair Marks, each outward Gate pulse opens one false route and closes one real route. One creature chosen by the Game Master changes zones involuntarily unless a character spends a Reaction and succeeds on a DC 15 Athletics, Arcana, or Thieves' Tools check.

### **The Important Discovery**

The Gate cannot simply be locked. A complete closure would trap food, physicians, and funerary workers outside. The service mechanism distinguishes a necessary passage from a claimed passage.

OUTWARD lets Caldovian use every route for one grand entrance. INWARD allows ordinary traffic to continue while every ritual route folds back toward the central claimant. This is the third lesson of the Hollow Circle: the party can contain Caldovian without shutting down the city or cancelling ordinary magic.

### **Gate Captain**

Captain Sera Dalm is a broad woman with a practical voice and no patience for theatrical passwords. She can hold an inward stake after a character turns it. She also commands twelve continuity guards. The guards evacuate civilians, hold one zone, or engage hired agents. The guards do not reverse a stake or confront Caldovian without the party.

### **The Hidden Route**

If Caldovian arrived as a fugitive or rumor, the remaining hidden route is a funerary service door. Caldovian selected it because officials hesitate to delay a body. A DC 15 Investigation check, consultation with Thosa, or comparison of passage times reveals a seven-minute gap in the ledger.

Closing the funerary door is not required. Posting one witness and one guard prevents misuse while preserving lawful passage.

### **Useful Supplies**

The gate office can provide two crowbars, a block and tackle, three door wedges, a signal horn, and four red closure flags. A closure flag displayed by a character with civic authority can clear one zone of civilians during the finale.

## The Three Stakes

*How ordinary repair becomes the Hollow Circle*

### Function Pairs

Public Furnace: Consumption and Continuity.

Hall of Measures: Interpretation and Probability.

Necessary Gate: Passage and Foresight.

Turning one stake inward suppresses both associated functions immediately. Authentic relics become inert within the Circle. Substitutes fail, jam, or reveal a mundane mechanism. Charges, Luck Debt, stored heartbeats, and other existing conditions remain recorded.

### Reversing a Stake

With Civic Insight: one action, no check.

Without Civic Insight: two uninterrupted actions, or one action and a DC 18 check using a skill or tool listed for the anchor.

With an authentic relevant relic acting against Caldovian: the character gains Advantage.

With Caldovian physically controlling the stake: the character must first move him, restrain him, or win a contested check.

### Holding a Stake

Once a stake turns inward, a civic worker or allied NPC can maintain it. Caldovian can attempt to turn one stake outward only once. He must be in the anchor's zone, spend an action, and succeed on a DC 18 Charisma check. A conscious defender adjacent to the stake can oppose with Athletics, Arcana, Investigation, or a relevant tool check. On a tie, the stake remains inward.

### Forming the Hollow Circle

The Hollow Circle forms as soon as all three stakes point inward. It suppresses the six relic functions, substitutes, fragments used as ritual parts, Caldovian's harness, and the Unbound Circle. It does not suppress ordinary spells, class features, magic items unrelated to the six functions, divine power outside the ritual, or the city's normal heat, measures, and gates.

### Visible Sign

The blue line marks on all three anchors turn black. Steam falls instead of rising. Every open ritual doorway shows the same empty service room. Reflections return to the present. Caldovian's voice loses its echo.

## Finding Caldovian

*Celebrity, fugitive, prisoner, corpse, or rumor*

### Celebrity

Caldovian enters Guest Street at the head of a modest procession. He has reduced the number of musicians after Arulea's warning but has not abandoned the idea of witnesses. The party can stop the procession at Guest Entry, divert it to an empty yard, or let it proceed while evacuating the Central Works district. Public obstruction without proof increases Elra Attention by 1. Showing the three incompatible filings ends civic permission immediately.

### Fugitive

Caldovian uses a Handshake repair cart with legitimate silk rope, dark armor, tool rolls, and one illegal compartment. A route audit, marked carriage panel, known driver, or Scarlet Step contact reveals the cart. If missed, Caldovian reaches Central Works Court at the end of the second Work Turn.

### Prisoner

Caldovian remains calm during processing and asks for every right the city genuinely provides. His harness sits in evidence. One prepared agent attempts to reclassify it as ceremonial clothing. The Circle can activate through filed orders even while he remains restrained. If the party keeps Caldovian, harness, relics, and filings separated, begin the finale with the Hall stake inward.

### **Corpse**

Caldovian's body receives lawful funerary custody. The body does not rise. If the Reliquary holds his final heartbeat or the heart-drum substitute contains his recorded beat, the Unbound Circle creates a Last Echo in Central Works Court. If no continuity component exists, hired agents activate the Circle in hope of creating a relic from his name. Begin with Continuity suppressed.

### **Rumor**

A performer, clerk, or carrier uses one of Caldovian's legal identities. The real Caldovian may already stand inside the Hall as an "object claimant." The Bracers, a signature comparison, a lover's recognition, or a direct question about the cup from the Red Door can expose him.

### **Arulea and Civic Authority**

*Competence helps without taking the party's decisions away*

#### **Arulea's Role**

Arulea coordinates records, workers, guards, guest entry, and public communication. She does not command the party's relics, choose a custodian, or decide whether Caldovian deserves death. She treats every extraordinary claim as a problem that must survive an ordinary record.

#### **What Arulea Can Do**

- Close the public gallery after proof of the three identities.
- Issue access to any civic anchor.
- Provide six continuity guards.
- Send a duplicate order to one location.
- Protect one witness inside Central Records.
- Place Caldovian under civic arrest after two independent forms of proof.

Arulea can complete one of these actions per Work Turn. The party must ask, present enough information, or accept the legal consequence.

#### **What Arulea Will Not Do**

She will not seize a culturally held relic without a custody basis. She will not destroy Fume inside the city. She will not announce a divine emergency without evidence. She will not place a civilian crowd around Caldovian to strengthen a case. She will not turn a stake inward because the reversal changes the city's legal definition of a person and an object. A character must accept that responsibility.

#### **Quiet Foreshadowing**

Arulea knows more about continuity law than any ordinary minister should need. Her office already holds sealed copies of Cornelia's family claims, Solice custody opinions, and Caldovian's oldest return petition. She explains each file as preparation. No evidence in this chapter proves another motive.



## **A Useful Order**

If the party proves the Circle plan, Arulea issues a simple public notice: “Central Works is closed for repair. No performance is scheduled. No public attendance is requested.” Reduce Elra Attention by 1 and remove civilian spectators from one zone.

## **Supplies, Allies, and Evacuation**

*Preparation should feel practical and worthwhile*

### **Buying and Borrowing**

Characters can acquire normal adventuring equipment at standard prices. Civic offices lend heavy tools against a signature. Useful items include chains, wedges, hooks, lantern shields, canvas screens, chalk, plumb lines, crowbars, a block and tackle, smoke hoods, insulated gloves, and certified blank notices.

A character who spends one Work Turn gathering a coherent kit gains Advantage on one repair, reversal, restraint, or evacuation check during the finale.

### **Allies**

One major ally can support each anchor. Sava, Ianca, Tessel, Vara, Lysa, Brannoc, Harl, Thosa, or a comparable survivor can hold a route, guard a custodian, or maintain an inward stake after a character reverses it.

An ally cannot reverse a stake, complete the Hollow Circle, or choose the final disposition of Caldovian. Powerful allies remove pressure without replacing the party.

### **Evacuation**

Each Work Turn spent on evacuation clears one zone of ordinary citizens. Arulea’s public notice clears another zone. A red closure flag can clear one zone during the finale.

For every uncleared civilian zone when the Circle activates, add one Crowd Complication at initiative count 20: a lost child, trapped cart, crushed doorway, false rumor, wounded worker, or person trying to watch. Resolving a complication normally requires one action or one successful DC 14 check.

### **Protecting Relics**

A relic outside the six zones cannot power the Circle unless the Key creates a route to it. A relic inside a sealed Priory case counts as present for recognition but cannot be attached without opening the case. A character can spend one Work Turn creating a two-witness custody chain. That chain prevents one forged transfer during the finale.

## **Activating the Unbound Circle**

*A six-round civic transformation*

### **The Trigger**

The Circle activates when Caldovian, a Last Echo, or a prepared agent places the harness or central script stand on the maintenance mark in Central Works Court and reads the final identity line. If the party removed the mark, the operator must spend one action locating the geometry. If the Hall filings were invalidated, the operator must succeed on a DC 17 Arcana or Performance check.

### **Round 1: Claim**

The three stakes turn OUTWARD unless already held inward. Blue lines appear along heat pipes, survey marks, and gate chains. Relic recognition occurs across all six zones.

### **Round 2: Audience**

The Circle counts every visible creature as a witness. Each uncleared crowd complication appears. Caldovian’s voice carries through civic pipes and speaking tubes.

### **Round 3: Vessel**

Caldovian becomes Unbound. If he is dead, the Last Echo manifests. If a prisoner remains separated from the harness, his body stays ordinary and the Echo forms at the harness instead.

#### Round 4: Definition

Records in the Hall begin rewriting Caldovian as an object under civic custody. Each outward anchor activates both associated functions this round instead of one.

#### Round 5: Crown of Cinders

If at least two stakes remain outward, Caldovian gains the Crown of Cinders title until the Circle ends. This is a ritual condition, not a seventh relic. Elra Attention increases by 1.

#### Round 6: Completion

If all three stakes remain outward, Caldovian becomes a living magical relic. He remains the Unbound stat block, gains Regeneration 15 while inside the Circle, and cannot be killed permanently until at least one stake turns inward. The party can continue the encounter. Completion is an escalation, not an automatic end.

#### Elra Attention

*The goddess notices stories, not encounter balance*

#### Starting Attention

Begin at 0, then add the following.

- +1 if Caldovian arrives in a public procession.
- +1 if Nela was possessed during Chapter 12.
- +2 if Nela was sacrificed.
- +1 if Vara died as part of the performance.
- +1 if a FOOM became a celebrated public story.
- 1 if the Hall gallery closes before activation.
- 1 if every relic arrives under a two-witness custody chain.

The track cannot begin below 0 or above 4.

#### Increasing Attention

Increase Attention by 1 when any event occurs: a deliberate public divine impersonation; a beautiful ritual death; a character turns violence into a speech for the crowd; Caldovian reaches Crown of Cinders; a relic produces a spectacular uncontrolled effect; or someone publicly claims Elra's authority. Increase Attention at most once per round unless a rule says otherwise.

#### Reducing Attention

Reduce Attention by 1 when any event occurs: a stake turns inward with ordinary tools and no speech; a civilian zone is cleared; a character files a true record instead of making a public accusation; Caldovian is restrained or arrested without performance; hospitality redirects Elra from the Circle; or Mother Solice's civic duty is invoked through a completed public service. Reduce Attention at most once per round.

#### Attention Levels

- 0–1, Uninterested. Elra does not intervene.
- 2, Watching. Blue heat appears in reflections.
- 3, Amused. Caldovian gains one use of Legendary Resistance.
- 4, Near. At initiative count 20, roll one Divine Interruption.
- 5, Present. Elra manifests at the edge of Central Works Court. Beautiful death becomes dangerous.
- 6, Claiming the Ending. Elra may turn a dramatic death into a divine warning, preserve Caldovian's name as legend, or demand a feast before leaving. The city can still be saved.

#### Roll 1d6 at Initiative Count 20

1. Hunger. The smell of roasted horse and wine fills one zone. Every creature in that zone must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or use 10 feet of movement toward Guest Street.

2. Anger. One visible lie ignites in blue flame. A forged document, false relic, or disguised identity becomes obvious and takes 10 (3d6) radiant damage if it is a creature.

3. Beauty. One creature chosen by the Game Master becomes impossibly striking until the next round. Attacks against that creature have Disadvantage unless the attacker succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw.

4. Appetite for Story. Caldovian and one character each state one true sentence. A refusal increases Attention by 1. A plain truth reduces Attention by 1.

5. Goats and Crabs. Spectral goats block one route while blue crabs cover another. One zone connection becomes Difficult Terrain. The effect ends when a creature offers food or calmly clears a path.

6. Solice's Shadow. A tall mummified silhouette appears behind one civic worker. The next attempt to maintain or reverse a stake gains Advantage. Elra complains audibly but does not cancel the help.

### **Speaking to Elra**

A character can spend an action addressing Elra after she becomes Present. A sincere offer of hospitality, evidence of civic harm, appeal to Mother Solice's duty, or refusal to make Caldovian's death beautiful calls for a DC 17 Persuasion, Religion, or relevant tool check. On a success, reduce Attention by 1. Each character can succeed once.

### **At Attention 6**

Do not make Elra a conventional combatant. She cannot be defeated by reducing Hit Points. She reacts to hospitality, insult, beauty, appetite, sacrifice, and Solice's authority. The Hollow Circle still suppresses Caldovian's ritual. It does not suppress Elra.

### **Relic Functions in the Circle**

*At initiative count 20, each outward anchor activates one available function*

#### **Interpretation — Bracers**

Authentic: Caldovian chooses the order of all Circle effects this round and chooses one creature within 60 feet. The creature must succeed on a DC 17 Charisma saving throw or lose the ability to speak a deliberate lie or cast a spell with a Verbal component until the next initiative count 20.

Substitute: Caldovian chooses the effect order but gains no target effect.

False or absent: roll randomly to determine the first Circle effect.

#### **Probability — Crooked Coin**

Authentic: Caldovian rolls 1d6 and adds or subtracts the result from one d20 roll before the next initiative count 20. Mark 1 Luck Debt. The Game Master collects the debt after the scene according to the Coin's rules.

Substitute: add or subtract 2.

False or absent: no effect.

#### **Consumption — Fume**

Authentic: Fume uses its normal spell-consumption rule for every spell cast within 30 feet. At initiative count 20, Caldovian may spend 1 charge to cause a voluntary FOOM centered on the harness. Roll normally on the center and d100 tables.

Substitute: smoke fills one zone and each creature there makes a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or becomes Blinded until the end of the next turn.

False or absent: no effect.

#### **Continuity — Reliquary**

Authentic: one creature at 0 Hit Points inside the Circle remains conscious, stable, and able to act until the next initiative count 20. This does not restore Hit Points or preserve a soul.

Substitute: Caldovian gains 12 temporary Hit Points.

False or absent: no effect.

### **Passage — Key**

Authentic: Caldovian opens one visible doorway, gate, hatch, or remembered entrance and moves himself or one willing creature to any adjacent zone. An unwilling creature within 30 feet must succeed on a DC 17 Charisma saving throw or move to an adjacent zone chosen by Caldovian.

Substitute: Caldovian teleports up to 20 feet inside the current zone.

False or absent: one stage door opens and reveals a wall.

### **Foresight — Mirror**

Authentic: the Mirror shows the immediate consequence of the first attack or check aimed at Caldovian before the next initiative count 20. That roll has Disadvantage, and Caldovian can move 10 feet as a Reaction after the roll.

Substitute: Caldovian gains +2 Armor Class against the first attack.

False or absent: the false glass shows Caldovian one second late and grants no benefit.

### **Function Overload**

On Round 4, each outward anchor activates both associated functions. On other rounds, Caldovian chooses one available function per outward anchor. If Interpretation is absent, roll 1d2 for each pair.

When an authentic relic is suppressed by an inward stake, it becomes inert inside the six zones. A character can carry it safely, but charges, Luck Debt, and stored effects remain unchanged.

### **Destroyed Relics and Fragments**

A fragment used as a ritual component produces one narrow final effect and then becomes inert. The Game Master chooses the closest substitute effect and applies it once. A destroyed relic never returns because the finale needs a function.

### **False Pieces**

A false piece survives until recognition occurs. At first recognition, the matching station sparks, jams, or speaks a meaningless phrase. Caldovian immediately learns that the piece is false. The false piece still occupies the station until removed.

### **Finale Zones**

*Run the battle as movement between civic spaces*

#### **Central Works Court**

Caldovian's harness stand occupies the center. The court contains coal carts, drains, lifting hooks, and low stone barriers. A creature can gain Half Cover by moving behind a cart. The center mark can be scraped away with one action and a metal tool, preventing a new activation after the Circle ends.

#### **Furnace Yard**

Hot pipes, ash pits, and worker platforms create narrow lanes. An outward pulse causes 10 (3d6) fire damage to one exposed creature, or 18 (4d8) if the Furnace has 0 Repair Marks. A smoke hood prevents the Blinded condition from civic smoke.

#### **Measures Arcade**

Stone standards and hanging frames provide Half Cover. An outward pulse doubles movement costs in the zone until the next round if the Hall has fewer than 2 Repair Marks. A calibrated chain grants Advantage on one attempt to restrain Caldovian or align the stake.

#### **Necessary Gate**

The winch platform stands ten feet above the road. Ladders, stairs, and the block and tackle reach it. An outward pulse moves one creature between zones if the Gate has fewer than 2 Repair Marks.

#### **Records Walk**

A roofed route protects documents and witnesses. A character can file a certified notice here with one action. A completed true notice cancels one forged order or reduces Elra Attention by 1 once.

## **Guest Street**

Civilians, food, baths, and public lodging make this the most dangerous zone to leave uncleared. Hospitality offered to Elra must come from this zone or Cheval Oratorie supplies carried into the finale.

## **Rounds 1 and 2**

*Claim and audience*

### **Round 1: Claim**

At initiative count 20, every outward stake activates one function. Blue lines connect the three anchors. Authentic relics recognize one another within the city-scale Circle. The party can identify active functions through visible signs.

Caldovian begins in Central Works Court unless a branch says otherwise. Prepared agents occupy one unresolved route for every 25 percent of the settlement reserve he controls. Use one Circle Agent per route, to a maximum of four.

### **Party Priorities**

A character can rush an anchor, engage Caldovian, evacuate a crowd complication, protect a relic, expose a false identity, or direct an ally. State every visible threat before the first character acts. No hidden event should make a reasonable choice meaningless.

### **Round 2: Audience**

Caldovian addresses the city through pipes and speaking tubes. He names the party's victories as evidence that every institution needed him. If the Hall gallery remains open, a crowd gathers in Guest Street. Increase Attention by 1 unless a character uses an action, closure flag, or true notice to end the gathering.

### **Caldovian's Offer**

Caldovian offers each character one place in the masterpiece: custodian, witness, bearer, translator, survivor, or executioner. A character who answers plainly gains Advantage on the next saving throw against Steal the Scene. A character who accepts may approach without attack, but the offer grants no magical compulsion.

### **Early Hollow Circle**

A well-prepared party can reverse all three stakes before Round 3. If so, Caldovian never becomes Unbound. Use Caldovian, Performer from Chapter 12, remove Final Exit outside the Red Door, and let the party resolve arrest, escape, or combat. Reward preparation. Do not force the boss transformation.

## **Rounds 3 and 4**

*Vessel and definition*

### **Round 3: Vessel**

Caldovian becomes Unbound if at least one stake remains outward. Replace his current statistics with the Unbound stat block. He retains current damage: subtract all damage already suffered from the Unbound Hit Point maximum. He does not heal from transformation.

If Caldovian is dead, the Last Echo manifests with its own stat block. If he is imprisoned away from the harness, the Echo forms and his body remains in custody.

### **The First Reversal**

The first inward stake visibly strips two functions from the harness. Describe the loss. Fume goes silent. The Reliquary misses a beat. The Bracers argue without sound. The Coin lands flat. The Key turns toward Caldovian. The Mirror shows only the present.

Reduce Elra Attention by 1 if the reversal uses practical tools and no speech.

#### **Round 4: Definition**

Every outward anchor activates both associated functions. Hall records rewrite names. Guest Entry attempts to classify every bearer and object. Caldovian tries to force one character into a chosen role through Steal the Scene.

#### **Public Record**

A character in Records Walk can use one action to file the true statement “Caldovian is a person attempting to become property without civic consent.” The statement must carry two witness signatures. Once filed, Caldovian loses Invited by Procedure and cannot use a false identity to cross a guarded route.

#### **If Two Stakes Are Inward**

The Unbound Circle becomes unstable. Caldovian loses Legendary Resistance and Regeneration. Only the remaining function pair can activate. The city is already safe from complete transformation, but Caldovian and the last anchor remain dangerous.

#### **Rounds 5 and 6**

*Crown of Cinders and completion*

#### **Round 5: Crown of Cinders**

If two or three stakes remain outward, Caldovian gains the Crown of Cinders condition. A thin crown of blue fire appears above his head. He gains a flying Speed of 30 feet and sheds Bright Light for 20 feet. This condition ends when a second stake turns inward. Increase Elra Attention by 1.

#### **A Beautiful Death**

At Attention 5 or 6, reducing Caldovian to 0 Hit Points while he bears the Crown risks giving him the ending he wants. Before applying the final damage, ask the attacking player how the action looks and who can see it. A practical, obscured, or restrained finish causes no special event. A deliberate public execution, divine challenge, or theatrical killing increases Attention by 1.

#### **Round 6: Completion**

With three outward stakes, Caldovian completes transformation. He gains Regeneration 15 at the start of each turn while the Circle remains active. He cannot die permanently with every stake outward. At 0 Hit Points, he becomes inert until the start of his next turn, then rises with 15 Hit Points.

With two outward stakes, transformation fails but the Crown remains until another reversal.

With one outward stake, no completion occurs. The remaining pair continues to function.

With no outward stakes, the Hollow Circle forms immediately.

#### **After Round 6**

Continue initiative as needed. The party can still reverse stakes, rescue civilians, suppress relics, or arrest Caldovian. The countdown changes the stakes; it never removes agency.

#### **Fume at Full Capacity**

If Fume consumes a spell while full, resolve the automatic FOOM exactly. The Circle does not protect Caldovian, the city, or Elra from the result. A FOOM can turn a stake, move a relic, create a route, or end a life. Preserve the rolled result.

#### **The Hollow Circle**

*The practical victory*

#### **Formation**

When all three stakes point inward, the blue lines contract from the city into Central Works Court and then into the harness. Every ritual relic and substitute becomes inert. Ordinary spellcasting continues. Heat returns to service lines. Measurements settle. Necessary doors remain usable.

### **Caldovian Becomes Hollowed**

Replace Caldovian's statistics with Caldovian, Hollowed. His current Hit Points become the lower of his current total or 90. He loses flight, Regeneration, Legendary Actions, relic traits, and Circle functions. He keeps his memories, skills, rapier, fear, and ability to manipulate a person who still wants to believe him.

### **No Automatic Victory**

Caldovian may surrender, bargain, run, attack, ask a lover for help, or attempt to turn one stake outward. Circle Agents may continue fighting. Elra may remain present. The party must still decide custody, arrest, medical care, or death.

### **Denying the Ending**

The best containment uses a canvas screen, ordinary chains, a smoke hood, a certified arrest notice, and few witnesses. A character can end the encounter without another attack by restraining Hollowed Caldovian, filing the arrest, and securing every exit. This requires one action from three different characters or allied civic workers during the same round.

### **Mother Solice**

If Elra refuses to leave, a willing civic worker may invite Mother Solice to speak through her body. The worker's posture becomes immaculate. Solice says, "The service is incomplete." Elra can argue, eat, leave, or help. Solice does not fight Caldovian for the party.

### **Caldovian, Unbound**

*The living magical relic before the Hollow Circle*

#### **Caldovian, Unbound**

Medium Humanoid, chaotic neutral • Challenge Rating 13 (10,000 XP) • Proficiency Bonus +5

Armor Class 18; Hit Points 195 (23d8 + 92); Speed 40 ft.

STR 10 (+0), DEX 20 (+5), CON 18 (+4), INT 16 (+3), WIS 14 (+2), CHA 22 (+6)

Saving Throws Dex +10, Con +9, Wis +7, Cha +11

Skills Deception +16, Insight +7, Performance +16, Persuasion +16, Religion +8

Damage Resistances force, psychic while at least two stakes remain outward

Condition Immunities Charmed

Senses passive Perception 12; Languages Common, Caldovi, Elven

Legendary Resistance (2/Day). If Caldovian fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead. He loses this trait while two or more stakes point inward.

Unbound Confluence. At the start of his turn, Caldovian gains 10 temporary Hit Points if at least two stakes remain outward.

Invited by Procedure. Caldovian has Advantage on checks to cross a route, claim custody, or remain in a civic scene after a recognized authority invites him. A filed true statement from Records Walk ends this trait.

Actions — Multiattack. Caldovian makes three Relic Rapier attacks.

Relic Rapier. Melee Attack: +10 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 17 (1d8 + 5 piercing plus 2d6 force damage).

Steal the Scene. One creature within 60 feet makes a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, Caldovian moves the creature up to half its Speed and the creature cannot take Reactions until the start of Caldovian's next turn.

Unbound Pulse (Recharge 5–6). Each enemy within 20 feet makes a DC 18 Charisma saving throw, taking 27 (6d8) force damage and moving 15 feet on a failure, or half damage with no forced movement on a success.

Bonus Action — Passage Step. If the Gate stake is outward, Caldovian teleports up to 30 feet or moves to an adjacent zone through a visible doorway.

Reaction — Mirror the Consequence. If Foresight is active, impose Disadvantage on one attack against Caldovian, then move up to 10 feet after the attack resolves.

Legendary Actions (3/Round). Move: Caldovian moves up to half Speed without provoking opportunity attacks. Silvered Reply (Costs 2): make one Relic Rapier attack. Demand the Role (Costs 2): one creature within 30 feet makes a DC 18 Charisma save or has Disadvantage on its next attack or check before the end of its turn.

### **Caldovian, Hollowed**

*A frightened man after the relics stop answering*

#### **Caldovian, Hollowed**

Medium Humanoid, chaotic neutral • Challenge Rating 6 (2,300 XP) • Proficiency Bonus +3

Armor Class 15; Hit Points 90 (20d8); Speed 30 ft.

STR 9 (–1), DEX 18 (+4), CON 10 (+0), INT 16 (+3), WIS 14 (+2), CHA 20 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Wis +5, Cha +8

Skills Deception +11, Insight +5, Performance +11, Persuasion +11, Religion +6

Senses passive Perception 12; Languages Common, Caldovi, Elven

No Audience. While fewer than twenty conscious creatures can see Caldovian, he has Disadvantage on Performance checks and cannot use *That Was the Cue*.

Still Caldovian. Suppression does not make him honest. Caldovian has Advantage on a Deception or Persuasion check made against a creature with Bond 2 or higher.

Actions — Multiattack. Caldovian makes two Silvered Rapier attacks.

Silvered Rapier. Melee Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 11 (1d8 + 4 piercing plus 1d4 psychic damage).

Steal the Scene. One creature within 60 feet makes a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, the creature moves up to 15 feet in a direction Caldovian chooses and loses Reactions until the start of Caldovian's next turn.

*That Was the Cue* (Recharge 6). Each enemy within 15 feet makes a DC 16 Charisma saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) psychic damage on a failure or half on a success.

Bonus Action — Desperate Exit. Caldovian Disengages or Dashes.

Reaction — Make It Mean Something. When a creature within 30 feet reduces another creature to 0 Hit Points, Caldovian gains Advantage on his next attack or Charisma check.

Surrender. Caldovian may surrender when reduced below 30 Hit Points, after every exit is secured, or after a person with Bond 2 or higher refuses to give him a dramatic ending. Surrender is real in the moment. It does not make future custody simple.

#### **Ordinary Death**

If Hollowed Caldovian dies, no relic preserves him unless an active, unsuppressed effect explicitly does so. Record the body, witnesses, cause, and custody. Elra Attention determines whether his death becomes a divine story. The party's choice remains final.

### **The Last Echo and Circle Agents**

*Branches for a dead Caldovian and hired support*

#### **Caldovian's Last Echo**

Medium Construct, unaligned • Challenge Rating 10 (5,900 XP) • Proficiency Bonus +4

Armor Class 17; Hit Points 136 (16d10 + 48); Speed 30 ft., fly 30 ft. (hover)

STR 8 (–1), DEX 18 (+4), CON 16 (+3), INT 16 (+3), WIS 12 (+1), CHA 20 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Con +7, Cha +9

Damage Resistances force, psychic; Condition Immunities Charmed, Frightened, Poisoned

Recorded, Not Returned. The Echo is not Caldovian's soul. It cannot form a new Bond, consent to resurrection, or survive outside the Unbound Circle.

Actions — Multiattack. The Echo makes two Script Blade attacks.

Script Blade. Melee Spell Attack: +9 to hit, reach 10 ft. Hit: 16 (2d10 + 5) force damage.

Borrowed Voice (Recharge 5–6). Each creature within 20 feet makes a DC 17 Wisdom saving throw, taking 22 (4d10) psychic damage and losing Reactions on a failure, or half damage on a success.

Bonus Action — Written Passage. Move to an adjacent zone through a filed route while the Gate stake remains outward.

Collapse. When the Hollow Circle forms, the Echo loses flight and takes 40 force damage. If reduced to 0 Hit Points, it becomes inert paper, glass, wire, and one recorded heartbeat.

### **Circle Agent**

Medium Humanoid • Challenge Rating 3 (700 XP) • Armor Class 16; Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16); Speed 30 ft.

Multiattack. Two dark-blade attacks, +5 to hit, 7 (1d6 + 4) slashing damage each.

Route Order. As a Bonus Action, the agent moves through a service route to an adjacent zone while the Gate stake is outward.

Turn the Stake. If adjacent to an inward stake, the agent begins a reversal. A second action completes it unless interrupted.

Smoke Pellet (1/Day). One 10-foot area becomes Heavily Obscured until the end of the next round.

### **Encounter Scaling**

Three or fewer characters: remove one Circle Agent and reduce Unbound Hit Points to 165.

Four characters: use the listed statistics and one to three agents based on treasury resources.

Five or more characters: add one agent, or give Caldovian 20 temporary Hit Points when Round 3 begins.

A powerful allied NPC should hold one route or agent rather than add full damage beside the party.



## **Civic Defenders and Anchor Support**

*Allies maintain the city while the party makes the decisive changes*

### **Continuity Guard**

Medium Humanoid • Challenge Rating 2 (450 XP) • Armor Class 17; Hit Points 45; Speed 30 ft.

**Spear.** +5 to hit, 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

**Shield Line.** An adjacent ally gains +2 Armor Class against one attack as a Reaction.

**Clear the Route.** The guard moves one willing civilian up to 20 feet without provoking opportunity attacks.

### **Civic Worker**

Medium Humanoid • Challenge Rating 1/4 (50 XP) • Armor Class 11; Hit Points 11; Speed 30 ft.

**Tool Strike.** +3 to hit, 3 (1d4 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

**Maintain Stake.** A worker adjacent to an inward stake grants Advantage to the defender's opposed check and prevents a Circle Agent from completing Turn the Stake with only one action.

**Practical Knowledge.** A worker grants Advantage on one repair or hazard check inside the worker's assigned anchor.

### **Using Sava and Ianca**

Sava can hold Records Walk, expose a false order, or defend one inward stake through disciplined movement. Ianca can stabilize the Furnace, brace the Gate, or carry civilians through a blocked route. Neither woman completes the Hollow Circle.

If both arrive, private insults continue even during the crisis. Keep the exchange brief. Competence remains the point.

### **Using Vara or Lysa**

Vara can turn Scarlet Step agents against Caldovian or secure the settlement reserve. Lysa can expose one false identity or command a cell while wearing Vara's office. Asking Lysa to disappear into Vara raises Pressure. Letting Lysa act in her own name gains Bond.

### **Using Mother Solice**

Solice may possess one willing civic worker after Attention reaches 5. Her presence grants Advantage on one civic action per round. She refuses to decide Caldovian's fate. "Duty does not become mercy merely because anger is loud."

## **Outcomes for Caldovian**

*The city survives more than one kind of ending*

### **Quiet Arrest**

The party forms the Hollow Circle, restrains Caldovian, files the true identity notice, and removes public witnesses. Elra loses interest. Caldovian enters civic custody as a person, not an artifact. This is the cleanest victory and the ending he hates most.

### **Death Without Spectacle**

Hollowed Caldovian dies after the Circle forms, away from a crowd and without sacred performance. His body receives ordinary funerary custody. Elra may be angry, bored, or absent. The city records cause, witnesses, and property separately.

### **Beautiful Death**

Caldovian dies while Unbound, crowned, publicly challenged, or watched by Elra. The city can still survive, but his name becomes a divine story. Increase Attention to at least 5. Elran factions argue for generations about whether Elra accepted, mocked, or warned through him.

### **Living Relic Contained**

Caldovian completes transformation but the party reverses at least one stake before escape. He becomes inert at 0 Hit Points but returns while the Circle remains active. Forming the Hollow Circle changes him to Hollowed. If the party cannot complete the reversal, Priory containment becomes the campaign's immediate epilogue.

### **Escape**

Caldovian leaves Oraş Cald with one or more functions, a route, or a surviving audience. The city is saved if the anchors no longer endanger it. Book One can end with a damaged victory and a living recurring villain. Record exactly what he carries.

### **Surrender and Bargain**

**Caldovian may surrender to a character with high Bond.** He offers routes, names, money, relic information, or testimony against Vara, Xyom, Cornelia's allies, or civic officials. Some information is true. A surrender should create a custody problem, not erase the finale.

### **Relic Custody After the Circle**

*Victory does not settle ownership automatically*

#### **Immediate Procedure**

After danger ends, create one record for each relic, substitute, fragment, false piece, and harness station. Record location, condition, charges, Luck Debt, stored heartbeat, attunement, witnesses, and current claimant. Do not put "the six relics" on one line.

#### **Possible Custodians**

Giftschrank Priory offers secure containment, especially for Fume.  
The Path of Glorious Life claims cultural stewardship.  
Mother Solice's offices claim funerary and continuity authority.  
Rock Elf custodians claim burial objects and the Reliquary.  
The Hall of Measures claims evidence created through civic filings.  
Vara or Lysa may claim objects purchased, stolen, or rescued by the Scarlet Step.  
The party may retain an item through consent, necessity, theft, or unresolved dispute.

#### **Destroyed and False Items**

**A destroyed relic remains destroyed.** A fragment produces no additional function after its final use. Substitutes and false pieces are evidence, stage property, or dangerous mechanisms. None becomes a true relic because the Circle used it.

#### **Fume**

If Fume survives, record the exact charge total after every spell and FOOM. The Hollow Circle suppresses Fume only while the sword remains inside it. Moving the sword out restores normal behavior. Never describe containment as permanent unless the party completes a valid destruction procedure.

#### **Crooked Coin**

Luck Debt survives suppression, Caldovian's defeat, and the end of the campaign. Collect outstanding debt according to the Coin's rules. Do not use debt to undo the party's victory.

### **Oraş Cald Afterward**

*A functioning city absorbs even a divine emergency*

#### **The First Hour**

Workers cool the Furnace, reset the Hall, inspect the Gate, clear Guest Street, count injuries, and collect false documents. Arulea requests statements while memory remains fresh. Public Kitchen East sends food without asking which faction won.

#### **The First Morning**

**Repairs begin before speeches.** The Hall publishes a temporary notice separating Caldovian the person, Caldovian the performance, and Caldovian the proposed object. The Necessary Gate adds a second witness to funerary service routes. The Furnace removes “ceremonial arrival heat” from every emergency code.

### **Public Story**

**Let the party choose one honest public summary.** A quiet statement reduces cult interest and protects witnesses. A dramatic statement wins fame and may preserve Caldovian’s legend. A false statement creates a future vulnerability. Arulea records the chosen public story beside the sealed complete account.

### **Rewards**

Oraş Cald pays each character 1,500 gp for emergency civic service, repair risk, and testimony. The party also receives permanent guest-entry clearance, access to public archives with reasonable notice, and one civic favor. A character who stole public or Scarlet Step funds may lose part or all of the payment.

### **Surviving Relationships**

**Update Bond and Pressure.** A protected worker remembers practical kindness. A displaced custodian remembers who took control. Vara or Lysa remembers how the party treated visible identity. Sava and Ianca remember whether the party listened. Elra remembers the ending only if Attention reached 5 or 6. Mother Solice remembers the work regardless.

### **Character Epilogues**

Ask each player one question.

Which relic, person, or institution does the character trust now?

What ordinary civic task does the character perform before leaving Oraş Cald?

What part of Caldovian’s friendship remains emotionally real?

What public story does the character refuse to accept?

What object, debt, injury, or promise travels onward?

Show one visible result for each answer.

### **Caldovian’s Cup**

If the smoky grey cup from the Red Door survives, it remains intact. It is not one of the six relics. A tap on the rim produces a clear note. In a quiet epilogue, the cup may sit in evidence, in Vara’s rooms, beside Caldovian’s bed, or on the Red Door bar. Do not make it secretly complete the ritual. Where ever it is Sava plans on recovering it, if she hasn’t already.

### **Arulea**

**Arulea closes the civic file but does not destroy it.** She keeps one sealed duplicate in continuity storage. Her competence should feel reassuring. Small unanswered questions may remain: why did she possess old Glass Coast claims, why did she anticipate a dead claimant, and why does Mother Solice address her without introduction? Book One provides no answer.

### **Book Two Boundary**

The Beautiful Death of Cornelia Van Ghoul begins one week later. Do not place Cornelia’s corpse, the Coin of the Phoenix, or the sealed industrial-alcohol tun inside this finale. A brief request for future transport can arrive after the epilogue, but the horror of the journey belongs to the next book.

### **Final Image**

**Steam rises from the repaired Public Furnace.** The Hall’s blue plumb line hangs straight. The Necessary Gate opens for a bread cart, closes behind it, and records the passage. Oraş Cald continues because someone performs each duty.

Whether Caldovian lives, dies, escapes, or becomes evidence, the city refuses to become only his ending.

## Finale Quick Reference

*One-page procedure for running Oraş Cald*

### Before Play

1. Complete the Finale State Sheet.
2. Determine Arrival Form and Work Turns.
3. Mark each anchor at 0 Repair Marks.
4. Set starting Elra Attention.
5. Choose one to four Circle Agents based on resources.
6. Place allies, custodians, relics, substitutes, and civilians.

### During Work Turns

Each character completes one task. Track Repair Marks, Civic Insight, evacuation, filings, supplies, custody chains, and Caldovian's location. At the end of the last Work Turn, activate the Circle unless the party prevented the trigger.

### During the Circle

Initiative count 20: resolve crowd complications, Divine Interruption if required, civic hazard from unstable outward anchors, and one function per outward anchor. Round 4 activates both functions per outward anchor.

Round 1 Claim. Round 2 Audience. Round 3 Vessel. Round 4 Definition. Round 5 Crown of Cinders. Round 6 Completion. Continue after Round 6 as needed.

### Reversal Summary

Furnace inward: suppress Consumption and Continuity.

Hall inward: suppress Interpretation and Probability.

Gate inward: suppress Passage and Foresight.

All three inward: form the Hollow Circle and change Caldovian to Hollowed.

### End the Campaign

Resolve Caldovian, Elra, relic custody, public story, rewards, relationships, and character epilogues separately. A victory can be complete, damaged, quiet, famous, merciful, criminal, or tragic. The city's survival does not require one approved moral answer.



## CHAPTER 14 — Relics, Magic, and FOOM Tables

*Complete rules for the six relics and related items*

### Using This Chapter

This chapter consolidates the campaign's relic rules. Earlier adventures introduce each object through custody, danger, and story. Use these pages when a character attunes to a relic, invokes a property, damages an object, triggers recognition, accepts Luck Debt, or releases Fume.

### Rules Shared by the Six

**Cultural Trust.** Possession and attunement do not create ownership. Most relics remain part of shared Elran heritage held through legal title, cultural claim, institutional custody, inherited obligation, or negotiated use. Fume is the exception: immediate containment takes priority over ordinary ownership.

**Recognition.** When two linked relics come within 60 feet, each object produces a characteristic sign. Recognition communicates relation, capacity, warning, disagreement, or immediate function. Recognition is not obedience, consent, attunement, or proof that Caldovian's interpretation is correct.

**Object Damage.** The object statistics below allow a relic to be seized, restrained, broken, or protected during play. Ordinary damage does not automatically end an artifact's magic. Each entry states what a broken object does and how permanent destruction becomes possible.

| Function       | Relic                        | Recognition Sign                             |
|----------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Interpretation | Bracers of Two Tongues       | Silver and bronze inscriptions rearrange.    |
| Consumption    | Fume                         | Smoke thickens or the blade begins a word.   |
| Passage        | Key Without a House          | Its shadow points toward an impossible seam. |
| Continuity     | Obsidian Reliquary           | A stored or sympathetic heartbeat sounds.    |
| Probability    | Crooked Coin                 | The bent Coin balances on its edge.          |
| Foresight      | Mirror of the Unlived Moment | A reflection moves a fraction early.         |

### Bracers of Two Tongues

*Wondrous Item, rare (requires attunement to both bracers)*

One narrow bracer is pale silver and covered in flowing Old Elven. The broader bracer is dark bronze and inscribed in blunt Common. One inscription speaks; the other answers, qualifies, interprets, or states the practical consequence.

**Paired Defense.** While wearing both bracers, gain a +1 bonus to AC.

**Two Tongues.** The bearer can understand, speak, read, and write Common and Elvish, including Old Elven. The bracers convey idiom, implication, social register, and likely responsibility rather than only literal wording.

**Comparative Understanding.** After hearing or reading two accounts of the same agreement, event, instruction, or dispute, spend 1 minute comparing the accounts. Learn one important difference in intention, obligation, omission, or consequence. This property cannot reveal a fact unknown to both sources.

**Relic Interpreter.** When another linked relic is within 60 feet, the bracers translate its immediate reaction: function, need, warning, capacity, target, disagreement, recognition, or attitude. The translation does not make the relic truthful or obedient.

**Object Statistics.** Each bracer is a Tiny object with AC 19, 20 Hit Points, Damage Threshold 5, and immunity to poison and psychic damage. If one bracer is destroyed, the surviving bracer becomes nonmagical until repaired or reunited with a faithful reconstruction.

## Fume, the FOOM Sword

*Artifact rules, Smoke Drinker, release, and destruction*

*Weapon (longsword), artifact (requires attunement)*

Fume is a slender dark longsword with deep blue and violet patterns. Grey smoke drifts through a black central channel. The bearer gains a +1 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with Fume. It has the Finesse and Versatile (1d10) properties.

**Fume Save DC.** When a released effect requires a saving throw or spell attack, use the bearer's spell save DC and spell attack modifier. If the bearer has neither, use save DC 15 and +7 to hit.

### Smoke Drinker

| d20  | Result                                                                                        |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | Fume consumes the spell before any effect. The resource is expended, and Fume gains 1 charge. |
| 2–20 | The spell resolves normally. Fume gains no charge.                                            |

Roll before resolving any spell cast within 30 feet. A cantrip and a level 9 spell each add exactly 1 charge. Fume cannot consume a deity's direct intervention, an artifact's permanent property, a permanent planar trait, or a spell cast wholly inside a functioning dead-magic area.

**Capacity.** Fume holds 12 charges and regains none at dawn. At 12 charges it keeps hunting. If it consumes another spell, the spell is negated, an automatic FOOM occurs, and Fume ends at 11 charges.

### Release Fume

Once per round, the bearer can replace one attack made with Fume, speak the command word, and expend 1 charge. Roll 2d6 on the Center Table, then roll d100 on the FOOM table. The effect requires no Concentration. A beneficial result still affects the determined center.

| 2d6  | Center               |
|------|----------------------|
| 2    | The wielder.         |
| 3–11 | The intended target. |
| 12   | The wielder.         |

**Fearsome Reputation.** When Fume releases, each creature within 30 feet that recognizes the sword must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or become Frightened of the wielder until the end of the creature's next turn. A successful creature is immune for 24 hours.

**Enchantment Consumption.** On meaningful contact with an enchanted item, the GM can roll d10000. On 1 (a 0.01 percent chance), Fume permanently consumes one magical property and gains 1 charge. This cannot be intentionally attempted more than once per item per day. An artifact resists unless its rules permit damage or loss.

**Destruction.** Fume can be broken if it holds no more than 2 charges, all active magic ceases in the chamber, it is pinned inside null-salt, heated only by nonmagical pressure, left untouched for 13 minutes, and broken mechanically. A successful destruction is permanent.

**Object Statistics.** Tiny object; AC 21; 40 Hit Points; Damage Threshold 10; immune to poison and psychic damage. Ordinary damage cannot reduce Fume below 1 Hit Point.

## FOOM Effect Table 01–25

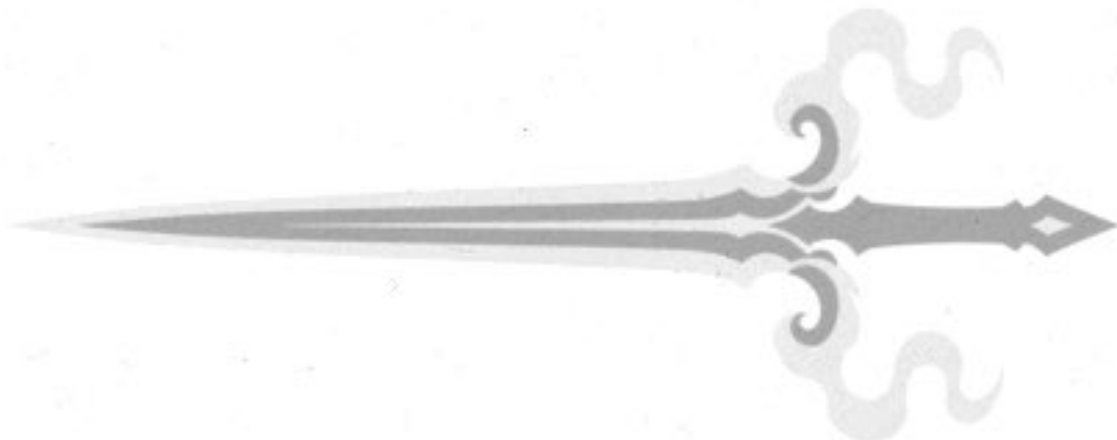
Roll openly. “Lvl” is an approximate spell level for adjudicating suppression, not a charge cost.

| d100 | Lvl | Effect                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 01   | 0   | Soot Cough. The center and each creature within 5 feet make a Constitution saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 1d6 poison damage and cannot take Reactions until the start of its next turn. |
| 02   | 0   | Candle Rain. Tiny blue flames fall in a 10-foot radius. Invisible creatures and objects are outlined until the end of the wielder's next turn.                                                        |
| 03   | 0   | Ashen Hand. A grey hand deals 1d8 necrotic damage to the center; a failed Strength save makes it drop one held object.                                                                                |
| 04   | 0   | Sudden Applause. Disembodied applause erupts. The center has Disadvantage on its next Dexterity (Stealth) check and its next Constitution saving throw made to maintain Concentration.                |
| 05   | 1   | Black Feather Fall. The center rises 10 feet, drifts safely down, and cannot take falling damage until the end of its next turn.                                                                      |
| 06   | 1   | Ember Needle. Make a ranged spell attack against the center. On a hit, it takes 3d6 fire damage.                                                                                                      |
| 07   | 1   | Smoke Double. The next attack against the center before the end of its next turn has disadvantage.                                                                                                    |
| 08   | 1   | Inverted Footprints. For 1 hour, the center's tracks point opposite its movement; mundane tracking has disadvantage.                                                                                  |
| 09   | 1   | Glass Tongue. The center makes a Charisma saving throw. On a failure, it cannot knowingly lie for 1 minute.                                                                                           |
| 10   | 1   | Backward Step. The center teleports 10 feet directly away from the wielder or falls prone if no safe space exists.                                                                                    |
| 11   | 1   | Frost Bloom. Creatures in a 5-foot radius make a Constitution saving throw, taking 3d6 cold damage on a failure or half as much on a success.                                                         |
| 12   | 1   | Grease Halo. Ground in a 10-foot radius becomes slick for 1 minute. A creature entering or starting there must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw or fall Prone.                                     |
| 13   | 1   | Lantern Theft. Nonmagical flames within 30 feet go out; magical light of 1st level or lower is suppressed until the end of the wielder's next turn.                                                   |

| d100 | Lvl | Effect                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 14   | 1   | Borrowed Voice. For 1 minute the center speaks in the voice of a random creature within 60 feet.                                                                                             |
| 15   | 1   | Iron Sneeze. Loose metal leaps toward the center. It makes a Dexterity saving throw, taking 3d4 piercing damage on a failure or half as much on a success.                                   |
| 16   | 1   | Red Thread. The center is tethered to the nearest creature within 30 feet until the end of the wielder's next turn; neither can willingly move more than 30 feet apart.                      |
| 17   | 1   | Paper Bees. The center takes 2d6 slashing damage and has disadvantage on its next attack roll.                                                                                               |
| 18   | 1   | Laughing Wound. The center takes 2d6 psychic damage and makes a Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, it can speak only through laughter until the end of its next turn.                        |
| 19   | 1   | Sudden Door. A temporary door opens through the nearest solid surface and vanishes at the end of the wielder's next turn.                                                                    |
| 20   | 1   | Milk-White Fog. Opaque white fog fills a 15-foot radius until the end of the wielder's next turn.                                                                                            |
| 21   | 2   | Grave Chill. The center makes a Constitution saving throw, taking 4d6 necrotic damage on a failure or half as much on a success.                                                             |
| 22   | 2   | Blue Levitation. The center rises 20 feet, hangs until the end of its next turn, then falls normally.                                                                                        |
| 23   | 2   | Unwelcome Armor. Smoky iron grants +2 AC for 1 minute but halves the center's speed.                                                                                                         |
| 24   | 2   | Split Shadow. Make a spell attack against the center. On a hit, it takes 4d8 psychic damage.                                                                                                 |
| 25   | 2   | Tongue of Sparks. A 15-foot cone extends from Fume toward the center. Creatures in the cone make a Dexterity saving throw, taking 4d6 fire damage on a failure or half as much on a success. |

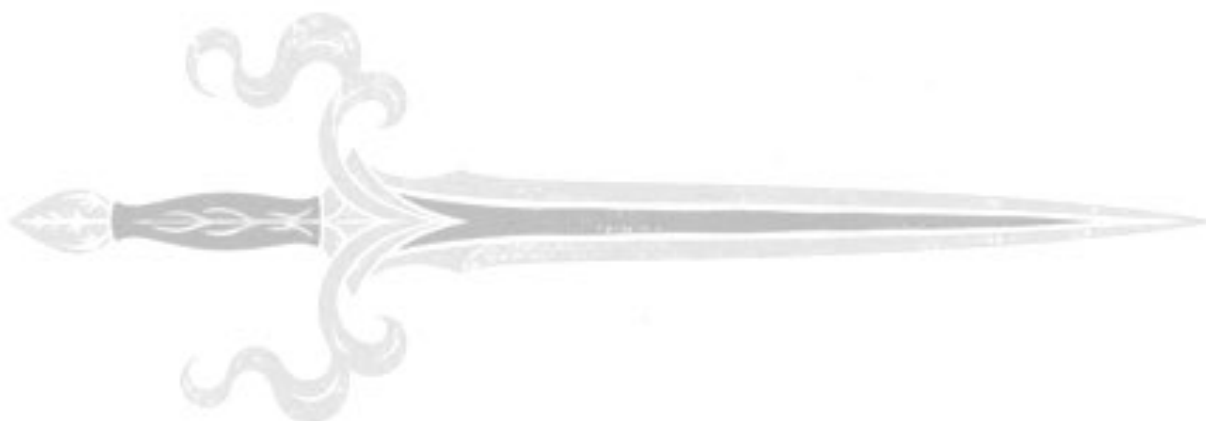
| d100 | Lvl | Effect                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|------|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 26   | 2   | Sleep of One Eye. The center makes a Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, it is Incapacitated until it takes damage or until the end of its next turn.                                                                                         |
| 27   | 2   | Bone Compass. For 10 minutes, one hand points toward the nearest corpse or undead within 1 mile.                                                                                                                                             |
| 28   | 2   | Salt Circle. A 10-foot-radius circle lasts 1 minute; summoned creatures must pass a Charisma save to enter.                                                                                                                                  |
| 29   | 2   | Raining Keys. Keys rain in a 20-foot radius. Creatures there make a Dexterity saving throw, taking 3d6 bludgeoning damage on a failure or half as much on a success. The area is Difficult Terrain until the end of the wielder's next turn. |
| 30   | 2   | Memory Slip. The center loses its reaction and remembers nothing until the start of its next turn.                                                                                                                                           |
| 31   | 2   | Mirror Step. The center exchanges positions with the nearest creature within 30 feet. An unwilling creature can prevent the exchange with a successful Charisma saving throw.                                                                |
| 32   | 2   | Thunder in the Teeth. The center makes a Constitution saving throw. On a failure, it takes 4d8 thunder damage and is Deafened for 1 minute. On a success, it takes half damage and is not Deafened.                                          |
| 33   | 2   | Soft Stone. Stone and packed earth in a 15-foot radius become difficult mud for 1 minute.                                                                                                                                                    |
| 34   | 2   | Copper Sleep. If the center is a Construct, it makes a Constitution saving throw and is Incapacitated until the end of its next turn on a failure. Any other center takes 3d6 lightning damage.                                              |
| 35   | 2   | Borrowed Momentum. The center is hurled 30 feet away; if it hits a solid object, it takes 3d6 bludgeoning and falls prone.                                                                                                                   |
| 36   | 3   | Hollow Lungs. The center makes a Constitution saving throw. On a failure, it takes 5d6 necrotic damage and cannot speak or provide Verbal components until the end of its next turn.                                                         |
| 37   | 3   | Violet Chain. The center is Restrained. It repeats a Strength saving throw at the end of each turn, ending the effect on a success.                                                                                                          |
| 38   | 3   | Rain of Teeth. Creatures in a 20-foot radius make a Dexterity saving throw, taking 5d6 piercing damage on a failure or half as much on a success.                                                                                            |

| d100 | Lvl | Effect                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------|-----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 39   | 3   | Upside-Down Room. Gravity reverses in a 15-foot radius until the start of the wielder's next turn.                                                                                                          |
| 40   | 3   | Choir of Knives. Three spectral knives each make a spell attack against a random creature within 30 feet. A knife deals 2d8 force damage on a hit.                                                          |
| 41   | 3   | Melted Distance. Until the end of the wielder's next turn, each 5 feet of movement within 20 feet costs only 1 foot.                                                                                        |
| 42   | 3   | Feral Furniture. Up to three unattended objects animate for 1 minute. Each has AC 15, 10 Hit Points, Speed 30 feet, +5 to hit, and deals 1d8 + 3 bludgeoning damage. Each attacks the nearest creature.     |
| 43   | 3   | Green Lightning. A 60-foot line passes through the center; Dexterity save for 6d6 lightning, half on success.                                                                                               |
| 44   | 3   | False Sunrise. Bright light fills a 30-foot radius. Creatures there make a Constitution saving throw, taking 4d6 radiant damage and becoming Blinded until the end of the next turn on a failure.           |
| 45   | 3   | Age of Dust. One nonmagical worn or carried object becomes brittle and useless; otherwise center takes 5d8 necrotic.                                                                                        |
| 46   | 3   | Thief of Names. For 1 minute no one can remember or speak the center's name; it gains Stealth advantage but cannot receive benefits requiring its name.                                                     |
| 47   | 3   | Red Snow. A 20-foot radius is lightly obscured and difficult for 1 minute; creatures starting there take 1d6 cold.                                                                                          |
| 48   | 3   | Mouth in the Floor. The center takes 6d6 piercing damage and is Grappled (escape DC equals Fume's save DC).                                                                                                 |
| 49   | 3   | Glass Bones. The center takes 4d8 force and has disadvantage on Strength saves for 1 minute.                                                                                                                |
| 50   | 3   | Silent Explosion. Creatures in a 15-foot radius make a Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 6d6 force damage and is pushed 10 feet. On a success, it takes half damage and is not pushed. |



|    | d100 | Lvl | Effect                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|----|------|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 51 | 3    |     | Hound of Smoke. A smoke hound appears for 1 minute; use dire wolf statistics but its bite deals fire damage.                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 52 | 3    |     | Spiral Fall. The center teleports 30 feet upward and falls at the start of its next turn.                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 53 | 3    |     | Ink Flood. A 20-foot radius is heavily obscured until the end of the wielder's next turn; creatures inside are blinded.                                                                                                                                                                |
| 54 | 3    |     | Second Heart. The center gains 20 temporary hit points for 1 minute; when the temporary hit points vanish it takes 10 necrotic damage.                                                                                                                                                 |
| 55 | 3    |     | One-Word Storm. Creatures within 15 feet make a Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 5d6 psychic damage and cannot take Reactions until the start of its next turn.                                                                                                     |
| 56 | 4    |     | Black Orchard. Twisted trees erupt in a 20-foot radius. Creatures there make a Dexterity saving throw, taking 6d6 piercing damage and becoming Restrained on a failure. A Restrained creature can escape with a successful Strength check against Fume's save DC.                      |
| 57 | 4    |     | Cold Sun. Creatures within 20 feet make a Constitution saving throw, taking 6d8 cold damage on a failure or half as much on a success.                                                                                                                                                 |
| 58 | 4    |     | Shattered Noon. Every active spell of level 3 or lower within 20 feet ends.                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 59 | 4    |     | Puppet Strings. The center makes a Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, it uses its Reaction, if available, to make one weapon attack against the nearest creature.                                                                                                                      |
| 60 | 4    |     | Iron Rain. Creatures in a 20-foot radius make a Dexterity saving throw, taking 8d6 piercing damage on a failure or half as much on a success.                                                                                                                                          |
| 61 | 4    |     | Door into Water. A violent 30-foot-long, 5-foot-wide line extends from Fume through the center. Creatures in the line make a Strength saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 5d8 bludgeoning damage and is pushed 30 feet. On a success, it takes half damage and is not pushed. |
| 62 | 4    |     | Choir of the Unburied. Creatures within 20 feet make a Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 6d6 psychic damage and is Frightened until the end of its next turn.                                                                                                        |
| 63 | 4    |     | Red Hourglass. For 1 minute, the center's Speed is halved, its AC is reduced by 2, and it cannot take Reactions. It repeats a Wisdom saving throw at the end of each turn, ending the effect on a success.                                                                             |

|    | d100 | Lvl | Effect                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----|------|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 64 | 4    |     | Borrowed Giant. The center becomes Large for 1 minute, gains Strength-check advantage and +1d6 melee damage, but has disadvantage on Dexterity saves.                                                                                         |
| 65 | 4    |     | Lantern of No Faces. For 1 minute, faces cannot be distinguished within 20 feet; attacks against anyone but the nearest creature have disadvantage.                                                                                           |
| 66 | 4    |     | Thirteen Steps. The center teleports exactly 65 feet in a random direction; blocked arrival deals 6d6 force.                                                                                                                                  |
| 67 | 5    |     | Bone Orchard. Skeletal hands fill a 30-foot radius for 1 minute, making it Difficult Terrain. A creature entering or starting there makes a Strength saving throw, taking 3d6 necrotic damage and becoming Restrained on a failure.           |
| 68 | 5    |     | Starved Flame. A 30-foot cone extends from Fume toward the center. Creatures in the cone make a Dexterity saving throw, taking 8d6 fire damage on a failure or half as much on a success. Magical light of level 4 or lower in the cone ends. |
| 69 | 5    |     | White Silence. A silent, bitterly cold 20-foot radius lasts 1 minute; creatures starting there take 4d6 cold.                                                                                                                                 |
| 70 | 5    |     | Unmaking Ray. A 60-foot-long, 5-foot-wide line extends through the center. Creatures make a Dexterity saving throw, taking 10d6 force damage on a failure or half as much on a success. Objects and structures take double damage.            |
| 71 | 5    |     | Sudden Winter. A 30-foot radius freezes for 1 minute and becomes Difficult Terrain. Creatures there make a Constitution saving throw, taking 8d6 cold damage on a failure or half as much on a success.                                       |
| 72 | 5    |     | Griming Gate. The center teleports to a random safe location within 1 mile.                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 73 | 5    |     | Ash Phoenix. Creatures in a 20-foot radius make a Dexterity saving throw, taking 8d6 fire damage on a failure or half as much on a success. The center regains Hit Points equal to half the fire damage it personally took.                   |
| 74 | 5    |     | Palace of Smoke. A 30-foot radius lasts 1 minute; at the start of each turn inside, a creature teleports to a random open space in the smoke.                                                                                                 |
| 75 | 5    |     | Stolen Gravity. Gravity ceases within 30 feet for 1 minute; movement requires pushing from surfaces.                                                                                                                                          |



|    | d100 | Lvl | Effect                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----|------|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 76 | 6    |     | City of One Room. For 1 minute every door within 60 feet opens into the same extradimensional chamber; exits return through random doors.                                                                                                  |
| 77 | 6    |     | Choir of Meteors. Three random points within 30 feet erupt. Creatures in each 10-foot-radius blast make a Dexterity saving throw, taking 4d6 bludgeoning plus 4d6 fire damage on a failure or half as much on a success.                   |
| 78 | 6    |     | Flesh to Mist. The center becomes mistlike for 1 minute, moves through narrow gaps, resists nonmagical damage, and cannot make weapon attacks.                                                                                             |
| 79 | 6    |     | The Long Blink. The center vanishes until the end of its next turn, then returns to the nearest safe space.                                                                                                                                |
| 80 | 6    |     | Black Tide. Creatures in a 30-foot radius make a Constitution saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 10d6 necrotic damage and falls Prone. On a success, it takes half damage and does not fall Prone.                               |
| 81 | 6    |     | Crown of Wasps. The center makes a Constitution saving throw. On a failure, it takes 8d6 poison damage and is Frightened of the nearest creature for 1 minute. On a success, it takes half damage and is not Frightened.                   |
| 82 | 6    |     | World Turned Sideways. Gravity shifts horizontally in a 30-foot radius for 1 minute toward a random compass direction.                                                                                                                     |
| 83 | 6    |     | Throat of the Volcano. Creatures in a 20-foot radius make a Dexterity saving throw, taking 10d6 fire damage on a failure or half as much on a success. For 1 minute, a creature entering the area or starting there takes 2d6 fire damage. |
| 84 | 6    |     | Unperson. The center is invisible and undetectable by divination for 1 minute; others forget where it stood.                                                                                                                               |
| 85 | 7    |     | Sevenfold Echo. Seven bolts strike random creatures within 60 feet. Each bolt deals 4d8 force damage, and one creature can be selected more than once.                                                                                     |
| 86 | 7    |     | Day Without Color. For 1 minute, acid, cold, fire, lightning, necrotic, poison, psychic, radiant, and thunder damage within 40 feet becomes force.                                                                                         |
| 87 | 7    |     | Red Moon Below. Creatures within 30 feet make a Constitution saving throw, taking 6d6 radiant plus 6d6 necrotic damage on a failure or half as much on a success.                                                                          |
| 88 | 7    |     | Army of Reflections. Seven duplicates protect the center for 1 minute. When an attack targets the center, roll 1d8. On 2–8, one duplicate is hit and destroyed instead. An area effect destroys every duplicate in its area.               |

|     | d100 | Lvl | Effect                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----|------|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 89  | 7    |     | Closed Future. The center's next three d20 rolls before the end of its next turn are natural 1s.                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 90  | 7    |     | Open Future. The center's next three d20 rolls before the end of its next turn are natural 20s.                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 91  | 8    |     | The Unasked Resurrection. The nearest corpse within 60 feet returns with half hit points, frightened and uncontrolled; if none, the center heals 8d8.                                                                                                                                                    |
| 92  | 8    |     | Storm of Doors. Creatures in a 30-foot radius make a Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 12d8 force damage and teleports to a random safe space within 60 feet. On a success, it takes half damage and does not teleport.                                                             |
| 93  | 8    |     | Glass World. Creatures in a 40-foot radius make a Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, a creature takes 12d6 piercing damage and is Restrained until the end of its next turn. On a success, it takes half damage and is not Restrained.                                                                |
| 94  | 8    |     | Time Stutter. The center immediately takes two additional turns, then is stunned until the end of its following turn.                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 95  | 8    |     | Names of Fire. Creatures within 30 feet make a Charisma saving throw, taking 10d8 fire damage on a failure or half as much on a success. A creature can speak its full name as a Reaction to gain Advantage on the save.                                                                                 |
| 96  | 8    |     | Empty Kingdom. Magic is suppressed in a 60-foot radius until the start of the wielder's next turn; spells cannot be cast and magic items become inert.                                                                                                                                                   |
| 97  | 9    |     | The Hungry Sky. Creatures within 40 feet make a Strength saving throw. On a failure, a creature rises 60 feet, takes 15d6 force damage, and remains suspended until the end of the wielder's next turn.                                                                                                  |
| 98  | 9    |     | Reverse Death. If above 1 hit point, the center drops to 1. Other creatures within 30 feet heal 5d8; undead take radiant damage instead.                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 99  | 9    |     | Fume's Feast. Every active spell within 60 feet ends. Fume fills to 12 charges, then erupts in a 30-foot radius. Creatures there make a Dexterity saving throw, taking 12d10 force damage on a failure or half as much on a success.                                                                     |
| 100 | 9    |     | FOOM. Creatures in a 30-foot radius make a Dexterity saving throw, taking 5d6 fire, 5d6 cold, 5d6 lightning, and 5d6 force damage on a failure or half as much on a success. Survivors teleport to random safe spaces within 120 feet. Fume loses all charges, and the wielder gains 1 Exhaustion level. |

**FULL-CAPACITY RELEASE** A spell consumed at 12 charges causes one automatic FOOM, then leaves Fume at 11 charges. The bearer can use Borrowed FOOM only while also attuned to the Crooked Coin.

**TABLE RULE** Use the Center Table before rolling d100. A save uses Fume's save DC. A spell attack uses Fume's spell attack modifier. Never choose a convenient result.

## Passage and the Final Beat

*The Key Without a House and the Obsidian Reliquary*

### Key Without a House

*Wondrous Item, very rare (requires attunement)*

**Charges.** The Key has 3 charges and regains 1d3 expended charges daily at dawn.

**Ordinary Locks.** The Key opens a nonmagical lock it can physically enter. This uses no charge and leaves no damage.

**Temporary Doorway.** As an action, expend 1 charge and touch a solid surface. A visible doorway opens through up to 5 feet of nonmagical material for 1 minute. Dismiss it early as a Bonus Action. A creature in the opening when it closes moves to the nearest safe side.

**Familiar Passage.** As an action, expend 3 charges while touching a doorway, arch, gate, or frame. It opens for 1 minute onto a familiar passage within 1 mile that the bearer has personally crossed. It cannot cross planar boundaries.

**Rejection Points Home.** When a magical lock, ward, planar boundary, or sovereign effect rejects the Key, no charge is spent. The Key becomes painfully hot and points toward the nearest mundane entrance or practical route for 10 minutes.

**Passage Is Not Permission.** The Key bypasses barriers, not ownership, law, invitation, vows, custody, or consequences.

**Destruction.** To make the Key vulnerable, stand before a barrier, identify a lawful route, receive permission, deliberately refuse both routes, and say, "Passage is not permission." The Key becomes ordinary iron for 1 minute and can be broken with suitable tools or 20 points of nonmagical bludgeoning damage.

**Object Statistics.** Tiny object; AC 20; 25 Hit Points; Damage Threshold 8; immune to poison and psychic damage. If broken, both sides point toward nearest entrance but cannot pass

### Obsidian Reliquary

*Wondrous Item, very rare (requires attunement)*

**Capacity.** The Reliquary holds one final heartbeat. Capturing another releases and destroys the stored heartbeat.

**Capture the Last Beat.** When a living creature dies within 30 feet, use a Reaction to capture its final heartbeat. The soul is not captured, delayed, compelled, or returned. The body remains dead.

**Refuse Death.** When the bearer or a creature within 30 feet drops to 0 Hit Points, use a Reaction and release the heartbeat. The creature drops to 1 Hit Point instead, regains 4d8 + 4 Hit Points, and gains 1 Exhaustion level after 1 minute.

**Last Answer.** Release the heartbeat into its original corpse. The corpse answers one question in one sentence using information possessed immediately before death. The answer can be mistaken, frightened, incomplete, evasive, or false.

**Borrowed Motion.** Release the heartbeat into a corpse that died within the previous 24 hours. For 1 minute, the corpse can stand, walk, carry, point, and follow simple physical instructions. It cannot attack, cast spells, improvise, or become alive.

**Permission to End.** Return the heartbeat to its original body, named remains, or a place sincerely recognized as final rest. Valid permission must come from prior testimony, Last Answer, or reliable evidence. Open the vessel and say, "No body is owed another moment." It becomes vulnerable to ordinary damage for 1 minute.

**Object Statistics.** Tiny object; AC 18; 30 Hit Points; Damage Threshold 5; resistant to spell damage; immune to poison and psychic damage. If destroyed while holding a heartbeat, every

**RELIC PRINCIPLE** The Key proves that access is not authority. The Reliquary proves that bodily continuity is not ownership of a

## The Crooked Coin

*Borrowed success, visible debt, and fair collection*

*Wondrous Item, rare (requires attunement)*

The Crooked Coin is pale electrum, a Caldovi metal also called aluminum. It is bent through the portrait of a crowned woman. The reverse shows an empty throne. When deliberately flipped, it lands standing on its edge unless another magical force interferes.

**Charges.** The Coin has 3 charges and regains all expended charges daily at dawn.

**Borrowed Success.** When the bearer fails an attack roll, ability check, saving throw, or death saving throw, the bearer can use a Reaction and expend 1 charge. Treat the d20 as a natural 20. The result is a real natural 20 for every rule that cares about the number. The beneficiary gains 1 Luck Debt.

**Luck Debt.** Debt belongs to the beneficiary, not the current bearer. Debt remains if the Coin is lost, sold, stolen, suppressed, destroyed, carried to another plane, or placed inside an antimagic effect.

**Collecting Debt.** After the debtor later succeeds on an attack roll, ability check, saving throw, or death saving throw, the GM can collect 1 Luck Debt and treat that successful d20 as a natural 1. Announce collection before resolving the natural 1. Collection must be visible, dramatically fair, proportionate to the borrowed success, and unable to erase an accomplishment already completed.

**Settling Accounts.** The GM can offer a serious voluntary failure as payment. The player must agree before the failure occurs. Suitable settlements include arriving too late, losing an important object, being recognized while disguised, allowing an enemy to escape, revealing a secret, accepting lawful custody, or refusing an easy victory. A cosmetic inconvenience never settles debt.

**Communication.** The Coin is courteous, patient, and exact. Through the Bracers it uses approved, borrowed, later, account, owed, and sufficient. It never threatens. It behaves as though collection is ordinary administration.

**Borrowed FOOM.** A bearer attuned to Fume and the Coin can expend 1 Coin charge and gain 1 Luck Debt to use the d20 Borrowed FOOM table instead of the Center and d100 tables. Make this choice before any d100 result is known. Page 11 presents the complete table.

**Object Statistics.** Tiny object; AC 21; 12 Hit Points; resistant to all damage; immune to poison and psychic damage. Ordinary damage can bend, flatten, split, or melt the Coin, but all pieces remain magical and return to coin shape after 24 hours unless contained separately.

**DISTINCT RELIC** The Coin of the Phoenix is a separate resurrection artifact. The Crooked Coin cannot resurrect a corpse and is not a resurrection item.

## d20 Luck Debt Collection Prompts

*Use the table to shape a fair collection, not to replace judgment*

Roll when a debtor has an eligible successful d20 and several proportionate collections are possible. Reroll a result with no relationship to the borrowed success. The mechanical core remains simple: one successful d20 becomes a natural 1, and one Luck Debt is removed.

| d20 | Collection Prompt                                                                                    | d20 | Collection Prompt                                                                           |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | A successful attack becomes 1; position or cover now favors the target.                              | 11  | A successful deception becomes 1; one listener believes the truth behind the lie.           |
| 2   | A successful saving throw becomes 1; the debtor is restrained, frightened, or exposed by the effect. | 12  | A successful insight becomes 1; the debtor reads fear as guilt or certainty as honesty.     |
| 3   | A successful physical check becomes 1; a route closes or a carried object is dropped.                | 13  | A successful concentration or endurance save becomes 1 at the next proportionate danger.    |
| 4   | A successful knowledge check becomes 1; the right fact arrives after a costly choice.                | 14  | A successful death save becomes 1 after Borrowed Success prevented death.                   |
| 5   | A successful social check becomes 1; a truthful statement sounds rehearsed or self-serving.          | 15  | A successful escape becomes 1; the debtor must abandon an object or ally to continue.       |
| 6   | A successful stealth check becomes 1; recognition occurs without automatic combat.                   | 16  | A successful recovery becomes 1; the Coin offers a voluntary confession instead.            |
| 7   | A successful pursuit check becomes 1; another quarry gains distance or reaches cover.                | 17  | A trusted contact becomes suspicious after a successful negotiation turns to 1.             |
| 8   | A successful tool check becomes 1; the work holds, but evidence of tampering remains.                | 18  | A valuable object is available, but taking it requires accepting a serious visible loss.    |
| 9   | A successful initiative-related check becomes 1; the debtor acts after the crucial movement.         | 19  | The Coin offers to settle through a refusal: leave one easy success unused.                 |
| 10  | A successful custody check becomes 1; lawful authority demands surrender or a second witness.        | 20  | The debtor names a proportionate voluntary failure; the GM accepts, narrows, or rejects it. |

**FAIRNESS RULE** Never collect Luck Debt on an unrelated innocent. The account belongs to the person who borrowed success. A collection can complicate the present, but it cannot retroactively erase a completed victory.

## Mirror of the Unlived Moment

*The first direct consequence, never the best future*

*Wondrous Item, very rare (requires attunement)*

The Mirror is a dark palm mirror that never reflects the exact present. A raised hand appears a fraction early. A falling bottle is already broken. An unopened door briefly shows the first person who will pass through it.

**Charges.** The Mirror has 3 charges and regains 1d3 expended charges daily at dawn.

**A Moment Ahead.** While holding the Mirror, gain a +2 bonus to Initiative, cannot be Surprised while conscious, and have Advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks made to notice a creature drawing a weapon or beginning a hostile action.

**Unlived Defense.** When an attack hits the bearer, use a Reaction and expend 1 charge. The attacker rerolls the attack and uses the lower result.

**Choose the Better Instant.** After making an attack roll, ability check, or saving throw, but before the outcome is resolved, expend 1 charge to roll a second d20 and choose either result.

**Immediate Consequence.** As an action, expend 1 charge and describe one action being considered within the next minute. The GM describes the first significant direct consequence shown by the Mirror. The vision is truthful, incomplete, based on the most likely immediate result, and not a fixed future. It does not reveal secret motives, distant consequences, or the best choice.

**Confusion of Possibility.** After expending the second or third charge before completing a Long Rest, make a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, until the end of the bearer's next turn, the bearer cannot take Reactions, Speed is halved, and attack rolls have Disadvantage.

**Object Statistics.** Tiny object; AC 17; 18 Hit Points; resistant to psychic and force damage; immune to poison. If broken, each fragment reflects a different possible identity of the creature holding it but has no other magic until restored.

### Coin Resonance: The Unlived Hour

| Stage      | Manifestation                                                                                                                                                              |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Before  | Reflections move a heartbeat early. Each character learns one immediate danger and gains Advantage on one response.                                                        |
| 2. Again   | The last six seconds repeat with small changes. A character can return to the space occupied at the start of the previous turn. No resource, damage, or condition returns. |
| 3. Another | One Unlived Double appears for every two characters. A Double uses a familiar face and one remembered tactic.                                                              |
| 4. Choose  | The Mirror shows the first direct result of two visible routes. The group can ask one additional specific action question without spending a charge.                       |
| 5. Owed    | Each Luck Debt appears as a pale mark across the debtor's reflection. One debt can be settled through a serious voluntary failure accepted now.                            |
| 6. Lived   | Unchosen possibilities collapse. Doubles vanish, glass settles, and one custody action completed during this stage cannot be undone by the Hour.                           |

The Unlived Hour begins only when an adventure, resonance event, or Game Master decision calls for it. Outside the affected area, less than 1 minute passes.

## Borrowed FOOM d20 Table

*A safer release purchased with Luck Debt*

Before rolling Fume's normal tables, a bearer attuned to Fume and the Crooked Coin can spend 1 Coin charge and gain 1 Luck Debt to use this d20 table. The intended target is the center, except on 20, which targets the wielder. Fearsome Reputation still applies. Choose before any d100 result is known.

| d20 | Lvl | Borrowed FOOM Effect                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|-----|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1   | 0   | Candle Rain. Tiny blue flames fall in a 10-foot radius around the intended target. Invisible creatures and objects in the area are outlined until the end of the wielder's next turn.                                                 |
| 2   | 0   | Ashen Hand. A grey hand strikes the intended target for 1d8 necrotic damage. The target must succeed on a Strength saving throw or drop one held object chosen by the wielder.                                                        |
| 3   | 1   | Smoke Double. A smoky duplicate surrounds the intended target. The next attack made against the target before the end of its next turn has disadvantage.                                                                              |
| 4   | 1   | Glass Tongue. The intended target must succeed on a Charisma saving throw or become unable to knowingly speak a lie for 1 minute.                                                                                                     |
| 5   | 1   | Backward Step. The intended target teleports 10 feet directly away from the wielder. If no safe space is available, the target falls prone instead.                                                                                   |
| 6   | 1   | Grease Halo. The ground in a 10-foot radius around the intended target becomes slick for 1 minute. A creature entering or beginning its turn there must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw or fall prone.                            |
| 7   | 1   | Red Thread. The intended target becomes magically tethered to a second creature chosen by the wielder within 30 feet. Until the end of the wielder's next turn, neither creature can willingly move more than 30 feet from the other. |
| 8   | 1   | Sudden Door. A temporary door appears on the solid surface nearest the intended target. It opens to the opposite side of that surface and disappears at the end of the wielder's next turn.                                           |
| 9   | 2   | Blue Levitation. The intended target rises 20 feet and remains suspended until the end of its next turn, then descends harmlessly to the nearest unoccupied space beneath it.                                                         |
| 10  | 2   | Unwelcome Armor. Plates of smoky iron surround the intended target for 1 minute. The target gains +2 AC, but its speed is halved.                                                                                                     |

| d20 | Lvl | Borrowed FOOM Effect                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-----|-----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 11  | 2   | Salt Circle. A 10-foot-radius circle appears around the intended target for 1 minute. A summoned creature must succeed on a Charisma saving throw to enter the circle.                                                                                                           |
| 12  | 2   | Memory Slip. The intended target loses its reaction and cannot remember anything that occurs before the beginning of its next turn.                                                                                                                                              |
| 13  | 2   | Mirror Step. The intended target exchanges positions with another creature chosen by the wielder within 30 feet. An unwilling creature may resist with a Charisma saving throw.                                                                                                  |
| 14  | 2   | Soft Stone. Stone and packed earth in a 15-foot radius around the intended target become soft mud for 1 minute and count as difficult terrain.                                                                                                                                   |
| 15  | 3   | Violet Chain. The intended target is restrained by glowing chains. The target may repeat a Strength saving throw at the end of each turn, ending the effect on a success.                                                                                                        |
| 16  | 3   | Melted Distance. Until the end of the wielder's next turn, every 5 feet of movement within 20 feet of the intended target costs only 1 foot of movement.                                                                                                                         |
| 17  | 3   | Thief of Names. For 1 minute, creatures cannot remember or speak the intended target's name. The target has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks but cannot benefit from an effect requiring its name to be spoken.                                                           |
| 18  | 3   | Ink Flood. Black ink fills a 20-foot radius around the intended target until the end of the wielder's next turn. The area is heavily obscured, and creatures inside are blinded.                                                                                                 |
| 19  | 6   | The Long Blink. The intended target vanishes until the end of its next turn, then returns in the nearest safe space to where it disappeared.                                                                                                                                     |
| 20  | 5   | Ash Phoenix's Mercy. This result targets the wielder instead of the intended target. Pale fire passes harmlessly through the wielder, who regains 8d8 hit points and may end one blinded, deafened, frightened, paralyzed, poisoned, or stunned condition affecting the wielder. |

## Other Relics and Custody Tools

*Important magic outside the six-function set*

### Coin of the Phoenix

*Wondrous Item, artifact*

**Appearance.** A thick gold coin shows a bird rising from a drinking cup.

**Charges.** At dawn, the Coin gains 3d6 charges. Unused charges vanish at the next dawn.

**Phoenix Wine.** Place the Coin in a small cup containing a few ounces of wine. After 1 continuous hour, it expends 1 charge and activates the wine. Removing it early leaves ordinary wine and spends no charge. Activated wine remains potent until the next dawn or until diluted.

**Resurrection.** Pour the entire dose into the mouth of a corpse. The creature immediately returns to life with 1 Hit Point. No spell, prayer, willing soul, or additional rite is required. The Coin need not be present when the wine is administered. Sharing a container with a corpse causes no resurrection.

**No Refusal.** The dead creature cannot decline. The effect closes mortal wounds but does not restore missing body parts, cure poison or disease, remove curses, or make a body viable in its surroundings. Magic that bars resurrection prevents the return. A destroyed soul or a body incapable of life does not return.

**Wine Only.** Beer, distilled spirits, water, blood, and other liquids remain ordinary.

**Object Statistics.** Tiny object; AC 22; 30 Hit Points; immune to nonmagical damage, poison, and psychic damage.

### Gloves of the Ice Empress

*Wondrous Item, rare (requires attunement)*

**Appearance.** Pale-blue gloves cut from soft deer leather remain cold without becoming stiff.

**Frosted Strike.** Once on each of the bearer's turns when a melee weapon attack hits, the attack deals an extra 1d4 cold damage. This is the gloves' only damage increase.

**Winter Composure.** The bearer is adapted to severe natural cold and has Advantage on saving throws against becoming Frightened.

**Solice's Gift.** The magic can become dormant if Mother Solice personally withdraws the gift. This is a story consequence, not an automatic punishment for ordinary disagreement or failed devotion.

**Object Statistics.** Two Tiny objects; AC 15; 8 Hit Points each; immune to cold and resistant to fire. If one glove is destroyed, the surviving glove retains Winter Composure but not Frosted Strike until the pair is repaired.

### Quiet Ember Ledger

*Wondrous Item, uncommon*

While honestly recording an item's transfers, charges, activations, and witnessed effects, the keeper has Advantage on Intelligence (Investigation) checks made to disprove a false custody claim concerning that item.

### Not Part of the Six

The Group of Six is a title and ritual state, not a seventh

## Relic Custody Record

| Relic        | Bearer | Legal Claim | Cultural Claim | Last Verified | Caldovian Access |
|--------------|--------|-------------|----------------|---------------|------------------|
| Bracers      |        |             |                |               |                  |
| Fume         |        |             |                |               |                  |
| Key          |        |             |                |               |                  |
| Reliquary    |        |             |                |               |                  |
| Crooked Coin |        |             |                |               |                  |
| Mirror       |        |             |                |               |                  |

**FINAL PRINCIPLE** A relic is a useful power, a cultural argument, and a responsibility. The campaign works when a character still wants the object after learning why possession is difficult.

## CHAPTER 15 — Creatures and NPC Stat Blocks

### *Recurring campaign figures and compact encounter profiles*

This chapter collects the complete recurring profiles promised in Chapter 6. Adventure-specific enemies, hazards, and final forms remain in the adventure where each one appears. Use a stat block only when uncertainty, violence, pursuit, or active resistance requires rules. A social scene does not become a combat encounter merely because a Challenge Rating exists.

| CR 2-5                                                                                                          | CR 6-9                                                                              | CR 10-15                                   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Aliraia 2; Arulea 2; Nela 3; Li'l Snoot 3; Harl 4; Bottle Eater 4; Tessel 6; Thosa 5; Varo 5                    | Brannoc 6; Zam Zam 6; Sava 7; Lysa 7; Xyom 7; Caldovian 8; Vara 8; Ianca 8; Ra'av 9 | Cornelia 10; Mother Solice 15              |
| Generic profiles: Bath Scholar 1/4; Glassback Newt Swarm 1/2; Priory Warden 1; Marble Lion 1; Measure Bailiff 2 | Measure Guardian 3; Unlived Double 3; Circle Agent 3                                | Final Caldovian forms appear in Chapter 13 |

### Using Allies Without Replacing the Party

An allied NPC can hold a passage, suppress one hazard, move witnesses, provide a writ, or explain what a result means. The characters still choose the objective and complete the decisive task.

An NPC at 0 Hit Points follows the normal rules unless an adventure states otherwise. Do not create an automatic escape because a later chapter mentions the person.

Challenge Rating measures combat pressure, not political authority. Arulea can move a city with paperwork while remaining CR 2. Elra has no Challenge Rating because ordinary combat cannot defeat her.

Final forms for Caldovian - Unbound, Hollowed, and Last Echo - appear in Chapter 13 so the finale remains usable without page-turning.

| CALDOVIAN, PERFORMER                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | VARA VAY                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><i>A favored Elran bard-sorcerer who controls movement, attention, and the meaning of failure.</i></p> <p><b>Medium Humanoid, chaotic neutral</b>   AC 16   HP 112 (15d8 + 45)   Speed 30 ft.   CR 8 (3,900 XP)   PB +3 STR 9 (-1), DEX 18 (+4), CON 16 (+3), INT 15 (+2), WIS 12 (+1), CHA 20 (+5)</p> <p><b>Saving Throws.</b> Dex +7, Con +6, Wis +4, Cha +8.</p> <p><b>Skills.</b> Deception +11, Insight +7, Performance +11, Persuasion +11, Religion +5. Passive Perception 11. Languages Common, Caldovi, Elvish, and two others.</p> <p><b>Favored, Not Approved (3/Day).</b> When Caldovian fails a saving throw or ability check, he adds 1d8 to the roll. A visible sign of Elra's attention accompanies a success.</p> <p><b>Fragile Brilliance.</b> At 56 Hit Points or fewer, his Speed becomes 40 feet and opportunity attacks against him have Disadvantage.</p> <p><b>Spellcasting.</b> Charisma; save DC 16, +8 to hit. At will: minor illusion, prestidigitation, vicious mockery. 3/day each: command, disguise self, mirror image, suggestion. 1/day each: dimension door, greater invisibility, major image.</p> <p><b>Multiattack.</b> Caldovian makes two Cinder Note attacks.</p> <p><b>Cinder Note.</b> Ranged Spell Attack: +8 to hit, range 120 ft. Hit: 21 (3d10 + 5) fire, psychic, or radiant damage.</p> <p><b>The Beautiful Part (Recharge 5-6).</b> Each chosen enemy within 30 feet that can hear him makes a DC 16 Wisdom save. On a failure, the creature is Charmed until the end of his next turn and uses its Reaction to move up to Speed to a named space or make one weapon attack against a named target.</p> <p><b>Glorious Entrance (1/Day).</b> Caldovian and up to five allies within 30 feet gain 15 Temporary Hit Points, move up to half Speed without provoking opportunity attacks, and gain Advantage on the next attack roll or saving throw before the end of the next turn.</p> <p><b>Bonus Action - Private Direction.</b> One creature within 60 feet makes a DC 16 Wisdom save. On a failure, it is Charmed until</p> | <p><i>The red-masked courier and visible mistress of the Scarlet Step.</i></p> <p><b>Medium Humanoid, lawful evil</b>   AC 18   HP 110 (13d8 + 52)   Speed 30 ft.   CR 8 (3,900 XP)   PB +3 STR 10 (+0), DEX 18 (+4), CON 18 (+4), INT 16 (+3), WIS 16 (+3), CHA 18 (+4)</p> <p><b>Saving Throws.</b> Dex +7, Wis +6, Cha +7.</p> <p><b>Skills.</b> Deception +10, Insight +9, Investigation +6, Perception +6, Persuasion +10, Sleight of Hand +7. Passive Perception 16. Languages Common, thieves' signs, Elvish, and two trade languages.</p> <p><b>Cunning Action.</b> Vara takes Dash, Disengage, or Hide as a Bonus Action.</p> <p><b>Master of the Room.</b> Vara has Advantage on Initiative and cannot be Surprised while conscious inside a Scarlet Step location prepared for her arrival.</p> <p><b>Sneak Attack (1/Turn).</b> Vara deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when she hits with Advantage, or when an ally is within 5 feet of the target and she lacks Disadvantage.</p> <p><b>Prepared Exit (1/Day).</b> When Vara would drop to 0 Hit Points inside a prepared Step location, she drops to 1 Hit Point and moves up to Speed through a concealed route without provoking opportunity attacks.</p> <p><b>Multiattack.</b> Vara makes three Needle Rapier attacks.</p> <p><b>Needle Rapier.</b> Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.</p> <p><b>The Room Chooses (Recharge 5-6).</b> Up to three allies within 30 feet use Reactions to move up to half Speed and make one weapon attack.</p> <p><b>Reaction - Read Betrayal.</b> When a creature within 30 feet targets Vara or an ally with an attack, Vara imposes Disadvantage on the attack and moves 5 feet without provoking opportunity attacks.</p> <p><b>Tactics.</b> Vara attacks a route, witness, or held object before attacking a body. She leaves after one decisive exchange when the objective is no longer reachable.</p> |

## LYSA QUILL

*Vara Vay's long-term replacement, trained to inherit an entire public identity.*

**Medium Humanoid, neutral | AC 17 | HP 88 (16d8 + 16) | Speed 30 ft. | CR 7 (2,900 XP) | PB +3**

**STR 9 (-1), DEX 19 (+4), CON 14 (+2), INT 16 (+3), WIS 13 (+1), CHA 20 (+5)**

**Saving Throws.** Dex +7, Int +6, Cha +8.

**Skills.** Deception +11, Insight +4, Performance +11, Persuasion +8, Sleight of Hand +7, Stealth +7. Passive Perception 11. Languages Common, thieves' signs, Elvish, and two trade languages.

**Cunning Action.** Lysa takes Dash, Disengage, or Hide as a Bonus Action.

**Perfect Rehearsal.** After observing a Humanoid for 10 minutes, Lysa has Advantage on checks to imitate voice, posture, habits, and expected knowledge. A DC 18 Investigation check exposes the performance.

**Expected Mistake.** Lysa can intentionally reproduce one documented error, preference, scar, or lapse associated with a rehearsed identity. A witness familiar only with public appearances has Disadvantage on the first Insight check made against the impersonation.

**Sneak Attack (1/Turn).** One weapon hit deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage when Lysa has Advantage or an ally stands within 5 feet of the target.

**Multiattack.** Lysa makes two Concealed Blade attacks.

**Concealed Blade.** Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft. Hit: 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

**False Opening (Recharge 5-6).** One creature within 30 feet makes a DC 16 Wisdom save. On a failure, it uses its Reaction to move up to half Speed toward a point Lysa indicates and cannot make opportunity attacks during that movement.

**Reaction - Correct the Performance.** When a creature exposes one inconsistency in Lysa's identity, she makes one Deception check with Advantage or moves 10 feet without provoking opportunity attacks.

## THE LADY ON THE XEBEC / RA'AV

*A nonmagical social controller, patient strategist, and dangerous close-quarters survivor.*

**Medium Humanoid, lawful neutral | AC 17 | HP 126 (23d8 + 23) | Speed 30 ft. | CR 9 (5,000 XP) | PB +4**

**STR 8 (-1), DEX 18 (+4), CON 12 (+1), INT 20 (+5), WIS 18 (+4), CHA 20 (+5)**

**Saving Throws.** Dex +8, Int +9, Wis +8, Cha +9.

**Skills.** Deception +13, History +9, Insight +12, Investigation +9, Perception +8, Persuasion +13, Sleight of Hand +8. Passive Perception 18. Languages Common, thieves' signs, three trade languages, and two northern dialects.

**Cunning Action.** She takes Dash, Disengage, or Hide as a Bonus Action.

**Nonmagical Mesmerism.** After 1 minute of conversation, one creature that understands her makes a DC 17 Wisdom save. On a failure, she establishes one plausible framing for 24 hours: a person seems trustworthy, a route seems prudent, a delay seems reasonable, or an ordinary fact seems unimportant. Direct evidence permits another save. This feature is not magical.

**Harmless Old Woman.** While acting as Ra'av, creatures without direct evidence of her authority have Disadvantage on Insight checks made to identify her as an operational leader.

**Prepared Network (3/Day).** When she fails a check involving records, contacts, routes, or criminal procedure, she treats the d20 roll as 15.

**Sneak Attack (1/Turn).** One weapon hit deals an extra 21 (6d6) damage when she has Advantage or an ally stands within 5 feet of the target.

**Multiattack.** She makes two Quiet Knife attacks.

**Quiet Knife.** Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft. Hit: 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

**Place the Thought (Recharge 5-6).** One creature within 30 feet that can hear her makes a DC 17 Wisdom save. On a failure, it uses a Reaction to move up to half Speed toward a location she

## SAVA DREN

*A monk, legal investigator, and disciplined enemy of false premises.*

**Medium Humanoid, lawful neutral | AC 18 | HP 112 (15d8 + 45) | Speed 50 ft. | CR 7 (2,900 XP) | PB +3**

**STR 10 (+0), DEX 20 (+5), CON 16 (+3), INT 16 (+3), WIS 18 (+4), CHA 12 (+1)**

**Saving Throws.** Dex +8, Wis +7.

**Skills.** Acrobatics +8, History +6, Insight +7, Investigation +6, Religion +6. Passive Perception 14. Languages Common, Caldovi, and three others.

**Faith and Doubt.** Sava serves Mother Solice and traces the Path while privately insulting Elra's judgment. Divine service does not require cheerful piety.

**Wavering Line.** Sava moves through hostile spaces as Difficult Terrain. A creature whose space she leaves cannot make opportunity attacks against her until the start of her next turn.

**Evasion.** On a Dexterity save for half damage, Sava takes no damage on a success and half on a failure.

**Multiattack.** Sava makes three Wavering Strike attacks.

**Wavering Strike.** Melee Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 12 (2d6 + 5) bludgeoning, piercing, or slashing damage. Once per turn, the target makes a DC 15 Constitution save or loses Reactions until the end of its next turn.

**Trace the Room (Recharge 5-6).** Sava moves up to Speed without provoking opportunity attacks and makes one Wavering Strike against each of up to three different creatures she passes within 5 feet of.

**Reaction - Return the Miss.** When an attack misses Sava, she moves up to 15 feet without provoking opportunity attacks and makes one Wavering Strike against the attacker if it is within reach at the end of the movement.

**Cover Mark.** Sava has Advantage on checks involving impersonation.

## LANCA MERES

*A barbarian, structural engineer, bartender, and protector who makes pain useful.*

**Medium Humanoid, neutral good | AC 17 | HP 136 (16d8 + 64) | Speed 40 ft. | CR 8 (3,900 XP) | PB +3**

**STR 20 (+5), DEX 12 (+1), CON 18 (+4), INT 12 (+1), WIS 16 (+3), CHA 14 (+2)**

**Saving Throws.** Str +8, Con +7.

**Skills.** Athletics +8, Insight +6, Investigation +4, Perception +6, Survival +6. Passive Perception 16. Languages Common, Caldovi, and two others.

**Faith in the Load.** lanca expresses Elra's anger through protection and Solice's duty through repair.

**Glorious Rage (3/Day).** As a Bonus Action, lanca enters Rage for 1 minute. During Rage she has Resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage; Advantage on Strength checks and saves; +3 damage with Strength-based attacks; and immunity to forced movement or being knocked Prone unless she chooses.

**Carry the Weight.** During Rage, when a creature within 10 feet takes damage, lanca uses her Reaction to divide the damage equally between herself and that creature before either applies Resistance.

**Multiattack.** lanca makes two Burden Hammer attacks and one Shoulder Check.

**Burden Hammer.** Melee Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 12 (2d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage, or 15 during Rage.

**Shoulder Check.** Melee Weapon Attack: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 9 (1d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage, or 12 during Rage. The target makes a DC 16 Strength save or is pushed 10 feet.

**Make the Hurt Useful.** If lanca took damage through Carry the Weight since the end of her last turn, one Burden Hammer hit deals an extra 9 (2d8) damage and prevents opportunity attacks from the target until the start of its next turn.

## MOTHER SOLICE

*A divine proto-lich who controls a battlefield through quiet orders, possession, and refusal to yield.*

**Medium Undead (Deity), lawful neutral | AC 19 | HP 228 (24d8 + 120) | Speed 30 ft. | CR 15 (13,000 XP) | PB +5 STR 18 (+4), DEX 14 (+2), CON 20 (+5), INT 20 (+5), WIS 22 (+6), CHA 20 (+5)**

**Saving Throws.** Con +10, Int +10, Wis +11, Cha +10.

**Skills.** Arcana +10, History +10, Insight +11, Medicine +11, Persuasion +10, Religion +15. Passive Perception 16. Truesight 60 ft. Languages Common plus six languages; telepathy 60 ft.

**Damage Resistances.** Cold, necrotic, psychic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks. Damage Immunity poison. Condition Immunities Charmed, Exhaustion, Frightened, Poisoned.

**Divine Proto-Lich.** Solice does not need to eat, drink, breathe, or sleep. If destroyed, her body collapses into white ash and blue vapor. Elra and Solice determine whether and when the body reforms.

**Legendary Resistance (3/Day).** If Solice fails a saving throw, she succeeds instead.

**Immaculate Vessel.** Solice cannot be knocked Prone, moved against her will, or magically aged.

**Turn Resistance.** Solice has Advantage on saving throws against effects that Turn Undead.

**Spellcasting.** Charisma; save DC 18, +10 to hit. At will: command, detect magic, thaumaturgy. 3/day each: banishment, dispel magic, greater restoration, hold monster. 1/day each: hallow, heal, plane shift.

**Multiattack.** Solice makes three Immaculate Touch attacks, or two attacks and uses Quiet Command.

**Immaculate Touch.** Melee Spell Attack: +10 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 18 (3d8 + 5) radiant or necrotic damage, and the target cannot regain Hit Points until the start of Solice's next turn.

**Blue Wound (Recharge 5-6).** Solice draws a wavering line 60 feet long and 5 feet wide. Each creature in the line makes a DC 18 Dexterity save, taking 45 (10d8) force damage on a failure or half on a success. A creature that fails is pulled to the nearest unoccupied space on the line.

**Quiet Command.** One creature within 60 feet that can hear Solice makes a DC 18 Wisdom save. On a failure, Solice makes the target drop one held object, move up to Speed toward a named place, or fall Prone.

**Enter the Mortal (Recharge 6).** One Humanoid within 60 feet makes a DC 18 Wisdom save. On a failure, Solice possesses the target for 1 minute. The host repeats the save after taking damage and at the end of each turn. Solice can end the possession at any time.

**Reaction - Withdraw Grace.** When a creature Solice can see creates Undead or forces resurrection against known wishes, she imposes Disadvantage on the triggering roll or grants Advantage on the relevant save. If the effect requires no roll, the user takes 14 (4d6) psychic damage.

**Legendary Actions (3/Round).** Solice uses one option after another creature's turn: Measured Step, moving up to half Speed; Quiet Command (1 action); Immaculate Touch (2 actions); or Enter the Mortal, if available (3 actions).

~~**Running Solice.** She does not seek a fair fight. She identifies the duty that must continue, commands the nearest capable person, protects~~

## TESSEL VANE

*A northern-steppe Elran custodian who distinguishes courage from waste.*

**Medium Humanoid, lawful good | AC 18 | HP 102 (12d8 + 48) | Speed 30 ft. | CR 6 (2,300 XP) | PB +3**

**STR 18 (+4), DEX 10 (+0), CON 18 (+4), INT 12 (+1), WIS 16 (+3), CHA 16 (+3)**

**Saving Throws.** Con +7, Wis +6, Cha +6.

**Skills.** Athletics +7, Insight +6, Medicine +6, Religion +6, Survival +6. Passive Perception 13. Languages Common, Caldovi, and one steppe language.

**The Left Arm.** Fume consumed Tessel's left arm below the elbow. Her practical prosthesis has no magical combat benefit.

**Aura of Clear Courage.** Allies within 10 feet have Advantage on saving throws against Frightened.

**Relic Survivor.** Tessel has Advantage on saves against magic items and Resistance to damage caused directly by a magic item's curse or uncontrolled effect.

**Fume Custodian.** While carrying a properly sheathed Fume, Tessel knows its charge total. A voluntary release made by Tessel follows Fume's normal rules; she cannot choose the FOOM result.

**Spellcasting.** Charisma; save DC 14. 3/day each: bless, command, protection from evil and good. 1/day each: aid, lesser restoration, zone of truth.

**Multiattack.** Tessel makes two Ward Staff attacks.

**Ward Staff.** Melee Weapon Attack: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage, plus 4 (1d8) radiant damage against Undead.

**Null Seal (Recharge 5-6).** One creature, magic item, or magical effect within 30 feet makes a DC 14 Charisma save if applicable. On a failure, the target cannot activate a magic item or cast a spell until the end of Tessel's next turn. An unattended magic item receives no save.

**Reaction - Tested Courage.** When an ally within 30 feet fails a save against Frightened or a magic-item effect, Tessel allows a reroll.

~~**Reaction - Containment Intermaze.** When an adjacent~~

## LADY CORNELIA VAN GHOUL

*A Glass Coast swordmaster who can win a room and lose a campaign.*

**Medium Humanoid, lawful neutral | AC 19 | HP 168 (16d8 + 96) | Speed 40 ft. | CR 10 (5,900 XP) | PB +4 STR 12 (+1), DEX 20 (+5), CON 22 (+6), INT 16 (+3), WIS 14 (+2), CHA 18 (+4)**

**Saving Throws.** Dex +9, Con +10, Wis +6, Cha +8.

**Skills.** Acrobatics +9, Deception +8, Insight +6, Perception +6, Persuasion +8. Passive Perception 16. Languages Common and three others.

**Peaceful Life, Glorious Death.** Cornelia rejects all resurrection. Her doctrine is sincere, tender toward mourners, and capable of atrocity.

**Immediate Genius.** Cornelia has Advantage on Initiative and on checks made to read a room, identify the most dangerous creature present, or exploit the next ten seconds. She has Disadvantage on checks made to anticipate consequences more than one day away.

**Magic Resistance.** Cornelia has Advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

**Multiattack.** Cornelia makes three Glass Coast Blade attacks.

**Glass Coast Blade.** Melee Weapon Attack: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 16 (1d8 + 5 piercing plus 2d6 psychic damage).

**Unlived Hour (Recharge 5-6).** Cornelia moves up to Speed without provoking opportunity attacks and makes one Glass Coast Blade attack against each of up to three different creatures. A creature hit cannot take Reactions until the end of its next turn.

**Bonus Action - Chosen Instant.** Cornelia takes Dash, Disengage, or Hide.

**Reaction - Perfect Riposte.** When a creature misses Cornelia with a melee attack, she makes one Glass Coast Blade attack against it. On a hit, Cornelia moves 10 feet without provoking opportunity attacks.

**Legendary Focus (1/Day).** Cornelia succeeds on one failed Dexterity, Constitution, or Wisdom saving throw.

## THOSA LHAM

*Rock Elf funerary custodian.*

**Medium Humanoid (Elf), LN | AC 17 | HP 85 | Speed 30 ft. | CR 5 | PB +3**

**STR 14 (+2), DEX 12 (+1), CON 18 (+4), INT 16 (+3), WIS 18 (+4), CHA 14 (+2)**

**Saving Throws.** Wis +7, Cha +5. Skills Insight +7, Medicine +7, Perception +7, Religion +9. Darkvision 60 ft.; passive Perception 17.

**Final Custody.** A body remains the dead person's final entrusted possession. Rank, grief, and urgency do not replace consent.

**Spellcasting.** Wisdom; save DC 15, +7 to hit. At will: guidance, sacred flame, spare the dying, thaumaturgy. 3/day each: aid, gentle repose, protection from evil and good, speak with dead. 1/day each: death ward, dispel magic, revivify.

**Multiattack.** Two Funerary Staff attacks.

**Funerary Staff.** +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning, plus 9 (2d8) radiant against Undead.

**Name the Trespass (Recharge 5-6).** One Undead or possessing creature within 60 feet makes a DC 15 Wisdom save. On a failure, it is Incapacitated until the end of Thosa's next turn and any possession is suppressed.

**Reaction - Final Witness.** When a creature within 30 feet dies, it speaks one sentence of re-

## ALIRAIA

*Cornelia's valet and doctrinal logistics officer.*

**Medium Humanoid, LN | AC 14 | HP 52 | Speed 30 ft. | CR 2 | PB +2**

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

**Skills.** Insight +5, Investigation +7, Medicine +5, Sleight of Hand +5. Passive Perception 13.

**Prepared Departure.** Allies within 10 feet add 1d4 to Initiative and Dexterity saves.

**Multiattack.** Aliraia makes two Hidden Needle attacks.

**Hidden Needle.** Melee Weapon Attack: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

**Measured Dose (2/Day).** A creature damaged by Hidden Needle makes a DC 13 Constitution save or has Speed reduced by 10 feet and cannot take Reactions until the end of its next turn.

**Reaction - Remove the Evidence.** Aliraia conceals or retrieves one unattended Tiny object within 5 feet, or grants Half Cover to an adjacent creature until the start of her next turn.

**Practical Service.** Aliraia has Advantage on checks involving clothing, schedules, exits, body preparation, witness placement, and concealed personal items.

## ARULEA

*Continuity Minister and civic Elran.*

**Medium Humanoid, LN | AC 15 | HP 66 | Speed 30 ft. | CR 2 | PB +2**

**STR 10 (+0), DEX 14 (+2), CON 16 (+3), INT 20 (+5), WIS 16 (+3), CHA 16 (+3)**

**Skills.** History +7, Insight +5, Investigation +9, Persuasion +5. Passive Perception 13.

**Administrative Authority.** Allies who can hear Arulea add 1d4 to checks involving evacuation, repair, records, or civic procedure.

**Verified Instruction.** A creature acting under a written civic order from Arulea has Advantage on the first check made to complete that order.

**Walking Staff.** Melee Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. Hit: 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

**Orderly Retreat (Recharge 5-6).** Up to five allies within 60 feet move up to half Speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

**Emergency Measure (1/Day).** Arulea names one practical objective involving a gate, furnace, road, water line, public record, or evacuation. Up to six willing creatures gain 8 Temporary Hit Points and Advantage on the next relevant check before the end of the scene.

**Reaction - Record the Contradiction.**

When a creature within 30 feet presents false authority, Arulea grants Advantage on one check.

## VARO

*A replaceable operational identity for receivership and lawful-looking seizure.*

**Medium Humanoid, LN | AC 16 | HP 82 | Speed 30 ft. | CR 5 | PB +3**

**STR 10 (+0), DEX 14 (+2), CON 16 (+3), INT 18 (+4), WIS 14 (+2), CHA 18 (+4)**

**Saving Throws.** Int +7, Wis +5, Cha +7. Skills Deception +10, History +7, Insight +8, Investigation +7, Persuasion +10.

**Prepared Writ.** Varo carries 1d4 apparently valid orders. Exposing one requires DC 17 Investigation or a relevant tool check.

**Institutional Certainty.** Varo has Advantage on Charisma checks against officials until his authority is disproved in the scene.

**Multiattack.** Two Walking-Stick Blade attacks.

**Walking-Stick Blade.** +5 to hit; 6 (1d6 + 2) piercing.

**Procedural Delay (Recharge 5-6).** Up to three creatures within 60 feet make a DC 15 Wisdom save. On a failure, a target loses Reactions and has Disadvantage on its next ability check before the end of its next turn.

## XYOM KULTH

*A Red Cell commander who calls massacre retrieval.*

**Medium Humanoid, LE | AC 18 | HP 128 | Speed 30 ft. | CR 7 | PB +3**

**STR 18 (+4), DEX 16 (+3), CON 18 (+4), INT 12 (+1), WIS 14 (+2), CHA 20 (+5)**

**Saving Throws.** Str +7, Con +7, Wis +5. Skills Athletics +7, Intimidation +8, Perception +5, Stealth +6.

**Brutal Retrieval.** Once per turn, Xyom deals 10 (3d6) extra damage to a creature holding an object named for recovery.

**No Witnesses.** When a creature within 30 feet drops to 0 Hit Points, Xyom moves 15 feet and makes one Red Cell Blade attack as a Bonus Action.

**Multiattack.** Three Red Cell Blade attacks.

**Red Cell Blade.** +7 to hit; 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing.

**Seize It (Recharge 5-6).** One adjacent creature makes a DC 15 Strength save or drops one held object. Xyom catches it with a free hand.

**Reaction - Violent Correction.** When an ally within 30 feet misses, Xyom makes one Red Cell Blade attack against the same target.

## BRANNOC TALLOW

*The Door: an old-guard protector of people, passages, and evidence.*

**Medium Humanoid, LN | AC 18 | HP 118 | Speed 30 ft. | CR 6 | PB +3**

**STR 18 (+4), DEX 12 (+1), CON 18 (+4), INT 11 (+0), WIS 15 (+2), CHA 13 (+1)**

**Saving Throws.** Str +7, Con +7, Wis +5. Skills Athletics +7, Insight +5, Intimidation +4, Perception +5.

**Bodyguard.** Adjacent allies have Half Cover against attacks made by creatures Brannoc can see.

**Hold the Passage.** Brannoc has Advantage against forced movement and being knocked Prone. A creature hit by his opportunity attack has Speed 0 for the rest of the turn.

**Multiattack.** Two Guard Blade attacks.

**Guard Blade.** +7 to hit; 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing.

**Driving Blow (Recharge 5-6).** +7 to hit; 17 (3d8 + 4) bludgeoning. DC 15 Strength save or pushed 15 feet and knocked Prone.

**Reaction - Interrupt.** Brannoc becomes the target of an attack against an

## HARL FEN

*A protective cell leader who values living members and usable relationships.*

**Medium Humanoid, N | AC 16 | HP 68 | Speed 30 ft. | CR 4 | PB +2**

**STR 14 (+2), DEX 17 (+3), CON 16 (+3), INT 13 (+1), WIS 16 (+3), CHA 14 (+2)**

**Saving Throws.** Dex +5, Wis +5. Skills Insight +5, Perception +5, Stealth +5, Intimidation +4.

**Protective Cell.** Allies within 10 feet gain +1 AC while adjacent to cover or another ally.

**Multiattack.** Two Short Blade attacks.

**Short Blade.** +5 to hit; 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing.

**Get Everyone Out (Recharge 5-6).** Up to three allies within 30 feet move up to half Speed without provoking opportunity attacks and can draw or stow one item.

**Reaction - Cover the Witness.** When an adjacent ally is attacked, Harl imposes Disadvantage on the attack and moves 5 feet.



## ZAM ZAM

*A House of the Mother acrobat whose affection is genuine and whose doctrine is stronger.*

**Medium Humanoid, N | AC 17 | HP 102 | Speed 40 ft., climb 30 ft. | CR 6 | PB +3**

**STR 12 (+1), DEX 20 (+5), CON 16 (+3), INT 13 (+1), WIS 14 (+2), CHA 18 (+4)**

**Saving Throws.** Dex +8, Cha +7. Skills Acrobatics +11, Deception +7, Performance +10, Persuasion +7, Sleight of Hand +8, Stealth +8.

**Evasion.** On a Dexterity save for half damage, Zam takes no damage on a success and half on a failure.

**High Wire.** Zam ignores Difficult Terrain from ropes, rails, furniture, crowds, and narrow surfaces.

**Multiattack.** Three Acrobat's Knife attacks.

**Acrobat's Knife.** +8 to hit; 11 (1d4 + 5 piercing plus 1d6 psychic). Once per turn, one hit deals 10 (3d6) extra damage.

**Evasive Tumble.** After attacking, Zam moves up to half Speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

**Reaction - Catch the Fall.** Zam reduces falling or weapon damage to a creature within 10 feet by 14 (4d6).

## NELA VOS

*An orthodox performer whose imitation can attract Elra.*

**Medium Humanoid, NG | AC 14 | HP 58 | Speed 30 ft. | CR 3 | PB +2**

**STR 9 (-1), DEX 16 (+3), CON 14 (+2), INT 13 (+1), WIS 14 (+2), CHA 20 (+5)**

**Skills.** Deception +7, Performance +9, Religion +5.

**Perfect Imitation.** Insight checks to identify a performed role have Disadvantage unless the observer has personal evidence of a mistake.

**Spellcasting.** Charisma; save DC 15. At will: disguise self, minor illusion. 3/day each: command, heroism. 1/day each: major image, suggestion.

**Multiattack.** Two Stage Dagger attacks.

**Stage Dagger.** +5 to hit; 6 (1d4 + 3) piercing. If another performer is within 5 feet, the hit deals 7 (2d6) extra psychic damage.

**Blue-Line Cry (Recharge 6).** Chosen creatures within 15 feet make a DC 15 Wisdom save or become Frightened until the end of Nela's next turn. This is performance magic, not divine impersonation.

**Reaction - Take the Mark.** Nela adds 3 to AC against one attack she can see.

## LI'L SNOOT

*A gnomish knife thrower, prop keeper, and suspicious reader of audiences.*

**Small Humanoid (Gnome), N | AC 16 | HP 55 | Speed 25 ft. | CR 3 | PB +2**

**STR 8 (-1), DEX 19 (+4), CON 14 (+2), INT 15 (+2), WIS 14 (+2), CHA 15 (+2)**

**Saving Throws.** Dex +6, Int +4. Skills Acrobatics +6, Investigation +4, Perception +4, Sleight of Hand +6.

**Knife Reader.** Li'l Snoot cannot be Surprised by a visible thrown weapon and has Advantage to detect altered or poisoned stage weapons.

**Multiattack.** Three Throwing Knife attacks.

**Throwing Knife.** +6 to hit, range 30/90 ft.; 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing.

**Pin the Costume (Recharge 5-6).** On a Throwing Knife hit, the target makes a DC 14 Dexterity save or becomes Restrained until an Action frees it.

**Reaction - Catch and Return.** Reduce damage from a ranged weapon attack by 1d10 + 4. If reduced to 0, Li'l Snoot makes one Throwing Knife attack.

## BOTTLE EATER

*An orc stage performer who makes every injury look worse than it is.*

**Medium Humanoid (Orc), NG | AC 15 | HP 76 | Speed 30 ft. | CR 4 | PB +2**

**STR 18 (+4), DEX 12 (+1), CON 18 (+4), INT 12 (+1), WIS 14 (+2), CHA 16 (+3)**

**Saving Throws.** Str +6, Con +6. Skills Athletics +6, Insight +4, Performance +5, Perception +4.

**Stage-Hardened.** Bottle Eater has Resistance to damage from nonmagical glass, improvised stage hazards, and falls of 20 feet or less.

**Multiattack.** Two Heavy Prop attacks.

**Heavy Prop.** +6 to hit; 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning.

**Shattering Entrance (Recharge 5-6).** Bottle Eater moves up to Speed through one nonmagical door, screen, window, or stage wall. Creatures within 5 feet of the exit make a DC 14 Dexterity save or take 7 (2d6) slashing damage and fall Prone.

**Reaction - Take the Fall.** When an adjacent ally is hit, halve the damage to the ally. Bottle Eater takes the other half.



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|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p><b>BATH SCHOLAR</b><br/> <i>A defensive researcher who wants witnesses alive.</i><br/> <b>Medium Humanoid</b>   AC 12   HP 18   Speed 30 ft.   CR 1/4 (50 XP)   PB +2<br/> <b>STR 9, DEX 14, CON 12, INT 16, WIS 13, CHA 10</b><br/> <b>Arcane Tool.</b> +4 to hit, range 60 ft.; 4 (1d4 + 2) force.<br/> <b>Protective Thesis (1/Day).</b> One ally within 30 feet gains +2 AC until the start of the scholar's next turn.<br/> <b>Cease Hostilities.</b> A scholar stops fighting when an enemy drops a weapon, rescues a wounded scholar, or overcomes Scarlet Spear interference.</p>                                             | <p><b>GLASSBACK NEWT SWARM</b><br/> <i>Heat-loving newts disturbed beneath a bath bench.</i><br/> <b>Medium Swarm of Tiny Beasts</b>   AC 13   HP 36   Speed 20 ft., swim 30 ft.   CR 1/2 (100 XP)   PB +2<br/> <b>STR 6, DEX 16, CON 12, INT 2, WIS 12, CHA 4</b><br/> <b>Swarm.</b> The swarm occupies another creature's space and cannot regain Hit Points.<br/> <b>Bites.</b> +5 to hit; 10 (3d6) piercing, or 5 (1d6 + 2) at half Hit Points.<br/> <b>Heat Drawn.</b> Food, slow movement, or DC 12 Animal Handling moves the swarm without combat.</p>                                                                                                                                      |
| <p><b>PRIORY WARDEN</b><br/> <i>A trained custodian focused on distance and control.</i><br/> <b>Medium Humanoid</b>   AC 16   HP 39   Speed 30 ft.   CR 1 (200 XP)   PB +2<br/> <b>STR 14, DEX 12, CON 16, INT 13, WIS 15, CHA 11</b><br/> <b>Multiattack.</b> Two Iron Baton attacks.<br/> <b>Iron Baton.</b> +4 to hit; 6 (1d8 + 2) bludgeoning.<br/> <b>Containment Hook.</b> One creature within 15 feet makes a DC 13 Strength save or is pulled 10 feet.<br/> <b>Reaction - Seal the Reach.</b> Impose Disadvantage on one adjacent attempt to draw, pass, or activate a magic item.</p>                                          | <p><b>MARBLE LION</b><br/> <i>A disciplined private soldier who may become ally or opposition.</i><br/> <b>Medium Humanoid</b>   AC 17   HP 45   Speed 30 ft.   CR 1 (200 XP)   PB +2<br/> <b>STR 16, DEX 12, CON 16, INT 10, WIS 13, CHA 11</b><br/> <b>Multiattack.</b> Two Spear attacks.<br/> <b>Spear.</b> +5 to hit; 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing, or 7 (1d8 + 3) with two hands.<br/> <b>Shield Line.</b> Reaction: an adjacent ally gains +2 AC against one attack.<br/> <b>Professional Retreat.</b> The Lion Disengages as a Bonus Action after an order is disproved.</p>                                                                                                                       |
| <p><b>MEASURE BAILIFF</b><br/> <i>A civic enforcer who secures papers, doors, and disputed property.</i><br/> <b>Medium Humanoid</b>   AC 16   HP 45   Speed 30 ft.   CR 2 (450 XP)   PB +2<br/> <b>STR 14, DEX 14, CON 16, INT 13, WIS 15, CHA 12</b><br/> <b>Multiattack.</b> Two Measure Rod attacks.<br/> <b>Measure Rod.</b> +4 to hit; 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning.<br/> <b>Legal Seizure.</b> One adjacent creature makes a DC 13 Strength or Dexterity save or drops one held object.<br/> <b>Reaction - Witnessed Act.</b> Grant Advantage on one ally's check to identify, record, or evince an action within 30 feet.</p>         | <p><b>MEASURE GUARDIAN</b><br/> <i>A purpose-bound construct that enforces passage without permission.</i><br/> <b>Large Construct</b>   AC 18   HP 75   Speed 25 ft.   CR 3 (700 XP)   PB +2<br/> <b>STR 18, DEX 8, CON 18, INT 6, WIS 14, CHA 5</b><br/> <b>Damage Immunities.</b> Poison, psychic. Condition Immunities Charmed, Exhaustion, Frightened, Paralyzed, Poisoned.<br/> <b>Multiattack.</b> Two Stone Arm attacks.<br/> <b>Stone Arm.</b> +6 to hit; 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning.<br/> <b>Purpose Test.</b> One creature within 30 feet makes a DC 14 Charisma save or cannot cross a named threshold until the end of its next turn.</p>                                               |
| <p><b>UNLIVED DOUBLE</b><br/> <i>A reflected possibility that fights for one immediate future.</i><br/> <b>Medium Aberration</b>   AC 15   HP 52   Speed 30 ft.   CR 3 (700 XP)   PB +2<br/> <b>STR 10, DEX 18, CON 14, INT 12, WIS 14, CHA 8</b><br/> <b>Multiattack.</b> Two Reflected Blade attacks.<br/> <b>Reflected Blade.</b> +6 to hit; 8 (1d8 + 4) psychic.<br/> <b>Borrowed Motion.</b> Reaction: after a creature within 30 feet moves, the Double moves the same distance.<br/> <b>Shatter on Truth.</b> A character who proves which immediate future created the Double deals 10 force damage to it without an attack.</p> | <p><b>CIRCLE AGENT</b><br/> <i>A dark-armored operator trained to turn civic stakes outward.</i><br/> <b>Medium Humanoid</b>   AC 16   HP 52   Speed 30 ft.   CR 3 (700 XP)   PB +2<br/> <b>STR 14, DEX 16, CON 14, INT 13, WIS 12, CHA 11</b><br/> <b>Multiattack.</b> Two Dark Blade attacks.<br/> <b>Dark Blade.</b> +5 to hit; 7 (1d6 + 4) slashing.<br/> <b>Route Order.</b> Bonus Action: move through a service route to an adjacent finale zone while the Gate stake is outward.<br/> <b>Turn the Stake.</b> Two Actions complete one reversal unless interrupted.<br/> <b>Smoke Pellet (1/Day).</b> One 10-foot area becomes Heavily Obscured until the end of the agent's next turn.</p> |



## CHAPTER 16 — Appendices, Handouts, Index, and Credits

*Campaign records, cover stories, quick reference, and publication notes*

Use these pages during play or photocopy the record sheets. The working index uses chapter references because final page numbers can change during full-book assembly. Replace chapter references with page numbers only after the complete interior has been locked.

### Campaign Result Record

| Adventure                            | Level | Relic or Focus          | Result to Record                                                 |
|--------------------------------------|-------|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. The Bard at the Red Door          | 3–4   | Bracers of Two Tongues  | Custodian; Vara contact; Caldovian trust; Kessa and Copper Larks |
| 2. That FOOM Sword                   | 4–5   | Fume                    | Destroyed, contained, carried, or loose; Tessel; Priory damage   |
| 3. The House Without an Entrance     | 5–6   | Key Without a House     | Custodian; House status; Zam Zam; Varo evidence                  |
| 4. The Last Beat of the Scarlet Lady | 6–7   | Obsidian Reliquary      | Vara, Lysa, body, records, and public succession                 |
| 5. The Coin at the Unlived Hour      | 7–8   | Crooked Coin and Mirror | Coin custody; Mirror custody; Cornelia; Zam Zam                  |
| 6. The Circle of Embers              | 8–9   | All six functions       | Nela; relic harness; coup; settlement reserve; Caldovian         |
| 7. Oraş Cald                         | 9     | Unbound Circle          | Caldovian ending; civic anchors; final custody; public account   |

### Finale Inventory

| Function       | Authentic Relic              | Substitute or Absence   | Carrier at Start of Chapter 12 |
|----------------|------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Interpretation | Bracers of Two Tongues       | Script cuffs / absent   | _____                          |
| Consumption    | Fume                         | Kiln blade / destroyed  | _____                          |
| Passage        | Key Without a House          | Door lattice / absent   | _____                          |
| Continuity     | Obsidian Reliquary           | Heart drum / absent     | _____                          |
| Probability    | Crooked Coin                 | Weighted token / absent | _____                          |
| Foresight      | Mirror of the Unlived Moment | Stage mirror / absent   | _____                          |

## Handout: Relic Custody Ledger

*Record lawful possession, practical control, and every broken handoff*

Custody is not ownership. A lawful claim, physical possession, institutional duty, and public belief may point toward four different custodians. Record each transfer as an event with witnesses rather than moving an object offstage without explanation.

| Relic                            | Current Holder | Claimed Authority | Witnesses | Seal / Condition |
|----------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|-----------|------------------|
| Bracers of Two Tongues           | _____          | _____             | _____     | _____            |
| Fume                             | _____          | _____             | _____     | _____            |
| Key Without a House              | _____          | _____             | _____     | _____            |
| Obsidian Reliquary               | _____          | _____             | _____     | _____            |
| Crooked Coin                     | _____          | _____             | _____     | _____            |
| Mirror of the Unlived<br>Memento | _____          | _____             | _____     | _____            |
| Coin of the Phoenix              | _____          | _____             | _____     | _____            |

## Transfer Record

| Time / Place | Object | From  | To    | Authority or Reason | Witness / Contradiction |
|--------------|--------|-------|-------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| _____        | _____  | _____ | _____ | _____               | _____                   |
| _____        | _____  | _____ | _____ | _____               | _____                   |
| _____        | _____  | _____ | _____ | _____               | _____                   |
| _____        | _____  | _____ | _____ | _____               | _____                   |
| _____        | _____  | _____ | _____ | _____               | _____                   |
| _____        | _____  | _____ | _____ | _____               | _____                   |

## Fume Incident Log

| Charge Before | Trigger | d20 Result | FOOM?    | Charge After | Damage / Property / Witnesses |
|---------------|---------|------------|----------|--------------|-------------------------------|
| _____         | _____   | _____      | Yes / No | _____        | _____                         |
| _____         | _____   | _____      | Yes / No | _____        | _____                         |
| _____         | _____   | _____      | Yes / No | _____        | _____                         |
| _____         | _____   | _____      | Yes / No | _____        | _____                         |

## **Appendix: Sava and Ianca's Cover Stories**

*Five overlapping truths for Adventures 1–4*

Mother Solice sent Sava and Ianca to monitor Caldovian, investigate relic recognition, protect Caldov, and prevent a public divine crisis. Both women conceal that assignment. The cover survives because each explanation is mostly true. Rotate the reasons instead of repeating one answer until it becomes absurd.

### **1. The Improperly Transferred Mug**

Sava insists that Caldovian still holds an imported cup from an unresolved shipment. Caldovian calls it a gift. Sava says throwing it at the road did not transfer ownership. Ianca says she wants to learn why it bounced. This excuse supports visits to the Red Door, questions about Caldovian's rooms, and repeated contact with the party.

### **2. The Unreconciled Shipment**

The original crate suffered broken seals, missing devotional property, disputed carriers, and an incomplete chain of custody. Sava follows customs records and witness statements. Ianca verified weight, packing tension, and ceramic count. This explanation supports document work and questions about every later Elran object.

### **3. The Priory Retainer**

During Adventure 2, Giftschränk Priory retains Sava as an outside claims and custody specialist. Ianca serves as a geothermal, structural, and heavy-transport engineer. Property damage, spell contamination, injured workers, and altered transfer records keep the retainer plausible after Fume leaves the Priory.

### **4. The Interfered Freight Route**

During Adventure 3, Sava claims that the House of Roads and Measures obstructs a licensed route or property claim connected to the original import case. Ianca determines whether the failure is structural, mechanical, survey-related, deliberate, or caused by the Key.

### **5. The Oratorie Witness**

During Adventure 4, Ianca works at Cheval Oratorie as a bartender and practical engineer. Sava serves as a neutral foreign claims witness because a relic, a possible death, and altered records cross legal and religious jurisdictions. Possibly as a translator

### **The Running Exchange**

**Character:** "Are you still following us because of the cup?"

**Sava:** "The cup remains improperly transferred."

**Ianca:** "No."

**Sava:** "Ianca."

**Ianca:** "It is one of several reasons."

**Sava:** "*It is one of several reasons.* You sound like an ox."

**Ianca:** "Stop following Sava and I, she might pinch you with her little crab claws."

## **Game Master Quick Reference**

*Custody, pressure, allies, and recurring campaign truths*

### **Passage Is Not Permission**

The Key can create or identify a route. It does not establish ownership, legal access, welcome, or moral authority.

### **Custody Is an Active Situation**

A relic changes hands through doors, records, carriers, seals, fear, persuasion, theft, or force. Show every route.

### **Failure Changes the Starting Position**

A failed check advances a clock, alerts an opponent, damages a relationship, or adds a cost. It does not remove the only clue.

### **Allies Hold; Characters Solve**

Sava, Ianca, Vara, Tessel, Brannoc, Harl, Thosa, Arulea, and Mother Solice can contain one threat or open one route. The party completes the central objective.

### **Caldovian Helps Before He Betrays**

His kindness is often real. His help also keeps witnesses near the desired stage and turns each crisis into proof of his necessity.

### **Vara Vay Is the Red-Masked Courier**

Vara is the visible Scarlet Step leader and Caldovian's lover. Temporary actor-doubles exist. Lysa is the long-term replacement. Ra'av is the hidden Lady on the Xebec.

### **Handshake Has No Central Warehouse**

Ordinary offices, carriers, workshops, importers, and repair yards move tiny legal and illegal pieces. One raid cannot expose the whole system.

### **Elra Imitation Is Dangerous**

Outside the Festival of the Last Empire, dressing or painting a person as Elra opens the imitator to possession or sacrifice. A sudden unscripted cry of "Glory to Elra" marks sacrifice and warning.

### **Mother Solice Is Divine Undead**

Solice is the Necessary Undead, equal and complementary to Elra. Her authority appears through continuity, records, custody, public service, final instructions, and preserved obligations.

### **Cornelia Rejects All Resurrection**

Her doctrine does not apply only to House members. She holds that no dead person should ever return.

### **Fume Cannot Be Made Safe**

Procedure can reduce exposure and control release. No bearer chooses a FOOM result, and a full Fume still consumes another spell before automatic release.

### **Quiet Defeat Matters**

Caldovian's most complete defeat is ordinary, practical, and unperformed inside the Hollow Circle. A beautiful death can still become his masterpiece.

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## Credits

| Role                       | Credit                                                            |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Written and designed by    | DB Spitzer                                                        |
| Caldovian and Fume         | Originally co-created in the 1990s by JC Rescorla                 |
| Development and continuity | DB Spitzer; additional credits to be completed before publication |
| Editing and proofreading   | DB Spitzer                                                        |
| Illustration and cover art | DB Spitzer                                                        |
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### Compatibility and Publication Note

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