

A PATHFINDER RPG ADVENTURE FOR LEVEL 1

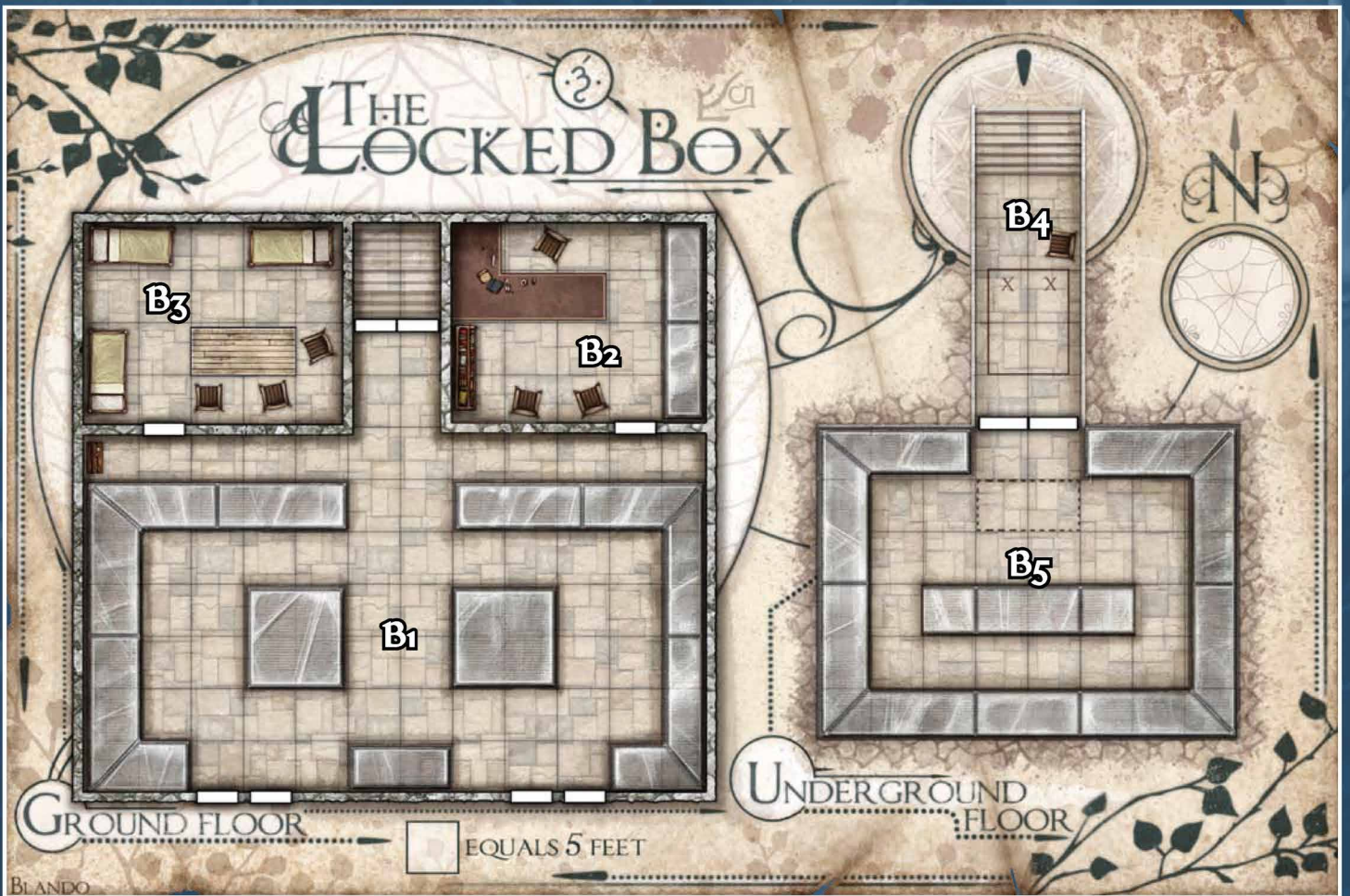
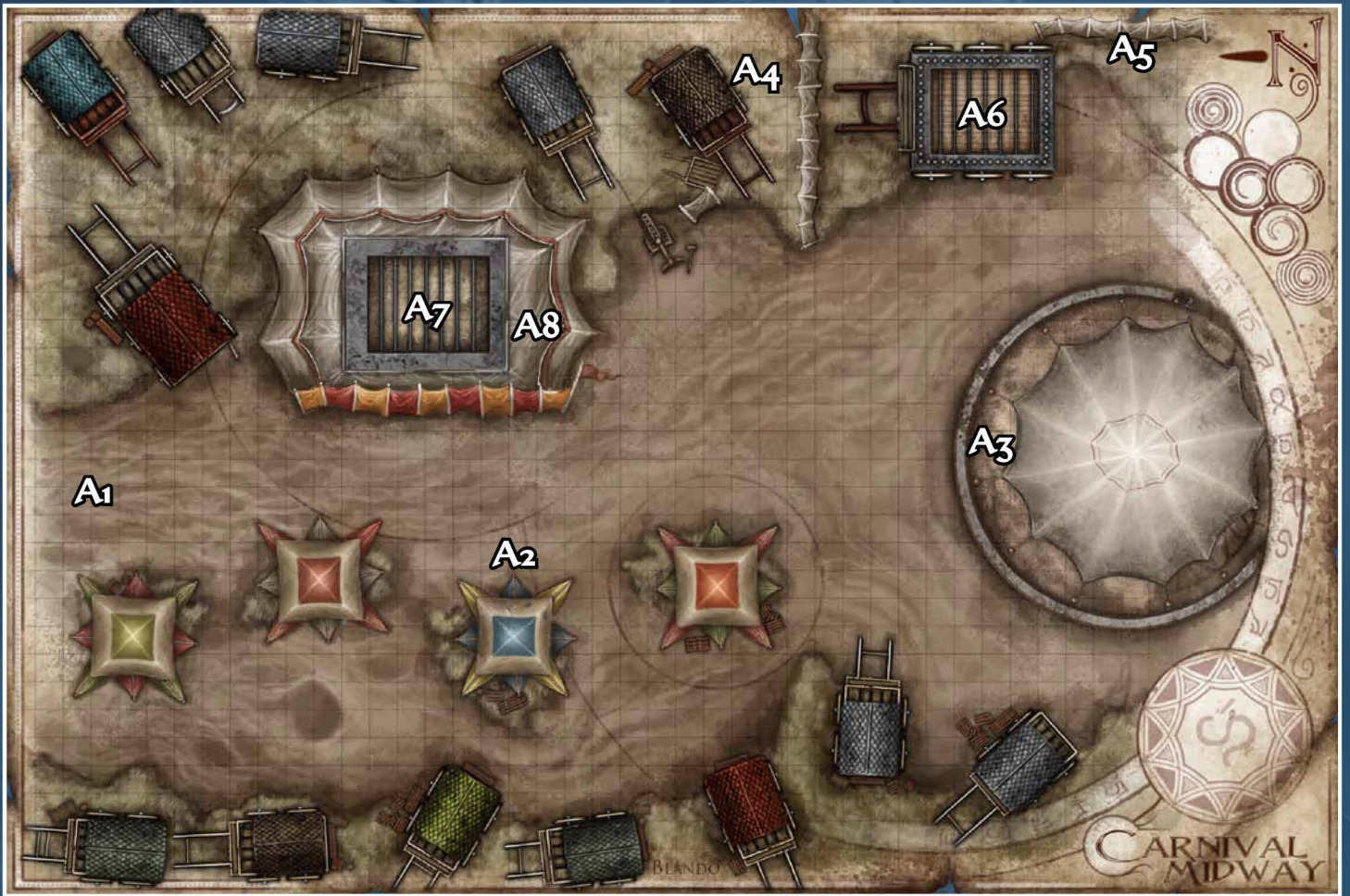
BY JIM GROVES

PATHFINDER[®]

MODULE[™]

MURDER'S MARK





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MURDER'S MARK

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Murder's Mark is a Pathfinder Module designed for four 1st-level characters and uses the medium XP advancement track. This module is designed for play in the Pathfinder campaign setting, but can easily be adapted for use with any world.

This product makes use of the *Pathfinder RPG Core Rulebook*, *Pathfinder RPG Advanced Player's Guide*, *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary*, and *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 2*. These rules can be found online as part of the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game Reference Document at paizo.com/prd.

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MURDER'S MARK

“Never underestimate the importance of carnivals, my boy. People need entertainment—some reward for their daily toil. The circus brings its own rules and order, and for a coin you catch a glimpse of the larger world. Then it departs, taking its wonders and strangeness with it, and your average soul returns to the fields content. You see? For just a week everything changes, but then everything returns to exactly the way it was, and no one expects or demands otherwise. They see the width and breadth of creation, but remain unburdened by how small they are in comparison.”

—Paracount Marcellus Thurvian of Belde, to his eldest son

MURDER'S MARK

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

The town of Ilsurian in Varisia was established by Ilсур, a First Sword of the Knights of Aroden in the city of Korvosa. With the crumbling of the Chelish Empire, Ilсур wanted a militant-leaning meritocracy to replace noble rule in Korvosa, but had to eventually concede defeat roughly 80 years ago. He marched his troops to the west bank of the Skull River where it empties into Lake Syrantula, and awaited a chance to return and seize Korvosa by military force. He died waiting for the opportunity, and his army gradually transformed into a strong community of independent fishers and foresters owing loyalty to neither Korvosa nor Magnimar. The soldiers brought by Ilсур and their descendants are ethnic Chelaxians, and most of them have the strong features, pale skin, and dark hair of that group. Most of them also harbor prejudice against the native Varisians, and believe the stereotypes that Varisians are thieves and layabouts. Since very few permanent residents of Ilсурian are ethnic Varisians, this racism has rarely been a problem. Yet all that changed when Ilсурian became the latest stopping point for a traveling circus known as the Umbra Carnival.

The adventurer Almara Delisen founded the Umbra Carnival over a decade ago. Almara had seen her companions slaughtered during an ill-fated venture, and in grief turned to entertainment as a means to sustain herself. An illusionist, Almara used her magic to become the center of a traveling show that passed through small towns starved for entertainment and a glimpse of life beyond their borders. With time, other performers, acts, and attractions joined her circus—lost souls and lonely hearts, eager to see the world or leave some part of it behind. Years later, the circus has grown to the size of a small village, with a diverse array of attractions and amusements from all over Avistan. The sincere intent of the carnival is to provide much-needed entertainment at a price communities can afford. Once it arrived in Ilсурian, however, this goal became complicated by the machinations of Ilсурian's thieves' guild, the Gilded Hands.

The Gilded Hands are run by a married Chelish couple from Korvosa. Once young hustlers for the Cerulean Society, they were run out of town by an influential Sczarni gang leader over a personal grudge. They moved to Ilсурian, and took on the aliases of Borvius and Robella Monchello to avoid pursuit and continuation of the vendetta. In public, Borvius runs Ilсурian Storage & Hauling, a cartage company that ships goods and stores cargo, and Robella owns Mistress Robella's Curiosity Shop just next door. In secret, they jointly control all the serious criminal activity in Ilсурian. Recently, they have been constrained by the size of the town itself. The guild has reached a tipping point where it dare not undertake more profitable criminal ventures without risking a strong response from

WHERE ON GOLARION?

The Umbra Carnival takes place in and just outside of the town of Ilсурian in Varisia. The independent town sits at a crossroads of river traffic from across all of Varisia, on the north bank of Lake Syrantula and the east side of the Skull River. The Umbra Carnival is also the starting point of the 9th-level module *The Harrowing*. For more information on Varisia and the Umbra Carnival, see *Pathfinder Campaign Setting: The Inner Sea World Guide* and *Pathfinder Module: The Harrowing*, both available at paizo.com and your local game store.



the town's sheriff and the larger community—at least, not without a scapegoat.

The arrival of the Umbra Carnival presented just such an opportunity. With the circus in town, the Gilded Hands quickly planned to perpetrate their boldest schemes and pin the blame on carnival folk, who are seen by the townspeople as even less trustworthy than other ethnic Varisians.

The day the circus arrived and started to unpack, the Monchellos dispatched spies to circulate among the curious local onlookers to search for a likely mark they could set up. Their chosen victim is Jherizhana, a gynosphinx and the carnival's Master of Shows (and also, unknown to anyone outside the circus, an elaborate illusion). The thieves' guild rightly assumes that if the murders appear to be perpetrated by the sphinx, the circus will be blamed for the subsequent robberies, and for bringing such a dangerous and uncontrollable creature to town. Their first target has been selected, and is slated to be murdered just after the opening night's big top show.

Adventure Summary

While enjoying a traveling carnival, the PCs learn of a murder in the nearby town of Ilсурian. Having proven themselves by corralling a dangerous animal, they are recruited to act as independent investigators on behalf of the circus to exonerate it and its employees of the crime. During their investigation, more murders take place, and racial

tensions between the townsfolk and traveling Varisians rise. As they begin to unravel the truth, the PCs are confronted by the revelation that the circus is being framed by the local thieves' guild, and must brave the guild's secret hideout to restore the carnival's reputation and see justice done.

The Truth about Jherizhana

A central theme in this adventure is that one character has been singled out as the mark (the easy target, sucker, or victim) for the villains. In this case, the chosen mark is Jherizhana the sphinx. Turning Jherizhana into a scapegoat is a bold move for the thieves' guild because of her dangerous nature, but this same dangerous quality is also what makes her the perfect choice. The irony is, neither the guild nor the townsfolk know enough about sphinxes to discern a real one from a clever imitation.

It is not unreasonable to question how a creature like a sphinx was magically subjugated and bound to perform as a carnival attraction. The common explanation offered to visitors is that Jherizhana is bound by magic. To those more experienced or cynical, the carnival "reluctantly" offers a more plausible explanation: The sphinx is a bard, who plays at being a circus star in order to travel Avistan and expand her already vast knowledge of history and lore. She enjoys performance art, and loves humanity, at least while she's performing. Jherizhana does not truly reside in a cage, but rather a large, comfortable, and private wagon of her own. She willingly enters a cage—one that could never truly contain her—so the curious may regard her while feeling safe. She always appears accompanied by guards, not only to protect the public, but also to maintain her boundaries. If the PCs manage to "drag" this information out of the carnival workers, the NPCs pretend to beg the PCs to refrain from spoiling this "secret."

The simple truth is Jherizhana doesn't exist at all, but is rather an elaborate illusion. The entire circus knows, and works to sell this fiction. If a visitor cannot accept the simple explanation, the individual is initiated into the supposed conspiracy of the second version. More often than not, suspicious visitors accept the second explanation because they think they've forced someone to confess to it.

Inside the big top, Jherizhana is created by a bard named Ika. When Jherizhana is scheduled to appear in her cage (at location A7), Ika creates her with *minor image* and *ventriloquism* while standing hidden near the cage. The sphinx's guards serve only to prevent anyone from

testing the illusion by interacting with it directly. With the cooperation of the entire circus, this technique makes it very difficult to pierce the illusion. Saving throws should not be permitted without direct interaction with the illusion.

Under the orders of Almara, the truth about Jherizhana is withheld from the PCs initially. Almara fears that if the PCs know this secret from the start, they will merely turn over this information to the authorities rather than try to find the real killers. Jherizhana is also their greatest attraction—as long as the public believes she is genuine. Ticket sales remain healthy and admission prices high, but rumors of their sphinx being a fake could easily spread along the trade routes and damage their future sales. So while clearing the carnival's name is paramount, disclosing the secret is considered a last resort. As the PCs continue to demonstrate their loyalty to the circus, Almara becomes more inclined to confide the whole truth. If the PCs prove they've figured out the secret, Almara admits to it. Don't try to trick the players if they figure out the secret through good roleplaying and honest detective work—reward their efforts with the truth.



Almara Delisen

PART ONE: THE CIRCUS COMES TO TOWN

The fleet of circus wagons arrives the day before the adventure begins. All of Ilsurian becomes aware of the carnival when a contingent arrives to restock its store of food and supplies and hang up colorful posters. A few townspeople wander out to the fields where the Umbra Carnival sets up, hoping to nose around and get a sense of this year's attractions—a common event tolerated by the circus as long as the locals stay out of the way. Among the onlookers is Borvius Monchello, the secret co-leader of the Gilded Hands, who studies the carnival, looking for the mark he's been waiting for.

The following day, circus folk hold a parade that marches through town in a spectacle of sights, music, and drumming. Banners and streamers herald a procession of clowns, stilt walkers, and tumbling acrobats, all of whom wave to the townspeople. Carnival barkers call out to people on the streets, promising thrills, chills, and delights for people of all ages (at the modest price of a few copper coins). The entire procession is a formal declaration of the carnival's opening, and seeks to draw out the curious and idle to follow along to the procession's end, the parade grounds.

The most obvious reason for the PCs to be at the circus is the circus itself. The adventure does not assume the

PCs are from Ilsurian, but the Umbra Carnival is the most interesting and unusual public event to happen around town all year. Encourage PCs to explore the carnival, as the investigation won't begin until the PCs learn of the first murder and are invited by Almara Delisen to act as her representatives (an event which is predicated on their success at midway games and the Uncaged Dragon encounter). This murder happens during the first night of the circus, and the body is found in the morning. See Appendix 2 on page 30 for details on each area and the sorts of entertainments and diversions available. Because Ilsurian is in a rural area, the big top show costs no more than 1 sp. As they explore, PCs might overhear Ilsurian townfolk talking with suspicion about the circus people or warning their friends to keep their valuables hidden when talking to the Varisians." Once the PCs have had a chance to explore and play some games, proceed to run the Uncaged Dragon encounter on page 7.

The Midway

The midway offers a multitude of games of chance, each costing 1 cp per play. To devise additional games of your own, use these values for starting 1st-level characters: DC 13 for skill checks, AC 13, or DC 12 for ability checks. It is important for the PCs to be reasonably successful at the games. If these values are too low for your taste, instead of raising the target numbers, consider making the prizes a little nicer for successful rolls that exceed the DC or AC by 5 or more. This simulates degrees of success without reducing the chance of actually winning the game.

The proprietor of the Umbra Carnival, Almara Delisen, is observing the crowd at the midway. If the PCs ask around, carnival crew won't hesitate to identify her, but they also add that Almara often watches the midway in her spare time.

Below are some key locations in the carnival midway. For information about the rest of the carnival facilities, see Appendix 2 on page 30.

A1. Midway Entrance

A path runs east here from the midway toward the traveling zoo. To the south are booths with pavilion tent tops that provide shade for the games of skill and chance played beneath. Behind them are circus wagons, some clearly only for transportation and equipment, while others are attractions and portable shops for merchants. To the north is a gigantic tent erected on tall poles with a stage curtain pulled shut across its front.

This busy area leads into the midway, with its attractions in a small tent and stands that promise exciting games and diversions. After the PCs explore the carnival, the "baby dragon" from area A6 gets loose. See page 6 for the description of this encounter.

PLAYING GAMES

The mini-games in the midway are important. Not only do they help the players get into their characters, but they help rationalize why Almara Delisen recruits them out of a crowd of strangers. The games demonstrate that the PCs possess skills and abilities that could help the circus, serving as both an introduction and a test. Having the first murder happen after opening night allows the PCs to fully experience the circus without the distraction of being "on the case." Nevertheless, some players enjoy different degrees of roleplaying, and others look for the problem right at the start so they can start solving it.

An alternative beginning could have the murder take place the same night the circus arrives and unpacks. By the first afternoon of business, rumors are already circulating. Allow the PCs to make Diplomacy checks to gather information to learn some basic facts about the murder, only to be caught up in the monitor lizard escape described in the Uncaged Dragon encounter on page 7. They still end up demonstrating their skills to Almara, while purposefully pursuing the story.

A2. King of the Carnival (CR 1/2)

A heavy, long-handled mallet leans against a 3-foot-wide and 12-foot-high wooden tower crowned with a stuffed lion's head. At the base is a lever attached to a puck that slides up and down a pole running the length of the tower up to the lion's head.

This is a classic high-striker game with a twist. The game is run by **Narhi Vangkot** (CG male human commoner 3), an Ulfen strongman with a talent for calling out and challenging passersby. Narhi invites carnival-goers to demonstrate their "power and passion" to him by "taming the savage beast on yonder pole."

Players grasp a heavy mallet and strike the lever to send the puck to the top of the pole with a Strength check. Instead of a bell ringing, the lion head animates and responds to how high the puck reaches. Success against a DC of 13 makes the lion roar, winning the game. If the result of the Strength check is 18 or higher, the lion's thundering roar can be heard across the entire carnival. Narhi (who takes the game quite seriously) presents the player with an additional prize, a paper crown identifying the victor as a "King or Queen of the Carnival." If the player fails the Strength check, the lion head merely meows and licks its lips. Should the mallet be seized as a weapon of opportunity, treat it as a greatclub.

Story Award: The PCs earn 100 XP if they get the lion to roar, and an additional 100 XP for a thunderous roar. The paper crown grants the owner a 50% discount on admission to big top performances and the sideshow.

MEETING THE MONCHELLOS EARLY

You might want to have Borvius or Robella appear early in the adventure so they don't come out of nowhere later on. Robella might have received permission to set up a small booth in the Winding Market (see page 31) during the first night of the circus. The adventurers might even be referred to her shop if they ask where to find strange or curious items. Borvius isn't quite as easy to incorporate as a businessman, but he could come into the campaign as an incidental character. Perhaps he plays the King of the Carnival game right before a PC does, doesn't put up as good of a showing, and tosses some insults at the PCs when they show him up.

A3. The Lovely Madame Masque (CR 1/2)

Three raised runways meet at a point like an arrow beneath a brightly colored pavilion tent. Where the runways meet sits a tall, rectangular box covered in mirrors. Off to one side is a raised speaker's podium. Posters on makeshift signs depict an attractive woman in a provocative gown and silver mask, with the words "The Lovely Madame Masque" in bold print.

This game of chance challenges the skill of Perception. Unlike most midway games, multiple people play this one together, forming a betting pool. The winner takes half of the proceeds (an average of 1 sp) and the circus keeps the other half. A carnival barker recruits passersby until a minimum number of players are gathered. He then introduces Madame Masque, who emerges from the tent to wave silently at the crowd.

Madame Masque is a shapely woman in a provocative Varisian costume gown of red and black silk held together by ribbons. She is adorned with all manner of scarves, necklaces, earrings, and other decorative costume pieces, but her face is concealed by a finely crafted silver mask showing only her playful brown eyes. She remains mute, but nods and waves to the crowd.

The game is simple but challenging, calling on the power of observation. Madame Masque struts down the center runway and poses for 1 minute, flirting silently with the crowd. She then saunters to the mirrored cabinet, steps inside, and closes it behind her. After a flourish from the barker, the cabinet is opened to reveal three different Madame Masques. Each figure walks down a different runway, while four guards (N human warriors 2) prevent anyone from grasping at them. Each Madame Masque wears an entirely different costume from the original, but one wears a single piece of jewelry, item of clothing, or flower only the original wore. All three are illusions. The crowd has 1 minute to call out the matching item, and the first to correctly guess wins—or the players run out of time and the house keeps the pot. A

successful DC 13 Perception check permits the PCs to spot the item, with the highest result indicating the first PC to guess correctly. After guesses are made and a winner (if any) declared, two of the illusions vanish. The remaining image walks back to the mirrored cabinet where the real Madame Masque reemerges. Both compare the item in question, demonstrating the game is not rigged.

If the winning result is 20 or higher, the PC can name the trinket quickly and with great confidence, capturing the attention of Madame Masque herself. She walks on the runway toward the winner and slowly pulls a single scarf or ribbon from her costume, allowing it to tumble into the winner's grasp. Onlookers regard such a winner with envy, and Madame Masque gives the winner a final flirtatious over-the-shoulder glance before disappearing into the tent. Beneath her mask, Madame Masque is played by Ika. Madame Masque's game is never run while Jherizhana is performing or making an appearance in her special cage. For more information on Ika, see page 15.

Story Award: If the PCs win, they earn 100 XP, and they earn an additional 100 XP if they're given the ribbon. If the ribbon is worn prominently, the owner gains a +5 bonus on all Diplomacy checks with carnival crew and performers.

A4. The All-Seeing Hajeck

This ragtag tent is the abode of a Varisian huckster styling herself as the **All-Seeing Hajeck** (CN female expert 3/rogue 1). What Hajeck lacks in arcane talent she makes up for in knowing what people want to hear. She is irritated and unhappy to be located so close to the traveling zoo. Hajeck and the strange artifact she possess are covered further in the Pathfinder Module *The Harrowing*.

A5. The Traveling Zoo

A portable fence of wooden posts and rope cordons off this section of the circus. Several wagons constructed to serve as animal cages line the perimeter, with an occasional haystack piled between them. In the center of the area is a large tent whose wall flaps have been lifted up and tied off to allow easy viewing.

The entrance to the traveling zoo is sectioned off from the rest of the carnival. Guests are free to enter but exit the same way, which permits the animal handlers a final opportunity to proposition visitors for tips.

Some creatures are never brought out of their cages, except in rare instances underneath the big top. This includes the "baby dragon," and the manticores whose tail spikes have been surgically removed.

A6. Baby Dragon Cage

This heavy metal cage is labeled "Baby Dragon," but actually houses a monitor lizard. It's currently kept toward

the front of the traveling zoo area to impress potential visitors. Some of the Monchellos' thugs set the monitor lizard free on the first night of the carnival. See the Uncaged Dragon encounter below.

A7. The Lair of the Sphinx

This enormous tent is dwarfed only by the big top itself. The southern side has no wall, just a tall curtain pulled across its front. A sign posted outside advertises that this area has been set aside for meeting the sphinx at limited times throughout the day. Just inside is a large metal cage with no floor and bars running across the top. A single large door is set on the north corner of the west face, secured by a heavy lock. Strewn about the grass beneath the cage are silk sheets and piles of cushions and satin pillows.

The neatly painted sign advertises times when Jherizhana the sphinx is available to meet the curious and wonderstruck. Two guards (see page 13) are stationed here during Jherizhana's appearances. Visitors are not permitted to enter early. Once they are inside, any attempt to interact with the sphinx physically is prohibited.

Ika conceals herself within the shadowy folds of the tent with her *cloak of elvenkind*, casting *ventriloquism* and *minor image*. The guards work as her active partners, keeping visitors under control and Jherizhana's appearances on time and brief, then clearing the tent before Ika must drop the illusion.

Jherizhana's only appearances besides the evening show are for a few minutes after midday and again at midafternoon. She lounges in the center area with no regard for humanoid taboos concerning her state of undress. Visitors are free to walk around and speak with her. Provided they're friendly or polite, she replies in kind. The rest of the time this area is empty, and guards aggressively discourage snooping around the tent when it is not in use.

A8. Murder Site

This is the spot where the body of Sister Eselda Woodmere is discovered later in the adventure. See The Second Murder on page 12.

Other Areas

Only the midway locations appear here, but the PCs could explore other areas of the circus, possibly going shopping in the Winding Market or meeting the panotti Phardaen in the sideshow before he appears in the Uncaged Dragon encounter. Every night, the circus puts on an extravagant big top show, featuring a performance by Jherizhana, to bring

the day's festivities to a close. Appendix 2 describes some of the other carnival areas in more detail.

Uncaged Dragon (CR 2)

After the PCs have opportunity to explore the circus, they are drawn by the sudden screams of townspeople fleeing from the midway.

Creature: As the start of their plot to undermine the circus, the Gilded Hands are causing trouble—starting with the monitor lizard the circus calls a “baby dragon.” First, one of them wearing a disguise paid a gold piece to the panotti Phardaen to put on a show outside the beast tent. He was flying and doing tricks using his



Jherizhana

massive ears, unwittingly distracting the crowd while the thugs snuck in and freed the lizard. Now the beast scurries around the midway, hissing at the fleeing carnival-goers and snapping its jaws at anyone who gets too close.

MONITOR LIZARD

CR 2

XP 600

hp 22 (*Pathfinder RPG Bestiary* 194)

Tactics: The lizard is confused by all the commotion of the circus. It's rarely set free within such a busy area. If it's reduced to 11 hit points or fewer with nonlethal damage, it tries to submit to its attackers as though it were fighting for territory in the wild. If it's reduced with lethal damage, it fights until knocked unconscious or killed.

Phardaen: After he saw that the lizard had been set free, Phardaen rushed toward the scene. He's not quite brave enough to try bringing the creature under control himself, and he's afraid of hurting the lizard. When the PCs arrive, he begs them not to kill the "baby dragon." As long as the PCs deal nonlethal damage or just try to trap the lizard, he stays out of the way. If it seems like they might kill it, Phardaen attacks them, flying overhead and using his ears for wing attacks while pleading for the PCs to go easy on the lizard. He only draws his short sword if he's afraid for his own life.

PHARDAEN THE PANOTTI

CR 2

XP 600

hp 19 (see page 29)

Development: Once the fight is over, Berthold Flavion, the circus's Master of Beasts (see page 31), arrives, winded and flushed. Some members of the crew carry the lizard back to its cage, and others help calm Phardaen down and take him back to the sideshow (described in Appendix 2). If the PCs go to talk to Phardaen afterward, he tells them that someone paid him a gold piece to put on a show. He says it was someone with a big red beard, but nobody else remembers seeing anyone like that. Phardaen has a history of dishonesty, particularly when threatened, though he claims he's telling the truth this time.

Treasure: Berthold rewards the PCs with 25 gp for preventing innocents from being harmed. If they brought the lizard under control without unduly hurting it (meaning it retains at least 50% of its hit points or was subdued using nonlethal damage), he gives them an additional 25 gp.

PART TWO: THE FIRST MURDER

After sowing the seeds of mistrust with the escaped monitor lizard, the Gilded Hands begin the next phase of their frame-up after the opening night's final show. Highest on their list for robbery and murder is Archivin

Walder—Ilsurian's local moneylender and pawnbroker, and proprietor of the Locked Box. Through clever use of alchemy, the thieves' guild stages Walder's murder to make it look as though Jherizhana is responsible.

The town sheriff, **Kyra Feldane** (LG female human expert 4), confronts Almara Delisen first thing the following morning. Almara, knowing the sphinx did not murder anyone—and also knowing the locals are unlikely to assist or trust her predominantly Varisian crew—decides to find a third party to represent the circus and clear its name without needing to divulge its secrets.

Summons

The PCs receive a message midmorning via a carnival crew member. Mistress Delisen requests the PCs return to the circus in order to discuss a potential job opportunity.

When the PCs arrive at the circus, the carnival has not opened for the day's business yet. Almara waits beside a large private wagon with an adjoining canopy, and chairs are arranged around a nearby campfire. She greets them kindly but with a businesslike air, and after a brief introduction gets to the reason for her invitation.

"I appreciate your efforts yesterday in the regrettable incident with our dragon. I fear I could also use your help with another matter. You may have heard there was a murder in town last night. The circumstances, I am told, implicate people from my circus—something I find very hard to accept. I'd like to contract you to represent the Umbra Carnival to determine who is really responsible and preserve our reputation."

If the PCs ask questions or press Almara for more information, she responds as follows.

Choosing the PCs: "Your performance yesterday showed me that you're capable people. And honestly, we don't have many friends to choose from here."

The Sheriff's Investigation: "I don't believe Sheriff Feldane is an unjust woman, but I think she's under greater pressure to keep the peace than to find the guilty. After all, my people aren't her first concern. My belief is a third-party investigation stands a better chance of clearing our good name than the local constabulary."

The Circus's Needs: "This isn't just about lost revenue or personal reputation, or even protecting who they accused. This outfit relies on being able to buy provisions in the towns we visit. I can't let allow our ability to perform and obtain supplies to become compromised."

Accepting the Job: If the PCs accept, Almara grants them access to most areas of the circus. She also draws up a signed, sealed letter to Sheriff Feldane, identifying the PCs as her chosen third-party investigators. Finally, she recommends that the party make visiting the sheriff one of their first stops upon returning to town.

Treasure: Almara offers the PCs 600 gp if they find conclusive proof as to the identity of persons responsible. She's prepared to double that if the PCs can do so without divulging the truth about Jherizhana, but won't explain that during this initial meeting.

The Local Sheriff

Kyra Feldane can be found at the town jail. Feldane has been the sheriff for the last 15 years, and has a no-nonsense personality. She does her best to rise above the stereotypes the community harbors toward travelers and ethnic Varisians so she can mete out justice fairly. She agrees to see the PCs briefly, and after reviewing the note from Almara, consents to let them investigate the crime scenes. She does caution them that they're representing the circus, and thus any misconduct on their part reflects on the carnival. With that understood, she vouches for their legitimacy when they're investigating the case.

Feldane provides the basic facts on the murder. The victim was Archivin Walder, the town moneylender and sometimes pawnbroker who owns a local business called the Locked Box. Walder was found mauled while walking to his home after the circus last night. Walder's wife, who went looking for her husband when he never came home, discovered the body. Agnes Walder begged her husband's four full-time guards (N human warriors 2) who lived at the Locked Box for help. Three of them left their post to search, and one guard stayed behind to secure the office. Thieves, presumably in league with the creature that killed Walder, burst into the Locked Box, killed the remaining guard, and stole many easily carried valuables (such as gems and jewelry). The robbery was interrupted when the guards brought Walder's body to the office instead of his home, and they glimpsed two humanoid figures fleeing in the night. Upon finding the guard dead and the building burglarized, the three remaining guards secured the building until the sheriff could be notified.

Feldane confides she isn't entirely convinced a creature from the circus is responsible for the murders. Nevertheless, she explains the people of Ilsurian are fiercely independent and reactive.

"The mood in town is sour. There are stories all over the place about a great four-legged beast flying over town last night after the circus closed down, silhouetted across the moon. Of course, I'll be damned if I can find a single eyewitness who actually saw the sphinx. Now poor Walder is left dead in some bushes. It'd be one thing if these deaths were accidental, but the robbery angle

has people thinkin' of a Sczarni heist. I'm not proud to say it, but this stirs a lot of unworthy opinions about Varisians."

She offers her cooperation, but reminds them that she has to do what she feels is in the best interest of the town. She also cautions any PC Varisians to watch out for people nursing a grudge.

Archivin's Murder (CR 1/2)

If the PCs want to investigate where the body was discovered, either the sheriff or one of her constables can show them or explain where the location was. A successful DC 14 Survival check allows the PCs to locate clawed tracks of a big creature. Interestingly enough, there is no indication where the creature came from or where it went. The tracks just start out of nowhere—as if the creature could have flown to the spot. If PCs roll 19 or higher on the Survival check, the evidence has a very different context—showing where sections of the ground have been swept to remove tracks of other humanoids while leaving just the paw prints. Furthermore, the clawed tracks are not leonine, and not nearly deep enough to belong to Jherizhana, who should weigh approximately 600 pounds.

What Really Happened: In actuality, the Gilded Hands killed Archivin under the supervision of its two guild masters. Robella used a *feral mutagen* in conjunction with an *enlarge* extract to simulate the claw attacks of a large creature, while walking barefoot in order to leave the strange clawed tracks. Borvius staged the scene where the body would be found, and confiscated Archivin's master key to the Locked Box vault. When morning came and news of the murder circulated, the entire guild helped to generate a rumor concerning something resembling the sphinx flying above the town in the moonlight.

As for the robbery, Borvius outsourced the intended massacre of the guards to allies of the thieves' guild, the Nisku tribe. The Nisku are a small group of skulks who live outside of Ilsurian. The Gilded Hands used to pay the skulks off with a drug called shiver (as described on page 13) so the creatures wouldn't interfere with the guild's nocturnal activities. Now thoroughly addicted, the Nisku do whatever Borvius commands just for an occasional supply. Unless specifically noted, the skulks know very little about the actual guild. The Monchellos don't trust them at all, with the exception of two skulks (Kymeth and Onamae) who have quit the tribe completely and joined the guild.

Borvius gave Walder's keys to four skulks with orders to infiltrate the Locked Box and kill all the guards. The plan



Sheriff Feldane

went awry when Agnes Walder got the guards to leave their post to help search for her husband. The skulks dispatched the lone guard and began looting the office on their own initiative to please Borvius (and hopefully acquire more drugs as a reward). With three of the guards out of the building and the timetable altered, the skulks were interrupted. Two of the skulks fled, but in their haste one was accidentally locked inside of the vault, and the other was caught in a trap. When the guards discovered the office ransacked, they secured the building until morning.

Story Award: The PCs earn 200 XP if they successfully determine that the evidence of the sphinx attack is faked.

The Locked Box

The building itself is sturdy and solid, with 12-foot-high ceilings, heavy wooden doors except where noted, and no windows. Most of the office is on the single ground floor, but the vault is situated as a basement floor. Lamps illuminate the interior, even by day, in all areas except the vault.

When the PCs arrive, there are two guards present with **Agnes Walder** (N female human expert 1), the third having left to take the bodies to the temple of Erastil. Teary-eyed Agnes blames herself. She believes if she had gone to the carnival with her husband, events would have been different.

“It just bothered me to think of him ogling that winged she-lion whatsit—all that prancin’ about without a top on. But none a’ that would matter if only Archie was still here with me!”

Provided the PCs have been vetted by Sheriff Feldane, they’re granted access to the building. The vault has remained unopened and Walder’s master key is still missing. Agnes opens the door with her spare key and allows the PCs to investigate while she watches them carefully.

B1. Showroom and Exchange

Lamps illuminate this large showroom. Glass display cases, broken in a few places, line the walls, while two additional cases sit like islands in the center of the room. The cases contain an eclectic mix of valuables such as unusual tools, masterwork weapons, jewelry, fine china, antiques, and artwork. A set of merchant’s scales rests on top of one of the display cases.

The glass cases are 4 feet high and individually locked (Disable Device DC 15), though some were smashed open by the skulks. Broken glass has been swept up into careful piles.

The contents of the cases represent objects left as security on loans defaulted upon, or simply sold. Most of the gems and jewelry the skulks left behind in their haste are worth 50 gp or less, while more expensive baubles remain in the vault. The doors to the north lead to a wide set of stairs down to the vault area.

B2. Office

A large polished desk dominates the office. Hooks for hanging lamps are permanently affixed to the walls, while mounted behind the desk is a large framed portrait. Running along the east wall is a large display case filled with plaques, framed documents, trophies, and stuffed animals.

This was Archivin Walder’s private office. The portrait behind the desk depicts Archivin and Agnes in their youth. The desk is locked, but can be opened with Agnes’s key. The drawers contain Walder’s accounting books.

The display case contains mementos of personal value rather than treasures: Walder family portraits, a signed copy of the town charter, a stuffed and mounted bear, a mounted reefclaw, and a boggard short spear.

B3. Guards’ Quarters

This area is the guard’s quarters. Two cots and a bunk bed sit in the room. Footlockers are tucked underneath the cots to store personal belongings. A table and chairs are in the room’s center, a well-used deck of harrow cards on the tabletop.

A large, rusty red blotch remains on the floor where the guard’s body was discovered. Agnes tried to clean up the blood, but the floor is permanently stained. Agnes or Sheriff Feldane can tell the PCs that the guard’s throat was slit, but the body has already been removed from the scene.

B4. Vault Exterior (CR 3)

This bare corridor leads to the double doors of the vault. A hook for a hanging lantern is mounted on the western wall at the base of the stairs, and underneath it is a single chair.

Trap: This deceptively simple-looking area houses a pit trap in the floor. Unlike many similar traps, this one is counterintuitive. It captures thieves leaving the vault, trusting the heavy door and masterwork lock to deter them from getting in. When someone approaches the vault doors, the trap is deactivated, locked, and completely safe to walk on. A pressure plate inside the vault (see area **B5**) arms the trap. Once it’s armed, any weight placed on the two 5-foot northern squares of the trap door causes the whole 10-foot-by-10-foot hinged floor to drop to a 20-foot-deep pit below. Unless the trap door is physically caught and held in place, 4 rounds later the trap door swings back up on its hinges and locks back into place—whereupon it is deactivated again. Holding the trap door open requires a Medium creature to stand in a southern square of the pit and hold it open with one hand. The trap door is not airtight, and creatures below can make their presence known by calling out. The trap door is stout (hardness 6, 30 hp, break DC 27).

VAULT PIT TRAP

CR 2

Type mechanical; Perception DC 20; Disable Device DC 20

EFFECTS

Trigger location; **Reset** automatic; **Bypass** hidden switch (DC 20 Perception)

Effect 20-ft.-deep pit (2d6 falling damage); DC 20 Reflex avoids; multiple targets (all targets in a 10-ft.-square area)

Creatures: This trap caught the skulks by surprise. While fleeing the vault after the guards' unexpected return, a skulk named Rogi fell in and has remained trapped there overnight. Rogi is unsure which fate he dreads most: being caught and executed, or dying down here alone. He is waiting to see what happens before giving up and calling out for help. If a character drops down into the pit, he quickly explains that the trap door resets in only moments and tries to get them to hold it open while he assesses how he can escape.

ROGI

CR 1

XP 400

Injured skulk (*Bestiary* 2 248)

hp 16 (currently 12)

Development: Rogi doesn't have many good options. If attacked, he fights in self-defense while attempting to flee, but surrenders if he's close to death. If captured, he bargains for his life in exchange for what he knows. Unfortunately, he knows very little. His tribe, the Nisku, does favors for a group of humans in exchange for the narcotic shiver (created alchemically by Robella). He admits there's little love between the two groups, and the humans have the upper hand over the Nisku. The humans recruited two of the Nisku skulks, Kymeth and Onamae, to work for them full time. All orders and deliveries to the Nisku tribe come through these two.

B5. Vault Interior (CR 1)

Beyond the heavy steel door, this darkened chamber is lined with shelves, including freestanding shelving in the center. There is ample room in the vault, but labeled boxes, bags, weapons, and armor are spread throughout.

The metal doors to the vault are durable (hardness 10, hp 60, break DC 28), and locked. The lock can be picked with a DC 30 Disable Device check. The doors are designed to swing shut after 3 rounds, but they can be caught if a character standing next to them makes a DC 12 Reflex save, or propped open to prevent them from closing. Every time the doors are closed, the lock reengages automatically. The doors can be unlocked from either side, and can be held or propped open without difficulty.

Five feet past the doors, there is a 5-foot-by-10-foot pressure plate on the floor. Stepping on it does nothing

inside the vault itself, but it unlocks and arms the trap door in the floor in area **B4**. Even if a character fails to notice it prior to stepping on it, a successful DC 20 Perception check allows for an audible click to be heard, though the significance is not obvious.

A secret panel (Perception DC 20 to locate) is built into the shelves just east of the vault entrance. Inside is a bypass switch which deactivates the trap door in area **B4** after it has been armed by stepping on the pressure plate. The bypass also pops the door lock open, preventing one from being locked inside the vault if the key is misplaced. In actual use, the Walders never expected to avoid stepping on the pressure plate, and just disarmed the trap door before exiting. The trap only threatens those who enter and exit without knowing the proper procedure—a family secret even the guards don't know. Agnes can provide more detail if the PCs notice the pit trap, but she's so frazzled at the moment that she's forgotten all about it.

The vault contains the Walder family's better collection of items, gems and jewelry, and masterwork weapons and armor when not on display, as well as coins minted in Korvosa, Magnimar, and neighboring countries. There are even a few boxes belonging to Ilsurian citizens who pay a fee to have belongings stored securely.

Creature: Another skulk, Zahkar, was trapped inside the vault when her tribemates fled. She knows about the pressure plate, and overheard Rogi's startled scream before the vault doors swung closed and locked her in the darkness. She is hiding in the shadows, and tries to slip past the PCs before the doors can close again. Zahkar has a rough idea there is a trap door on the other side, and if she fails to spot it as she flees, she receives a +2 circumstance bonus on her Reflex save to avoid falling in. In the unlikely situation she can help Rogi, she does, but barring a means to lower something down to him, she abandons him to his fate. If she is unable to flee, she fights to the death.

ZAHKAR

CR 1

XP 400

Skulk (*Bestiary* 2 248)

hp 16

Development: If captured against her will, Zahkar attempts to bargain just as Rogi does (as described in area **B4**). If the skulks are brought to the sheriff as evidence the carnival is innocent, Feldane is skeptical, due to the number of strange creatures and freaks the circus advertises. A successful DC 11 Knowledge (local) check permits a PC to make a good argument that skulks don't live well in large communities, making their long-term association with the circus unlikely. This information or a successful DC 15 Bluff or Diplomacy check convinces the sheriff someone could be trying to frame the circus. She points out this may not sway

the rest of the town, and the PCs should continue to look for hard evidence linking the crime to whoever is responsible.

PCs who study the skulls, either dead or alive, and make a successful DC 15 Heal check recognize the signs of addiction (like shaky hands, furtive eyes, and an edgy demeanor). A result of 20 or higher lets them identify that this comes from shiver specifically.

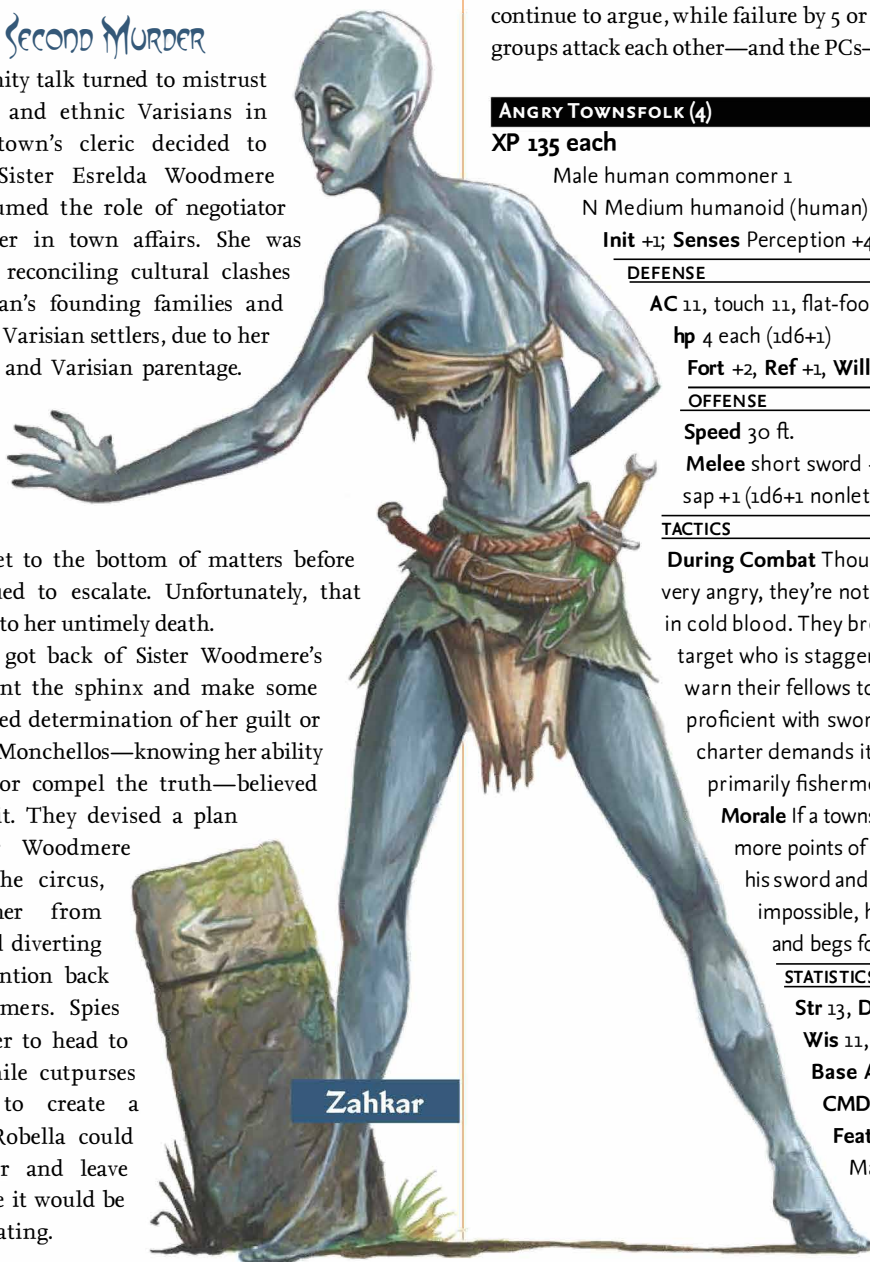
Treasure: If the PCs bring the skulls to justice, Agnes rewards them with 520 gp. Alternatively, the PCs may request an equivalent amount in masterwork weapons, armor, or other merchandise on sale at the Locked Box.

Story Award: The PCs earn an extra 100 XP if they determine the skulls are going through withdrawal, and an additional 100 XP if they identify the drug.

PART 3: THE SECOND MURDER

When community talk turned to mistrust of the circus, and ethnic Varisians in general, the town's cleric decided to take action. Sister Esrela Woodmere frequently assumed the role of negotiator and peacemaker in town affairs. She was well suited to reconciling cultural clashes between Ilsurian's founding families and the subsequent Varisian settlers, due to her mixed Chelish and Varisian parentage. After saying prayers for the deceased, she publicly declared her intention to get to the bottom of matters before events continued to escalate. Unfortunately, that declaration led to her untimely death.

When word got back of Sister Woodmere's plan to confront the sphinx and make some divinely inspired determination of her guilt or innocence, the Monchellos—knowing her ability to detect lies or compel the truth—believed she could do it. They devised a plan to kill Sister Woodmere right inside the circus, preventing her from interfering and diverting all of the attention back on the performers. Spies watched for her to head to the circus, while cutpurses stood ready to create a diversion so Robella could assassinate her and leave the body where it would be most incriminating.



Zahkar

Carnival Commotion (CR 2)

Whether the PCs are at the carnival or in Ilsurian, people run past from the direction of the circus parade grounds. If the PCs ask for details, they're told a fight is about to break out, and dozens of people are reporting their purses cut while walking around the carnival. One of the crowd says, "The thievin' Varisians are trying to bleed the town dry!"

Creatures: When the PCs arrive, the situation has escalated into a full-blown confrontation on the parade grounds between four Ilsurian men and two circus enforcers who are trying to drive them back toward town. If the PCs swiftly intervene, they can drive the two groups apart with a successful DC 15 Diplomacy check or DC 20 Intimidate check. Failure means they're ignored and the two groups continue to argue, while failure by 5 or more means the two groups attack each other—and the PCs—in the start of a riot.

ANGRY TOWNSFOLK (4) CR 1/3

XP 135 each

Male human commoner 1

N Medium humanoid (human)

Init +1; Senses Perception +4

DEFENSE

AC 11, touch 11, flat-footed 10 (+1 Dex)

hp 4 each (1d6+1)

Fort +2, Ref +1, Will +0

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee short sword +1 (1d6+1/19–20) or sap +1 (1d6+1 nonlethal)

TACTICS

During Combat Though the townsfolk are very angry, they're not out to kill anyone in cold blood. They break off attacking any target who is staggered or drops, and warn their fellows to do likewise. They're proficient with swords because the town charter demands it, but they're still primarily fishermen and foresters.

Morale If a townsfolk takes 3 or more points of damage, he drops his sword and flees. If flight is impossible, he drops to his knees and begs for mercy.

STATISTICS

Str 13, Dex 12, Con 10, Int 10,

Wis 11, Cha 9

Base Atk +0; CMB +1;

CMD 12

Feats Great Fortitude, Martial Weapon Proficiency (short sword)

Skills Perception +4, Profession (fisherman) +4, Swim +5

Languages Common

Gear sap, short sword

CIRCUS GUARDS (2)

CR 1/2

XP 200 each

Human warrior 2

N Medium humanoid (human)

Init +1; **Senses** Perception +2

DEFENSE

AC 12, touch 11, flat-footed 11 (+1 armor, +1 Dex)

hp 11 each (2d10)

Fort +3, **Ref** +1, **Will** +0

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee club +3 (1d6+1) or

sap +3 (1d6+1 nonlethal)

TACTICS

Before Combat The guards' primary responsibility is to keep the peace, and keep anyone from interfering with customers enjoying themselves and spending money. They're also always tasked with the responsibility of preventing anyone from "testing" Ika's illusion of Jherizhana.

Morale If brought down to 5 or fewer hit points, the guards disengage in order to get reinforcements. If fleeing is impossible, they start yelling for help.

STATISTICS

Str 13, **Dex** 12, **Con** 10, **Int** 10, **Wis** 11, **Cha** 9

Base Atk +2; **CMB** +3; **CMD** 14

Feats Endurance, Persuasive

Skills Acrobatics +3, Diplomacy +3, Intimidate +6, Perception +2

Languages Common

Gear padded armor, club, sap

Development: If the PCs succeed in defusing the confrontation or talking down the townsfolk, award them XP as if they had defeated them in combat. The "townies" explain there has been a rash of pickpockets since the carnival opened today, but grudgingly agree to leave the premises.

Immediately afterward, one the circus performers rushes toward the PCs and informs them that a body has been discovered in one of the large tents on the midway.

Murder on the Midway

The PCs are directed back to the area where the baby dragon rampaged earlier, but this time they're led inside the large tent called the Lair of the Sphinx (area A7). If they haven't looked inside the tent before, describe it and its purpose.

The body is located at the spot marked A8. If the PCs are residents of Ilsurian, they recognize the body as Sister Esrelda Woodmere, the town cleric of Erastil. Even if they are not locals, her robes clearly identify her as a cleric. Her wounds look like claw marks from a large animal,

TOWN ALCHEMIST?

"Murder's Mark" intimates drug use with the Nisku skulls and the recovering Filton Legg. This can lead to the PCs asking whether Ilsurian has a practicing alchemist. Robella doesn't advertise her true abilities—that would be too obvious—but she has acted as a nurse before. This can be a way for the party to roleplay with her earlier in the adventure, but be careful—you can accidentally short-circuit right to the ending if it is mishandled.

Shiver is the narcotic that caused the Monchellos to be driven out of Korvosa. Robella's original formula was meant to be more potent than most shiver found on the streets. In actuality, it was unstable and toxic—so dangerous it killed the brother of a Sczarni gang leader. After 15 years, she's greatly improved her formula.

SHIVER

Type injury or ingested; **Addiction** major; **Fortitude** DC 18

Price 500 gp

Effects variable; 50% chance to sleep for 1d4 hours or gain immunity to fear for 1d4 minutes

Damage 1d2 Con damage

similar to those found on the body of Archivin Walder. A successful DC 15 Heal check or DC 20 Perception check also reveals a slender rope burn around her throat, indicative of strangulation by garrote or similar weapon. The ground is firm and the inside of the tent has seen a lot of foot traffic, so any recent tracks have been ruined. Nevertheless, a successful DC 15 Survival check does rule out any tracks belonging to a large, heavy feline body, and a successful DC 20 Survival check identifies recent humanoid tracks going north to the back of the tent, where some of the tent stakes have been pulled to permit egress. A thorough search of the interior tent and a successful DC 15 Perception check uncovers three small glass vials. The vials lack enough of their original contents to identify what they contained, but a successful DC 15 Spellcraft check reveals they contained alchemical materials (but not true potions). Lastly, the cage door is unlocked but has been pushed closed.

The tracks lead out the back of the tent, where they pass by a small pile of tear-away clown costumes before becoming muddled in a maze of wagons, tents, and other foot traffic. If the PCs use Diplomacy to gather information or Knowledge (local) to interview townspeople and carnival employees concerning any events that seemed out of the ordinary, they can learn the following facts>

Result	Information
10–14	Many people in Ilsurian knew Sister Esrelda planned to speak to the sphinx directly this afternoon. She was very public about this after the news of Walder's murder.

Esrelida was half-Varisian, a strong defender of both her heritages, and a respected leader in the community.

15–19 Everyone expects a few purses to be cut at a town carnival, but the carnival's first day of business saw nothing out of the ordinary. Shortly before Esrelida was discovered, pickpockets seemed to have come out in droves. Once one individual noticed it, an alarm was raised from the crowds and many people discovered they'd been "pinched." This precipitated the fight on the parade grounds.

20+ Three circus clowns were observed near the sphinx's tent around the time of the mob scene on the parade grounds, which was unusual, as they had no business being there. Guards are always posted near the tent when the sphinx is doing an appearance. When Jherizhana is not there, patrolling carnival enforcers discourage people from loitering near the tent.

What Really Happened: The murder of Sister Esrelida was executed through good timing and teamwork on the part of the Gilded Hands, even though mistakes were made. Once Esrelida's intentions were known, rogues from the Gilded Hands staged a distraction to draw some of the guards away from their posts by picking pockets and then raising the alarm themselves. Once the citizens checked their own purses, they coalesced into a mob—drawing carnival guards away from their regular stations. While not every circus guard was at the confrontation where the PCs interceded, most were suppressing other confrontations with performers and vendors. Meanwhile, Esrelida entered the tent at A7 with the intent of speaking to Jherizhana. Since the carnival was not expecting a representative from town, the tent was empty. Robella and two of her rogues, disguised as clowns, slipped inside after Esrelida and attacked. Outnumbered, they grappled the cleric and garroted her to prevent her from crying out or casting spells. Robella finished her off using her combination of feral mutagen and *enlarge* extract. Once Esrelida was dead, Robella left the circus by use of an *invisibility* extract (accidentally dropping her used vials). Her two rogues slipped out the back after unlocking the cage, and discarded their clown costumes.

Development: The thieves' guild doesn't let an opportunity to steal pass them by. Rogues break into the temple of Erastil after its acolytes head to the circus to collect Esrelida's body. Esrelida was saving community tithes to refurbish the temple—something only members of the community would know. These tithes, in a box marked with the god's holy symbol, are currently in area D19 within the thieves' guild hideout.

Quarantine

Mistress Almara Delisen and Master Venlock, the circus's chief enforcer, arrive on the scene after the PCs. Both

are shocked, but Almara orders a carnival worker to run to Ilsurian and fetch Sheriff Feldane. Maintaining her certainty of the circus's innocence, Almara refuses to be party to a cover-up. Sheriff Feldane arrives soon after, and allows the PC to present any facts they have discovered.

Any significant evidence makes it clear to the sheriff that not everything is as it seems, but she points out that doesn't change her immediate problem of two prominent citizens murdered, and now a rash of pickpocketing at the circus. Feldane then demands to see the sphinx herself, and asks Almara and Venlock some pointed questions—starting with "Where is she right now?" and "Why isn't she in that cage?" Mistress Delisen flushes at the sheriff's directness, but proceeds to offer the second explanation described in *The Truth* about Jherizhana on page 4 (that Jherizhana is not a captive of the circus but only pretends to be one, and resides in a private wagon).

This is the last straw for the sheriff, who says:

"You've brought a dangerous creature into this community—a creature you clearly cannot keep track of, let alone control. I can't say I know for certain there's wrongdoing here on the part of your people, but after a point it ceases to matter. For the safety of my town, I'm putting this circus under quarantine. I don't want any of your people leaving these grounds unless it's to leave town completely. I'm giving you two days to get packed up and go."

If the PCs ask if they can continue to investigate, Feldane grants them permission with a warning. She wants conclusive proof of who is responsible if the circus is to be exonerated. Reasonable doubt is not enough.

Story Award: If the PCs present at least four distinct pieces of information, they earn 200 XP, plus an additional 100 XP if they can present seven facts or clues. Succeeding at more checks, or ones of higher difficulty, counts as more pieces of information even if the information's related. For instance, the vials are one piece of information, and the fact that they were used for alchemical materials counts as a second.

Interview with the Sphinx (CR 3)

At some point, the PCs might want to confront Jherizhana themselves, whether to learn what she knows, or to clear her as a potential suspect. When this happens may vary, but don't feel you have to postpone it until after the second murder. Depending on how the adventure is going, you can handle this encounter two different ways: they could interview Jherizhana as portrayed by Ika, or be introduced to Ika by Almara once they uncover the secret of the sphinx. Choose an approach based upon the players' own suspension of disbelief. If they're still willing to accept Jherizhana as a real person, don't spoil the surprise. If they're already questioning the reality of the sphinx, it's simple for them to disbelieve the illusion if they interact with or observe Ika.

Meeting Jherizhana

If circumstances dictate that the PCs speak to Jherizhana, Almara informs them she is to meet with them shortly in her tent (but outside of her cage). They are allowed entrance when Jherizhana is ready. Ika creates the illusion as described on page 4. Jherizhana is cordial and gracious, but somewhat aloof, and insists she has only a few minutes to spare them. She answers their questions to the best of her ability, but truthfully does not know why she's being framed as a killer and a thief. She posits that humanoid fear what they do not understand, and even suggests they go ask a thief. She is not uncooperative, but Ika created her character with a certain personality (lofty, wise, sensual, and with an earthy sense of humor), and she slips into the role without a thought. The sphinx discourages the PCs from coming too close or invading her personal space, which would allow them to interact directly with the illusion. Should they do so, Jherizhana threatens to teleport away to her private quarters so she may rest undisturbed. As a last-ditch effort to preserve the fiction, Ika drops the illusion to simulate the sphinx vanishing. Nevertheless, a successful DC 18 Knowledge(arcana) check informs a PC that sphinxes cannot teleport. Likewise, they can make a Sense Motive check opposed by Ika's Bluff check to tell that Jherizhana is being untruthful or evasive about something.

Meeting Ika

If the PCs confront Almara or Ika about the illusion, they admit the truth. Almara does her best to shield Ika from responsibility for the falsehood, truthfully insisting it was her decision not to tell the PCs.

Ika is a beautiful young woman, but the reason Almara and the carnival keep her out of sight (or in the guise of Madame Masque) is immediately evident: she and the fictional Jherizhana share the same face. Yet where the sphinx persona exudes poise and confidence, Ika is shy and quiet. Almara explains how the Umbra Carnival works as a community to keep Ika a secret. Ika offers the party an unreserved apology for not being forthcoming and truthful, and goes on to explain she never intended anyone to be hurt, and she obviously feels guilty for the deaths, even though she had nothing to do with them. If the PCs have not suggested it, Ika brings up the idea to just tell the people of Ilsurian that Jherizhana is an illusion.

Almara is opposed to this idea on principle, above and beyond just the financial loss of a successful attraction.

"That doesn't bring these killers to justice. It doesn't change people's opinion of us, or maintain Ilsurian as a venue we're welcome to visit again. All it proves is these bastards were too stupid to figure out they were framing an illusion. No one here is going to come to our shows anymore. We'll be forced to leave town and they'll get away with it."

Ika	CR 3
XP 800	
Female human bard 4	
LG Medium humanoid (human)	
Init +2; Senses Perception +7	
DEFENSE	
AC 15, touch 13, flat-footed 12 (+2 armor, +2 Dex, +1 dodge)	
hp 31 (4d8+10)	
Fort +3, Ref +6, Will +4; +4 vs. bardic performance, language-dependent, and sonic	
OFFENSE	
Speed 30 ft.	
Melee rapier +5 (1d6–1/18–20)	
Special Attacks bardic performance 13 rounds/day (countersong, distraction, fascinate, inspire competence +2, inspire courage +1)	
Bard Spells Known (CL 4th; concentration +7)	
2nd (2/day)— <i>minor image</i> (DC 16), <i>mirror image</i>	
1st (4/day)— <i>charm person</i> (DC 14), <i>cure light wounds</i> (DC 14), <i>silent image</i> (DC 15), <i>ventriloquism</i> (DC 15)	
0 (at will)— <i>dancing lights</i> , <i>daze</i> (DC 13), <i>detect magic</i> , <i>ghost sound</i> (DC 14), <i>message</i> , <i>prestidigitation</i>	
STATISTICS	
Str 8, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 12, Wis 10, Cha 17	
Base Atk +3; CMB +2; CMD 15	
Feats Dodge, Spell Focus (illusion), Weapon Finesse	
Skills Acrobatics +9, Bluff +7, Knowledge(arcana) +10, Knowledge(local) +10, Perception +7, Perform(oratory) +10, Perform(sing) +10, Sense Motive +4, Spellcraft +8, Stealth +9	
Languages Common, Varisian	
SQ bardic knowledge +2, versatile performance (oratory)	
Gear leather armor, rapier, <i>cloak of elvenkind</i>	

Battle Lines Being Drawn (CR 2)

This encounter takes place when the PCs are traveling back and forth between the Umbra Carnival and Ilsurian proper. The timing is flexible, but should be presented after Sister Eselda's murder and the sheriff's imposition of a quarantine on the circus. It reflects the town's growing frustration and impatience with the turmoil—whatever the source.

The setting is simple, just off the commonly traveled route between the town and circus. A visible crowd of six men has gathered around the base of a large tree, but what they're doing isn't obvious until the PCs draw close. A young Varisian teenager named Milandru, a child of a circus family, has been caught in Ilsurian after the quarantine. Milandru made a friend of one of the youths from town, a lad named Grayson. Though Milandru may not admit it to the PCs, he has developed a crush on his new friend. When the quarantine was imposed, Milandru snuck into town to say goodbye, perhaps even fantasizing the other boy would run away and join the Umbra Carnival with him.

Instead, he was spotted and confronted by an angry mob of Ilsurian citizens, who thought to make an example

of him for trespassing back into town. Not knowing his actual reasons, only that he was a Varisian stranger from the circus, the mob gave the boy a beating. They covered his face with a burlap sack so he couldn't identify them, and planned to leave him tied to the tree to be discovered later. Without even realizing it, they're killing him.

When the PCs confront this situation, Milandru's face is covered, but a successful DC 10 Heal or Perception check reveals the figure is unconscious and badly injured without requiring the PCs to physically examine the body. Milandru has a Constitution score of 10, is at -4 hit points, and is not stabilized. Make his Constitution check (starting with DC 14) at initiative rank 10.

Creatures: The townsfolk react with hostility toward any interference from the PCs, accusing them of "helping those carnies get away with stealing and killin' folks!" They attack to drive the PCs off, requiring a successful DC 24 Diplomacy or DC 11 Intimidate check to talk them down. If shown the boy is on the verge of death, the mob is shocked and horrified; the PCs gain a +10 circumstance bonus on Diplomacy checks to end the conflict, and even gain the townsfolks' grudging cooperation.

ANGRY TOWNSFOLK (5) CR 1/3
XP 135 each
hp 4 each (see page 12)

Development: Despite being a fight, this is also a complex roleplaying situation for the players. If the PCs kill townsfolk, regardless of how reprehensible their actions are, the task of proving the Umbra Carnival is innocent becomes very difficult. Feel free to remind the players that they're representing the circus, and that the town has seen a beloved spiritual leader murdered at the carnival without anyone arrested for it yet. The PCs run the risk of being no better than the mob if they're too harsh. Some in the mob attempt to flee in the face of their shame, but depending on

the how the PCs act, others may try to help make amends or turn themselves over to the sheriff.

If Milandru dies, it's a dark day for everyone, both at the circus and in Ilsurian. Sheriff Feldane arrests any of the mob she can apprehend, but expresses the dour opinion that the circus should leave before things get worse.

Story Award: If Milandru is saved, the PCs earn 100 XP in addition to the experience for defeating the townsfolk.

Treasure: If the PCs save Milandru's life, his parents are grateful for his safe return. His mother gives them a *scarf of the suggestive dance* (see the sidebar on page 17), a family heirloom, as a gesture of their thanks.

PART 4: THE THIRD MURDER

Until this point, the Gilded Hands have focused their attention on the circus and the PCs have been playing catch-up. Now the thieves' guild is starting to factor the PCs into their plans.

Filton Legg was Ilsurian's equivalent of the town drunk, but liquor wasn't the undoing of this failed fishermen, but rather the narcotic called shiver. Filton lost everything to supply his habit, but as a heavy buyer became aware of the Gilded Hand's existence as an organized group of criminals. Among the things Filton overheard was how much the guild coveted the business interests of a river merchant, Arhaneem Braeton.

Over the last month, Filton started to kick the habit. Not realizing the Gilded Hands were plotting to kill Braeton in cold blood, Filton went to the river merchant seeking honest employment. Trying to ingratiate himself with his new employer, Filton volunteered the information that "Borvius Monchello, owner of Ilsurian Storage & Hauling," wanted to acquire Arhaneem's business. Arhaneem confronted Borvius on the docks and laughed at the very idea, unknowingly tipping off the thieves' guildmaster that someone was talking. The guild planned to make Filton and Arhaneem their final targets, but with PCs undermining their efforts to use the carnival as a scapegoat, Borvius added a new dimension to the plot. The Gilded Hands are going to frame the PC themselves and thus discredit everything they've done so far, ruining the circus once and for all.



Ika

MURDER'S MARK

The encounter begins with the discovery of Filton Legg's body. The body is hung from a tree in town, in a locale where the town constabulary would be sure to happen upon it shortly after. As the guild anticipated, Sheriff Feldane sends for the party right away. Filton's corpse is suspended by the neck from a dirty and torn Varisian scarf. His eyes have been gouged out, his mouth has been stuffed with rags, and his left hand has been severed at the wrist and is missing. A sheet of paper has been pinned to the body's shirt and is stained with blood, emblazoned with the Varisian words "We take care of our own." A successful DC 10 Perception check discovers a harrow card of The Desert, depicting an androsphinx, stuck just inside the body's vest, and a dingy, heavily creased, note appearing to be a few days old in the trouser pocket. The note is signed "Arhaneem Braeton," but bears no personal seal. The note explains the bearer has been hired to "work on one of the Skull River boat crews, and is on probation—an advance is permitted to buy new boots if necessary." A successful DC 12 Linguistics check shows the document to be artificially doctored to look older, and that the ink is only 1 or 2 hours old (determining whether Arhaneem actually signed the letter is impossible without a copy of his signature). The card has been arranged to appear like the obvious clue, and the note to seem like an incidental discovery.

If the PCs ask around about these individuals, they are told Arhaneem Braeton is a wealthy river merchant who owns a small fleet of ships that traverse Lake Syrantula and the Skull River. Filton Legg was a beggar and probrate.

A successful DC 10 Knowledge (arcana) check reveals there is no mystical or symbolic relationship with the harrow card. The only possible context is that The Desert depicts a sphinx. The PCs can also learn the following facts making some Diplomacy checks to gather information and some Knowledge (local) checks.

Result	Information
10–14	Filton was addicted to a substance known as shiver. Some people suspect the drug is produced locally, but sold in other towns and communities so that the drug's manufacture is not traced directly back to the source. Filton seemed to have an inside connection.
15–19	Having sold or lost everything he had of value, Filton was reduced to begging. Nevertheless, he started to change over the past few months—drying out, attending temple, and becoming respectable. Filton had been looking for honest work of late, but was publicly bitter toward persons he would not name.

SCARF OF THE SUGGESTIVE DANCE

Milandru's parents have held onto this family heirloom for several generations, but absolutely insist that the people who saved their son take it.

SCARF OF THE SUGGESTIVE DANCE

Aura faint enchantment; CL 1st

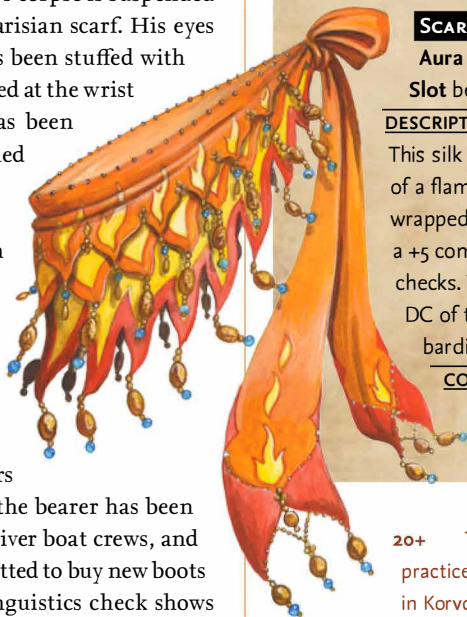
Slot belt; Price 3,000 gp; Weight 1/2 lb.

DESCRIPTION

This silk scarf is embroidered with all the colors of a flame and tasseled in tiny beads. When wrapped around the hips, it grants the wearer a +5 competence bonus on Perform (dance) checks. The scarf adds +1 to the saving throw DC of the wearer's fascinate and suggestion bardic performances.

CONSTRUCTION

Requirements Craft Wondrous Item, hypnotism; Cost 950 gp



20+ The practice of severing the left hand was a practice popular among gangs and thieves' guilds in Korvosa some 10 to 20 years ago. It was a reprisal done to someone who sought relief from an illegal debt by going to the authorities. The idea was the victims retained their right hands so they could still make good on their obligations. If the PCs uncover this specific fact, reward them 100 XP.

Development: With the advent of a third murder, Sheriff Feldane has no choice to but to arrest someone, lest she face a backlash from the town herself. She travels to the Umbra Carnival to order Jherizhana to surrender, and when no one forces the "sphinx" to appear or comply, Feldane arrests Almara Delisen in lieu of Jherizhana. For her part, Almara surrenders herself to custody willingly rather than trying to leverage the secret of the illusion or permitting Ika to come forward. Ika looks on, hidden in a tent and sobbing, as Mistress Delisen is put in manacles. Feel free to play this scene out if you like, but the sheriff does not budge, and Almara tells the PCs to spend their energy on finding the real murderers. This development serves to keep the sheriff busy, and allows the PCs to follow up with Arhaneem Braeton.

Borvius has made a calculated assumption about the PCs here. The man is no fool—he's guessing the PCs will ignore the contrived and staged evidence (the Varisian scarf, the sign, and the harrow card), in favor of the seemingly innocuous object—the note from Arhaneem Braeton. Filton really was given a job by Braeton, but the note is a fake. Borvius is guessing the PCs will go to Braeton's home in search of more clues, and once there he plans to ambush the party and frame them instead of the sphinx.

PART FIVE: BRAETON MANOR

Arhaneem Braeton was a self-made man and early entrepreneur in the area, his small fleet ferrying goods all the way from Magnimar to Kaer Maga and Janderhoff. As one of Ilsurian's wealthiest citizens and merchants, Braeton commanded no small authority on the town's docks. This frequently put him at odds with Borvius's legitimate business interests, which rely on competing river merchants who need labor and logistics. More importantly, Braeton's business has complicated the criminal activities of the Gilded Hands—much of which deals with smuggling and fencing goods brought to town via the docks at night. The Monchellos realized that if they acquired Braeton's business, they would have the makings of a proper criminal empire. Even if Braeton were just killed, it would still offer the guild greater latitude with their nocturnal dockside activities—hence Braeton's selection as the guild's final victim. Since Braeton has no grown heirs, Borvius could buy his vessels from the town at a reduced price while maintaining the illusion of legitimacy.

Nevertheless, the PCs are complicating matters. The Gilded Hands are relying on the crime spree being blamed upon the carnival, and with each murder the PCs have cast a shadow of a doubt. The Monchellos have arrived at the conclusion they're framing the wrong individuals. If the PCs can be portrayed as criminals working with the carnival to commit the crimes, then everything in relation to their investigation is cast into doubt, and Sheriff Feldane looks like a fool for ever having cooperated with them.

When the PCs go to Braeton Manor, the Gilded Hands have already prepared an ambush. The guild has murdered the Braeton adults and servants, but spared the children. Borvius has used one of Robella's infused extracts of *disguise self* on himself so he can appear as one of the PCs to the children, in order to trick them into being living witnesses to the PCs' alleged crimes. Once the PCs are killed, Borvius intends to stage the massacre so it appears the PCs and the Braeton family killed each other. Once the rescued children incorrectly identify a PC as one of the attackers, the frame-up will be complete.

Borvius knows there's a risk that his followers might get killed and that he might get caught or seen, so he's come up with a cover story for that eventuality: several of his workers didn't show up for work today, so he (and any thugs or rogues who survive the battle) came looking for them. They followed the workers to Braeton's and found out that what he thought were loyal workers had joined up with the PCs and the circus and betrayed the town. They were then attacked by the PCs themselves (explaining any injuries).

The front doors have been deliberately left slightly ajar to encourage the PCs to investigate, should they knock or call out and receive no answer. All of the curtains have been pulled, but the rogues have put some lights on in the upstairs

rooms so the manor doesn't appear abandoned. The north exterior doors are locked (DC 20 Disable Device to unlock). Disabling the locks on the windows requires a successful DC 15 Disable Device check (though they can be smashed open easily), and a DC 10 Climb check to get through.

Manor Grounds

If the PCs search around the house first, they can discover a thug hiding outside **C2** by succeeding at a Perception check opposed by the thug's Stealth check. If detected, he uses the flash powder as a means of alerting his comrades to the PCs' presence, then tries to lead them into the building. Noticing the grappling hook attached to area **C10** requires a DC 12 Perception check. The hook's still attached, but the rope is pulled up into the room.

C1. Foyer (CR 2)

This large, spacious foyer has high ceilings and is richly appointed. North of the door sits a large planter where an indoor tree is bathed in light from the skylight above. A massive staircase gradually ascends to a second floor above. Two sets of double doors on the east and west wall lead farther into the house. Another set of double doors stands behind the stairway. Leather padded chairs are interspaced throughout the room.

If it is evening when the PCs come to call, a few wall lamps have been left lit to encourage them to step inside, combining with the moonlight from skylight above to provide dim lighting. If it is daytime, the skylight still provides dim light throughout the room. The ceiling is 25 feet high in the area south of the staircase and the landing, and 12 feet high elsewhere on the first floor.

Creatures: Four thugs wait here to ambush the PCs. Two thugs are behind the closed doors in area **C2**—one is waiting in area **C8**, and the fourth is lurking just outside the windows of area **C2** in the bushes. Once the PCs enter the front doors, the thug lurking outside follows them inside and hurls a bag of flash powder at their feet. All creatures within a 10-foot-radius burst must save (Fortitude DC 13 negates) or be blinded for 1 round. The thug uses the time to lock the front doors behind him (he has the house key taken from Braeton's corpse) and draw his weapon. The other thugs use the surprise round to burst into the room and get in flanking positions around the PCs.

If the PCs come in from the north, through area **C5**, the thugs don't rush to engage them. Instead, they take cover and fire arrows, or move into area **C1** to draw the PCs out. If they're getting torn apart by the PCs' ranged attacks, they might rush into melee out of necessity.

If the PCs enter through **C10** or another room on the second story, Borvius rushes downstairs to join his crew instead of pulling the theatrics described below.

MURDER'S MARK



Assuming the fight takes place at the base of the stairs, choose one of the PCs who has been outspoken during the adventure. A figure perfectly resembling that PC in all physical details comes out from the door to area C10 (the children's room) and stands at the top of the stairs. This is Borvius under the effect of a *disguise self* infused extract. He calls to his thugs in a passable imitation of the PC's voice: "Slaughter these idiots and get to secure locations afterward. I've spared the children." The duplicate of the PC smiles evilly, and his magical disguise fades away to reveal a handsome older man with a ponytail. "After all, there's nothing more compelling than a living witness." He then calls out reassurances to the children in his own rough, masculine voice, as though he were there to save them, and heads back toward area C10. He is hoping his thugs finish off, or at least soften up, the PCs.

GILDED THUGS (4) CR 1/3

XP 135 each

Male human expert 1

NE Medium humanoid (human)

Init +2; **Senses** Perception +3

DEFENSE

AC 13, touch 12, flat-footed 11 (+1 armor, +2 Dex)

hp 8 each (1d8+4)

Fort +0, **Ref** +2, **Will** +1

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee short sword +1 (1d6/19–20)

Ranged shortbow +2 (1d6/x3)

TACTICS

Before Combat The thugs use any temporary blindness or surprise to get in flanking positions.

During Combat More cutpurses than warriors, the gilded thugs use only basic tactics—nothing more advanced than flanking.

Morale The thugs flee if reduced to 2 hit points or fewer.

STATISTICS

Str 10, **Dex** 14, **Con** 11, **Int** 13, **Wis** 8, **Cha** 9

Base Atk +0; **CMB** +0; **CMD** 12

Feats Toughness, Weapon Focus (short sword)

Skills Acrobatics +6, Bluff +3, Disable Device +6, Escape Artist +6, Knowledge (local) +5, Perception +3, Sleight of Hand +6, Stealth +6

Languages Common, Varisian

Gear flash powder (on only one thug); **Other Gear** padded armor, short sword, shortbow with 10 arrows

C2. Parlor

Leather sofas dominate this sitting room. Large windows with curtains drawn are set in the wall behind them.

C3. Dining Room

A large dining room table sits in the center of the room with enough chairs for a large family meal.

C4. Larder and Kitchen Storage

Cupboards here hold spices, flour, and other cooking ingredients. Baskets are filled with fruits and vegetables, while meats hang from the ceiling.

C5. Kitchen

Two large stoves and adjoining preparation tables sit in the center of the room. The two northern doors are locked (DC 20 Disable Device to unlock). Borvius and one of the thugs from area C1 both have a house key. The PCs can enter through the back door of the manor, coming in through this area instead of the foyer. Their enemies might be caught off guard if the PCs don't fall for the bait of the cracked front door.

C6. Servants' Quarters

This is a modest bedroom with a chest of drawers, and a few simple paintings on the wall to lend it some cheer. The bodies of an elderly servant couple, recently slain, are a shocking contrast to the tidiness of the rest of the manor. The manner in which the bodies have fallen shows the man was killed trying to shield his wife from further violence.

C7. Study/Office

This is a large and well-appointed office, with a large desk sitting in the center of the room. The walls are taken up with bookshelves and trophies and curios put on display.

The desk has been rifled through and papers are scattered everywhere. One piece of documentation is inside a metal scroll tube with a scrimshaw cap carved with the likeness of a turtleback ferryboat. It was placed by Borvius Monchello to appear as though the attackers had ignored it, but he made sure it was at least out in the open. It contains Arhaneem Braeton's last will and testament. In the event of Braeton's death, his business is held in trust by the town council for Braeton's two children. If there is cause to suggest the business may deteriorate before they come of age, the council has the option of selling the business on their behalf.

C8. Den

A billiards table occupies this room, and appears to have been recently used. A sideboard sits in front of the drawn curtains. Eight small glasses are set out in various places around the room, all of which smell of whiskey recently poured.

C9. Landing (CR 1)

Two experienced guild rogues observe the PCs' progress from this U-shaped landing of the manor's upper floor. They refrain from going down to the lower level, preferring to make the PCs come to them. The wooden railing allows them make unobstructed ranged attacks while granting them partial cover. The rogues are the last line of defense between Borvius and the PCs, so they hold back and guard the stairs even if their allies are losing the fight in area C1.

Creatures: If the PCs advance up the stairs in pursuit, Borvius's two allies have instructions to finish them off or delay them. The rogues throw their tanglefoot bags down on the staircase, and follow up with their throwing daggers.

GILDED ROGUES (2)

CR 1/2

XP 200 each

Male human rogue 1

NE Medium humanoid (human)

Init +6; **Senses** Perception +4

DEFENSE

AC 14, touch 12, flat-footed 12 (+2 armor, +2 Dex)

hp 10 each (1d8+2)

Fort +1, **Ref** +4, **Will** +0

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee short sword +3 (1d6+2/19–20)

Ranged tanglefoot bag +2 (entangle) or dagger +2 (1d4+2/19–20)

Special Attacks sneak attack +1d6

TACTICS

Before Combat The rogues throw their tanglefoot bags while the PCs are on the stairs.

During Combat The rogues start hurling throwing daggers at entangled or advancing PCs, switching to short swords once melee is inevitable. They look for opportunities to flank or retain the high ground.

Morale The rogues flee if reduced to 2 hit points or fewer.

STATISTICS

Str 14, **Dex** 15, **Con** 13, **Int** 12, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 10

Base Atk +0; **CMB** +2; **CMD** 14

Feats Improved Initiative, Weapon Focus (short sword)

Skills Acrobatics +6, Appraise +5, Bluff +4, Climb +6, Disable Device +6, Disguise +4, Escape Artist +6, Perception +4, Sleight of Hand +6, Stealth +6

Languages Common, Varisian

SQ trapfinding +1

Gear leather armor, daggers (5), short sword, tanglefoot bag

C10. Children's Room (CR 2)

A chest of drawers stands against the western wall between two twin beds. Each bed has a window above it. The walls are painted with fanciful nursery rhyme characters.

The door to this room is locked, and voices can be heard inside. The key found on the thugs from area C1 unlocks the door (hardness 5, hp 15, break DC 18); otherwise, a successful DC 15 Disable Device check unlocks it. A grappling hook remains embedded in the window frame. Borvius climbed up here in disguise and went straight into the children's room. After he entered, he pulled up the rope, which lies in a loose spool on the ground. The children have been too terrified to even attempt using this rope to escape. If the PCs manage to enter through the second story, the thug lurking in the bushes outside area C2 is supposed to warn the others. Borvius has the rogues guard the door of area C10 (or whichever room the PCs enter) and has the thugs occupy the area C9 landing to put a buffer between himself and the PCs. If they're stealthy enough to elude the thug outside, or they split their numbers to attack from multiple directions, the PCs can get past Borvius's contingency plans. If the PC Borvius impersonating comes through the window, the children are visibly terrified and might scream, warning the thieves even if the PCs have been quiet so far.

Creatures: Borvius is here, along with **Summer** and **Martim Braeton** (CG young human commoners 1). Summer and Martim are 9 and 10 years old and wide-eyed with fear. Borvius has no interest in harming them. His disguise has worn off, and he's pretending that he heard the commotion of the battle and has come to help the children escape.

BORVIUS MONCHELLO

CR 2

XP 600

Male human ranger (urban) 3

LE Medium humanoid (human)

Init +8; **Senses** Perception +8

DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 12, flat-footed 14 (+3 armor, +2 Dex, +1 shield)

hp 27 (3d10+6)

Fort +4, **Ref** +5, **Will** +1

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee mwk longsword +4 (1d8+2/19–20), mwk short sword +4 (1d6+1/19–20)

Ranged dagger +5 (1d4+2/19–20)

Special Attacks favored enemy (humans +2)

TACTICS

Before Combat Borvius throws his flash powder to the floor immediately at the start of combat (every character in a 10-foot-radius burst must make a successful DC 13 Fortitude save or be blinded for 1 round).

During Combat If the PCs look wounded, Borvius fights back, making a good show so the children will think of him as a hero. If the PCs are unscathed or get the upper hand, Borvius throws down the rope, scrambles out the window, uses the rope to get him within 10 feet of the ground, then drops. If he can't get out the window, he draws his weapons and fights.

Morale Borvius fights to the death if he can't get out the window.

STATISTICS

Str 15, **Dex** 14, **Con** 13, **Int** 12, **Wis** 10, **Cha** 10

Base Atk +3; **CMB** +5; **CMD** 17

Feats Endurance, Improved Initiative, Precise Shot, Two-Weapon Defense, Two-Weapon Fighting

Skills Bluff +3, Climb +8, Craft (traps) +7, Knowledge (local) +9, Perception +6, Sense Motive +3, Stealth +10, Survival +8

Languages Common, Varisian

SQ favored community (Ilurian), favored terrain (urban +2), track +1, trapfinding, wild empathy +3

Combat Gear *potions of cure light wounds* (2); **Other Gear** masterwork studded leather, masterwork longsword, masterwork short sword, dagger

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Favored Community (Ex) While inside the limits of Ilurian, Borvius gains a +2 bonus on initiative, Knowledge (local), Perception, Stealth, and Survival checks. These bonuses have been factored into Borvius's stat block.

Development: The children are physically unharmed, but terrified—particularly of the PC Borvius impersonated. The only attacker they ever saw was Borvius (wearing his magical disguise), who made a point of telling them he was working with the circus. The children do not know their parents are dead. Sheriff Feldane arrives soon after their rescue, summoned by the Braetons' neighbors, and can bring caregivers the children know to help break the news.

If Borvius manages to escape, he goes directly to Sheriff Feldane and tells her his cover story. She's a bit skeptical (unless the PCs killed any townsfolk earlier or have been particularly hostile), but she brings a force to investigate the Braeton Manor and potentially arrest the PCs.

Treasure: If convinced the party is on the right track, Feldane offers the party a *wand of cure light wounds* (10 charges) if they're going up against the thieves' guild.

C11. Master Bedroom

An oversized bed rests in the middle of the room, and two wardrobes face each other on opposites of the room.

This room is a scene of macabre theatre. The rogues killed Arhaneem Braeton and his wife, Canalee, but then set them in poses. Canalee's body sits on the floor with her arm and face draped on the bed. Arhaneem reclines in a chair, with his eyes closed as if resting. Rapiers, wet with sticky blood, hang from their limp grasps—as if they had been fighting and finally succumbed to their wounds.

C12. Guest Bedrooms

These rooms are extra bedrooms, some of which are also being used to store furniture.

C13. Washroom

This is a personal washroom, with a small sink and an empty bathtub.

C14. Linen Closet

This room stores clean clothes and bedding.

Sheriff's Arrival

Whether neighbors sent a messenger to the constabulary or Borvius escaped and ran there himself, Sheriff Feldane arrives about 10–15 minutes after the battle.

If Borvius died, Sheriff Feldane identifies him, and recognizes any slain guild members as his employees. She can also point the PCs to Ilsurian Storage & Hauling as Borvius's place of business on the docks. If the PCs are low on resources, the sheriff makes a suggestion: If Borvius had a criminal gang, she can keep the events at Braeton Manor quiet until morning so the PCs can rest up, then catch the criminals unawares. The rest of the constables are still dealing with outbreaks of unrest, and she's afraid if she pulls away the ones who are guarding the quarantined circus, the situation there could turn violent. The PCs might be able to take care of the thieves' guild without putting the rest of the town at risk. She promises to discreetly release Almara Delisen from custody once the PCs have attacked, since doing so earlier might spoil the element of surprise.

If Borvius lived, she brings a force of four constables (using the guard statistics from page 13) to arrest the PCs. If the PCs fight the constables or run away, she considers it proof of their guilt.

PART SIX: ILSURIAN STORAGE & HAULING

The Gilded Hands make their lair near the docks on Lake Syrantula. When the Monchellos first

arrived in Ilsurian, they spent a year recruiting local scoundrels to be part of their aspiring guild. Then Borvius set about looking for a hideout. He settled on an abandoned building intended to be used as a military training center before Ilsur died. The original design included a secret basement area 20 feet below the main floor, where troops could move out of town through secret tunnels, whether to defend the town or prepare a strike without Korvosan spies being aware. Sir Ilsur died shortly after it was completed, and the building sat empty and forgotten for decades. Borvius purchased it and started his public business front managing a crew of stevedores and laborers—Ilsurian Storage & Hauling. Later he expanded his enterprise into a cartage company, also shipping goods by land and providing a place for cargo to be temporarily stored. Borvius insisted new recruits be able and willing to perform actual labor to maintain the guild's front, and in lean times members benefit from wages.

Meanwhile, Robella pretended to befriend the elderly owner of the adjacent building. She slowly poisoned him to a gentle death and inherited his shop. The guild quietly dug a basement underneath it and secretly connected the two buildings. In that way, Borvius and Robella could confer in secrecy, and store their illegal and stolen goods.

The Gilded Hands practice a diverse array of illegal activities. Primarily, they fence stolen goods seized by river and lake pirates. Ships pull into the docks in the dead of night, and cargo is offloaded and carried underground to the guild's headquarters, where it is later sold and distributed to buyers as if it were normal cargo. Robella also produces drugs and poisons, for which Borvius finds buyers. The guild sometimes ventures into committing crime on a local scale, but is cautious about "overfeeding" on the townsfolk without having a good scapegoat. Finally, the guild sometimes accepts prisoners who have been captured for ransom.



Borvius Monchello

Borvius prefers to simply house them for a fee, leaving the ransoming details to the pirates.

Unless they proceed here immediately after the fight at Braeton Manor, when the PCs come to the warehouse the thieves already strongly suspect something has gone wrong, since Borvius failed to return, and the townsfolk are not enraged. Since they're not in public, they have weapons nearby and are prepared to react.

D1. Shipping and Receiving (CR 2)

The interior of this large building appears unfinished, with a wooden frame that could have housed two separate floors but is instead open to the roof like a barn. Sliding bay doors stand to the south, where a serviceable wagon is parked. Across the center of the warehouse, a catwalk hangs fifteen feet off the ground. Heavy items can be pulled up to the catwalk with ropes and a block and tackle. In the northeast and southwest corners, rooms have been framed in and walls erected. Shelving lines most of the walls, and crates and boxes are stacked in many places on the main floor.

This is the central work area of Ilсурian Storage & Hauling.

Creatures: There are three thugs standing on the catwalk at **D5**, where they're preparing to move heavy crates. If they see the PCs, they attempt to draw them closer, asking if they need help. Their armor is concealed under their jackets, and their bows are lying out of sight on the catwalk. Once the PCs are within 10 feet of the catwalk, the thugs kick over a large ceramic pickling jar. When it shatters on the warehouse floor, it releases an alchemical ooze swarm—a by-product of Robella's experiments. While the swarm plagues the PCs, the thugs pick up their shortbows and open fire on them. To the east is a ladder leading up to the catwalk, and the ropes can be scaled with a successful DC 15 Climb check (although the sanguine ooze swarm can climb up the ropes too).

The thugs don't fight to the death. They're not only alarmed by the PCs, but also disturbed by seeing the swarm in action. If the battle is going poorly and the swarm is slain, they jump off the catwalk, or otherwise climb down and attempt to flee down the secret door set in the floor of the warehouse (which leads down a ladder to just outside of area **D13** on the floor below). A successful DC 15 Perception check is required to find the secret door, barring the PCs actually seeing the thugs use it. Alternatively, areas **D3** and **D6** provide escape routes or potential allies.

GILDED THUGS (3) CR 1/3
XP 135 each
 hp 8 each (see page 19)

SANGUINE OOZE SWARM CR 1/3
XP 135

N Tiny ooze (swarm) (*Pathfinder Adventure Path #43 78*)

Init -5; **Senses** blindsight 60 ft.; **Perception** -5

DEFENSE

AC 7, touch 7, flat-footed 7 (-5 Dex, +2 size)

hp 7 (1d8+3)

Fort +3, **Ref** -5, **Will** -5

Immune ooze traits, swarm traits; **Resist** fire 5

Weaknesses vulnerability to cold

OFFENSE

Speed 10 ft., climb 10 ft., swim 10 ft.

Melee swarm (1 plus viscous)

Space 10 ft.; **Reach** 0 ft.

Special Attacks distraction (DC 13), euphoric slime, viscous (DC 13)

STATISTICS

Str 12, **Dex** 1, **Con** 16, **Int** —, **Wis** 1, **Cha** 1

Base Atk +0; **CMB** -7; **CMD** 4 (16 vs. grapple, see text; can't be tripped)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Euphoric Slime (Ex) Sanguine oozes are composed of congealed euphoric toxins. Any living creature that begins its turn affected by the swarm's viscous ability must succeed at a DC 13 Fortitude save or erupt into uncontrollable laughter and be effectively staggered for that round. This is a mind-affecting effect. Creatures immune to poison are immune to this effect.

Viscous (Ex) Whenever a sanguine ooze swarm makes a swarm attack on a Small or larger creature, that creature must succeed at a DC 13 Reflex save or be covered in patches of sticky ooze globules. Those who fail are entangled until the patches of ooze are removed. The ooze can be removed by spending a full-round action to fling off the globules—though this action might be impeded by the ooze's effects. If a creature affected by this ability takes any amount of cold damage, the ooze patches are immediately destroyed. The save DC is Constitution-based.

D2. Front Office (CR 1/2)

A desk and chair sit against the east wall, with additional chairs situated nearby. Wall lamps light the room. To the north of the desk is a single door leading deeper into the warehouse.

Creatures: A solitary rogue, Ferdis, sits behind the desk, filling in for Borvius in a legitimate administrative capacity. Nevertheless, when the PCs walk in the door, Ferdis knows trouble has arrived. He smiles and asks how he can help them, trying to determine how much the party really knows, and whether he should bolt and raise an alarm. If the PCs give him any sort of latitude, he invites them to have a seat while he gets his supervisor and heads through the door to the north to area **D3**. There he warns Byrten of their presence, sending him to warn Robella and get reinforcements from the three thugs in area **D1** if possible. If the PCs go on the attack,

Ferdis wastes no time trying to flee, either to the north for reinforcements or out the door to warn Robella.

FERDIS **CR 1/2**

XP 200

Male human rogue 1 (use stats for gilded rogue; page 20)
hp 10

Treasure: A small cashbox in the desk contains 100 sp.

D3. File and Records Room (CR 1/2)

File cabinets line the eastern wall of this room, while doors lead north, south, and west. A single oil lamp is set in the wall.

Creatures: Another rogue, Byrten, is here fulfilling job duties pursuant to running the guild's legitimate business front. He is well situated to hear sounds of battle coming from either the north or the south, requiring no Perception check in either case. If he hears any such noises, he peeks out the door, then immediately leaves through the secret door in area **D4** to warn Robella.

BYRTEN **CR 1/2**

XP 200

Male human rogue 1 (use stats for gilded rogue; page 20)
hp 10

D4. Storage

Boxes of old files and papers are stacked in one corner of this small room, opposite a half-dozen brooms and other cleaning supplies.

Old paperwork from the business is stored in this room. The southwestern corner is free of clutter and dust—a successful DC 15 Perception check reveals a secret door set into the floor. A rope ladder drops down into area **D12**.

D5. Catwalk

The catwalk is sturdy, with a 15-foot drop to the floor below. The traditional means of getting on it is the ladder on the eastern wall, but the various ropes used to hoist cargo can also be climbed, allowing characters to ascend to any section of the catwalk. Several cargo crates rest here as well. These can be tossed down on creatures below by making a ranged touch attack with a 20-foot range increment. A character struck by a crate takes 1d4 points of damage, due to its lightweight construction.

D6. Night Watchmen's Quarters (CR 1)

A cot and footlocker rest against the south wall by the eastern corner. In the opposite corner is a chair with a tray of food.

This area is the living space of Kymeth, one of two skulks who formerly belonged to the Nisku tribe. Both Kymeth and Onamae (in area **D16**) managed to convince the Monchellos of their willingness to work loyally with humans. They're still not the most ambitious of creatures, but they've come to appreciate the benefits of lurking within human society rather than outside of it. When Borvius had a task for the Nisku (lest he withhold the tribe's allotment of shiver), he sent the guild's "tame" skulks to make contact, so as to lessen the chance of the Nisku actually discovering where the guild is located. The skulks are fiercely loyal to their new human tribe and fight to the death.

Creatures: Kymeth is required to stay out of sight of anyone who isn't in the guild, and thus has become the guild's permanent night watchman. He keeps the eastern exterior door locked and sleeps soundly throughout the day, never coming out when legitimate customers are around. At night, he patrols the warehouse and surrounding area. If he hears fighting in area **D1**, he hides here until the ooze swarm is defeated, then sneaks out to help by striking from the shadows.

KYMETH **CR 1**

XP 400

NE skulk (*Bestiary* 2 248)
hp 16

D7. Mistress Robella's Curiosity Shop (CR 3)

This small store is filled with strange knickknacks, art, and unusual tools. The display case to the west features jewelry, most of it locally crafted. The case to the east contains oddities such as turtle-shell soup bowls and bizarre gnome cooking utensils. The center case is filled with bottles and vials and a selection of scented soaps and perfumes. Behind the counter are double doors leading north. Glass windows are set in the entrance doors.

Trap: A trap door is set in the 10-foot square immediately inside the front entrance. The trap is deactivated, but Robella can release the bypass switch beneath the counter as a swift action, making the trap active and dropping characters standing in those squares 10 feet down to area **D9**.

SHOP PIT TRAP **CR 1**

Type mechanical; **Perception** DC 20; **Disable Device** DC 20

EFFECTS

Trigger location; **Reset** manual; **Bypass** hidden switch (DC 20 Perception)

Effect 20-ft.-deep pit (2d6 falling damage); DC 20 Reflex avoids; multiple targets (all targets in a 10-ft.-square area)

Creatures: Unless forewarned, Robella is found here, behind the counter. If Borvius left for Braeton Manor and

didn't return, or if the PCs confront her with the evidence of her involvement, she sees the PCs as a major threat. She says, "If you did anything to my husband, you'll find knives in your backs," then downs her feral extract and tries to escape through area **D8**. She calls her rogues to delay the PCs while she runs for the vault in area **D2o**, gathers enough money and valuables to make a fresh start in a new town, and flees.

If encountered before the confrontation at the Braeton home, Robella plays the role of solicitous shopkeeper. Robella can see who is entering through the front doors, making it easy for her to activate the trap if she sees the PCs coming.

In addition to her other equipment, Robella carries Walder's missing master key on a leather cord around her neck (linking her to his murder).

ROBELLA MONCHELLO CR 3

XP 800

Female human alchemist 4
NE Medium humanoid (human)

Init +4; **Senses** Perception +6

DEFENSE

AC 17, touch 14, flat-footed 13 (+1 armor, +4 Dex, +2 natural)
hp 23 (4d8+2)

Fort +4, **Ref** +8, **Will** +0; +2 vs. poison

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft.

Melee 2 claws +4 (1d6+1), bite +4 (1d8+1) or dagger +4 (1d4+1/19–20)

Ranged bomb +7 ranged touch (2d6+2 fire) or dagger +7 (1d4+1/19–20)

Special Attacks bomb 9/day (2d6+3 fire, DC 15)

Alchemist Extracts Known (CL 4th)

2nd—*barkskin*, *invisibility*

1st—*cure light wounds*, *disguise self*, *enlarge person*, *shield*

TACTICS

Before Combat Given the opportunity, Robella consumes her feral mutagen. Her stat block reflects this.

During Combat Robella tries to keep her distance, weakening her enemies with her bombs. She fights on the run—even if she's lost her husband, she knows it's better to cut her losses and escape than die fighting.

Morale If brought down to 6 or fewer hit points, Robella flees.

Base Statistics While not using her mutagen, Robella's statistics are **Dex** 14, **Wis** 10, **Ranged** dagger +5, **CMD** 18, **Ref** +4, **Will** +1, **Init** +2, **AC** 13, touch 12, flat-footed 11, Disable Device +9, Heal +7, Perception +7, Stealth +6.

STATISTICS

Str 13, **Dex** 18, **Con** 10, **Int** 16*, **Wis** 8, **Cha** 12

Base Atk +3; **CMB** +4; **CMD** 18

Feats Brew Potion, Extra Bombs, Point-Blank Shot, Precise Shot, Throw Anything

Skills Appraise +8, Bluff +5, Craft (alchemy) +9, Disable

Device +11, Heal +6, Knowledge (arcana) +8, Perception +6, Spellcraft +9, Stealth +8

Languages Common, Shoanti, Varisian, Vudrani

SQ alchemy (alchemy crafting +4, identify potions), bomb (9/day), mutagen (+4/–2, +2 natural, 40 minutes), discoveries (feral mutagen, infusion), poison use, swift alchemy

Combat Gear *potions of cure light wounds* (2); **Other Gear** dagger, bracers of armor +1, master key to the Locked Box, portable alchemist lab, diamond white gold wedding ring worth 275 gp

* Robella took 2 points of Intelligence damage for making the infused extract for Borvius. The penalty to her Intelligence-based skill checks is already reflected in her statistics.

Treasure: Robella sends most of the truly valuable items down to the guild vault. She has a few exotic weapons on display: a madu, a rope dart, and an urumi. (Stats for these can be found in *Ultimate Equipment*.) The other items here aren't worth much (4 gp at most), and many in Ilsurian find them weird or disturbing. The curios include a skull covered in rusty red paint, a mummified elf ear, a vial of preserved basilisk droppings, a broken piece of mammoth tusk engraved with lewd images, a set of "vampire fangs" that look suspiciously like dog teeth, and a book bound in goblin skin.

D8. Workroom

This room serves as storage for the curiosity shop and as a makeshift break room when business is slow. A secret door set in the floor (requiring a successful DC 15 Perception check to notice) opens to a ladder descending 20 feet to another secret door leading to the corridor **D11**.

Many of the boxes are unopened, and some are stolen goods the guild has been holding onto before "recirculating" them through the shop or, if they could be easily recognized, shipping them off to another area. Robella works with area craftspeople who unknowingly accept stolen gems and jewels and craft them into jewelry for a portion of the sale.

Treasure: Sifting through the boxes requires at least 6 rounds (without magical help), but yields 500 gp in small rubies, sapphires, and pearls.

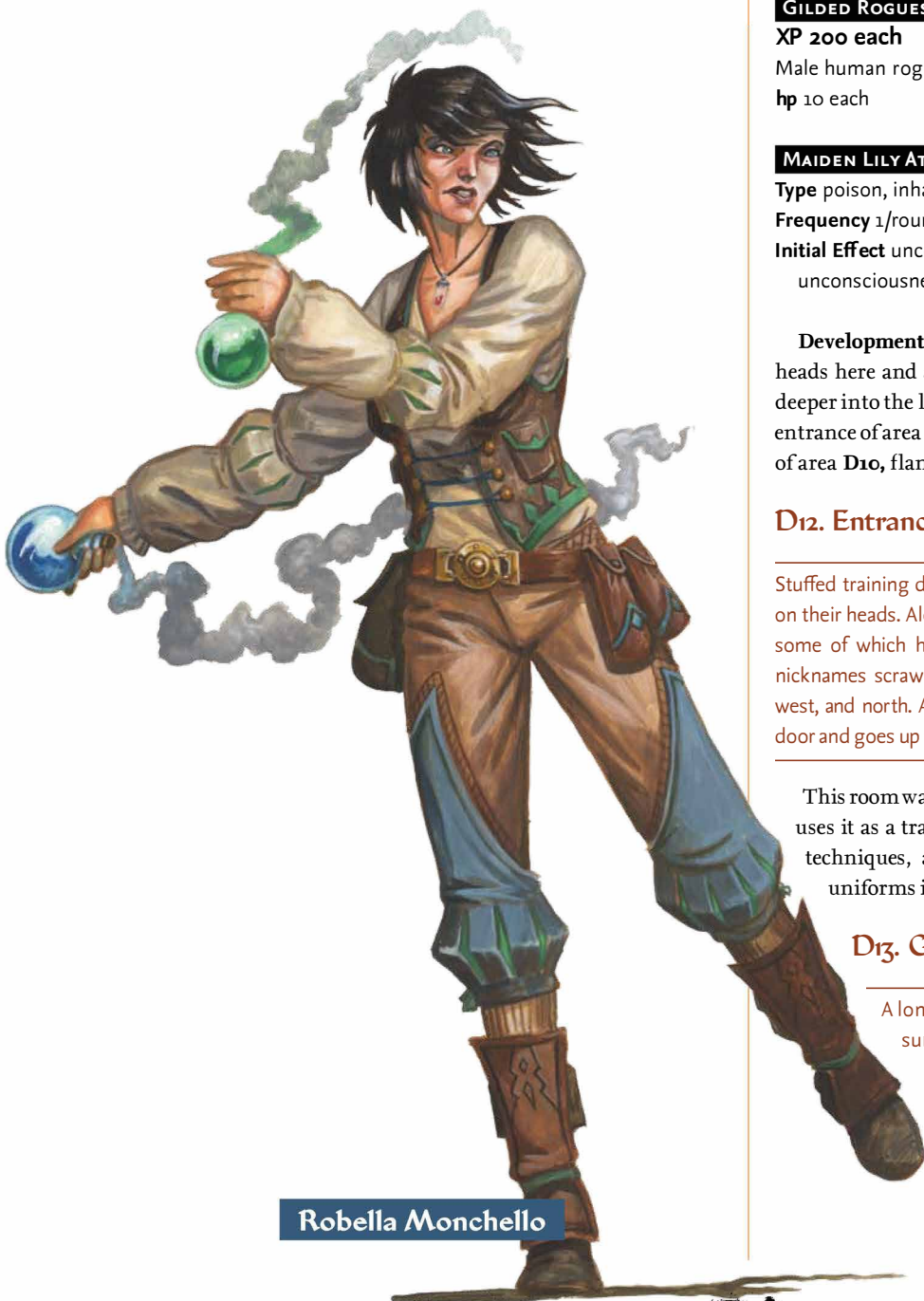
D9. Observation Room

This featureless room is where victims of Robella's trap door in area **D7** are unceremoniously dumped. The door to the north is concealed from this side, requiring a successful DC 15 Perception check to locate it. The door (hardness 5, hp 15, break DC 18) is kept locked at all times in anticipation of prisoners, and once the door is located, a successful DC 20 Disable Device check is required to open it. A sliding panel, operable only from the other side, is built in the door at eye level. Guild members use it to discreetly observe the occupants before making a decision on what to do with them. Robella has been known to brew inhalable sleep toxins to make the disposal of prisoners easier.

D10. Barracks (CR 1)

Several cots are arranged in this room, along with a small card table and chairs.

Guild rogues are forbidden from taking up permanent residence in the hideout, except for the two skulks. Nevertheless, members are required to perform some actual labor, and many of the pirated goods to be fenced arrive on the docks late at night. This area serves as a temporary rest area for tired thieves.



Robella Monchello

As an additional benefit, when Robella drops someone from the shop above, the rogues are already in position to guard them until the guildmaster determines their fate.

Creatures: Currently there are two rogues catnapping here. Instead of tanglefoot bags, each has a *potion of darkvision* to consume if warned of intruders. Each one also has a capsule of maiden lily attar poison created by Robella that he can toss into area **D9** through the viewing window. The capsule bursts as soon as it strikes anything with significant force, creating a 10-foot-square cloud of poison gas.

GILDED ROGUES (2)

CR 1/2

XP 200 each

Male human rogues (see page 20)

hp 10 each

MAIDEN LILY ATTAR

Type poison, inhaled; Save Fortitude DC 13

Frequency 1/round for 4 rounds

Initial Effect unconsciousness for 1 minute; Secondary Effect unconsciousness for 1d4 hours; Cure 1 save

Development: If Robella successfully eludes the PCs, she heads here and alerts the rogues to trouble before heading deeper into the lair. Given time, one rogue moves to the west entrance of area **D12** while the other remains in the doorway of area **D10**, flanking anyone coming down the hallway.

D12. Entrance Hall

Stuffed training dummies line the south wall, crude faces drawn on their heads. Along the east wall are pegs mounted at eye level, some of which have a change of clothing hung on them and nicknames scrawled on the wall above. Three doors lead east, west, and north. A rope ladder hangs from the ceiling by the west door and goes up through a five-foot-wide shaft to the floor above.

This room was part of the original construction. The guild uses it as a training room for basic fighting and thieving techniques, and a place to change out of their work uniforms into clothing suitable for going out at night.

D13. Guild Meeting Hall

A long wooden table sits in the center of the room, surrounded by chairs. Covering the surface are several maps and diagrams. A hand-drawn, poster-sized map of Ilsurian is nailed to the north wall.

In this room, the Gilded Hands coordinate their plans as a group. The wall map is of Ilsurian proper, with many of the

prominent homes and business marked. The diagrams on the table paint a grimmer portrait of the guild's activities: sketches of Archivin Walder's path home from the circus, notes on who should work the pickpocketing distraction at the carnival, and ideas on where to string up the body of Filton Legg. Lastly, there is a list of the PCs themselves, described in brief statements based on their appearance. The name of the PC whom Borvius impersonated is circled prominently. All these documents serve as hard evidence exonerating the Umbra Carnival.

D14. Interrogation Chamber

A heavy metal chair with straps mounted on high, flat armrests sits against the center of the north wall. To one side is an unlit brazier, and to the other is a small table covered with metal instruments. Two more comfortable-looking chairs sit directly across from it.

On occasion, the Monchellos had cause to interrogate a captive. This room saw little use for its intended purpose, but Borvius felt it was useful for maintaining guild discipline. Robella occasionally ran alchemical experiments that required a subject be restrained here.

D15. Detention Cells

Three cells line the wall to the east, each containing a straw pallet and three buckets.

The north and center cells are, respectively, occupied by two dwarven brothers, **Barengar** and **Pietros Gearwright** (NG dwarf experts 3). The Gearwrights were passengers on a ship returning from Magnimar to Janderhoff when their vessel was attacked lake pirates. The Gearwright family specializes in clockwork engineering, a notoriously rare skill set and a fact the brothers used to make a case for being taken for ransom. The Gilded Hands are only housing them for a prenegotiated fee from the lake pirates. Once the Hands receive their portion of the ransom, they render prisoners unconscious and release them in close proximity to some other town. The brothers are thin and unkempt, but otherwise in good condition.

Opening their cells requires the key Onamae holds in area **D18**, succeeding at a DC 25 Disable Device check to pick the lock, or making a DC 28 Strength check to bend the bars.

Development: The brothers scramble to their feet as soon as they see the PCs. Barengar whispers loudly that if they rescue the brothers, he'll give them the valuable magical creation from the guildmaster's office and tell them how to open its secret compartment. (He is referring to the clockwork spy.) Pietros then adds in a hushed tone, "Ware! They have a freak down here that blends right into the wall! It could be in this very room and you'd never know it!"

D16. Guildmaster's Office

A desk sits to the south, covered in an alchemical equipment and supplies. A cot with an extra padded mattress rests against the far wall, a small chest at its foot.

Robella and Borvius use this room as an office and private rest area. A logbook sits on the table among the pieces of laboratory equipment. The contents list the members of the guild through the use of nicknames, detailing criminal specialties and assignments. It is unhelpful for disclosing the true names of the guild members, but does indicate how organized they were.

The small chest is locked, requiring a successful DC 15 Disable Device check to unlock or a DC 18 Strength check to break. It has hardness 5 and 10 hit points. Inside is an unusual construct rescued from the Gearwrights' sinking ship. Called a clockwork spy, it is a mechanical construct that obeys anyone who winds it up—or at least it would, had it not been broken during the attack on the ship. The bottom of the chest is littered with tools, but Borvius hadn't figured out how to repair it, and the Gearwrights have played dumb. If rescued by the PCs, the brothers give them the spy as a gift and tell them how to open its hidden compartment.

Treasure: The equipment on the desk can be assembled into a full alchemist lab (40 pounds). The clockwork spy is broken, but can be repaired. Repairing it is like constructing it from scratch (and requires the same skills and requirements), but costs half as much. If rescued, the brothers might provide the labor and skill if the PCs can pay for the expensive components. There's not much time, though; the dwarves want to get back home as soon as they can. The clockwork spy's creation and combat statistics appear on page 58 of *Pathfinder RPG Bestiary 3*. Opening the hidden compartment requires a successful DC 30 Craft (clockwork) or Disable Device check, or the secret method the Gearwrights know. Inside is a *traveler's any-tool* (*Ultimate Equipment* 323), an arcane *scroll of locate object*, and a divine *scroll of cure serious wounds*.

D17. Corridor

A wooden ladder is bolted to the wall in this corridor, leading to a trap door to area **D1**. A few crates of smuggled goods are stacked to the south.

D18. Onamae's Quarters

A padded cot sits to the south, with a platter of chicken bones picked clean sitting on the floor next to it. To the north is a large, empty crate. The stale scent of body odor permeates the air.

Creature: The guild's second trained skulk lives in this room. Like Kymeth, Onamae isn't allowed to be seen

around the property by outsiders, but at night she ventures through Ilsurian. She specializes in reconnaissance and spying, doing the legwork before the guild stages a heist or major operation. She also acts as the Gearwright brothers' jailer. The keys to the prison cells can be found tucked in the scant clothing she wears. She immediately attacks anyone she doesn't recognize.

ONAMAE CR 1
XP 400
 NE female skulk (*Bestiary* 2 248)
 hp 16

Development: If Robella has passed her on the way to area D2o, Onamae lurks to one side of the western door in order to hide, readying a sneak attack on the first PC to step through.

D19. Smuggled Goods

This room is bare except for several tall stacks of crates and boxes. Many of them are labeled to addresses and ports of call other than Ilsurian.

This is a storage area for much of the stolen property and smuggled goods the guild receives. Specifically, this is material Borvius couldn't explain away, or the guild wouldn't want the sheriff to find during a random inspection of the warehouse.

Treasure: Many of the stolen trade goods can be returned to local and returning merchants. While it's all too bulky to have much short-term value to the PCs, Ilsurian officials eventually reward the party for returning them (see *Concluding the Adventure*, below). This area also contains a locked box full of tithe money stolen from the temple of Erastil. The god's holy symbol appears clearly on the box, and inside are 200 gp, 600 sp, and 1,200 cp.

D20. Guild Vault

This is where the guild keeps most of its ill-gotten gains. The door is steel (hardness 10, hp 60, break DC 28) and designed to keep the guild honest with itself, requiring a successful DC 30 Disable Device check to open. Inside, Robella stores her supply of shiver (5 doses) in a small chest.

If the PCs catch Robella before she leaves this room, she fights to protect her treasure. If reduced to 7 or fewer hit points, she surrenders and admits her role in the killings. If the PCs take an extraordinarily long time to catch up to her, she might escape.

Treasure: A large chest contains a *handy haversack*, a *key of lock jamming*, 1,600 cp, 640 sp, 300 gp, and 40 pp. There is also a small pouch with four uncut peridot gemstones

worth 24 gp each, and a silver chalice set stolen from the temple of Erastil worth 300 gp. If Robella escapes, she takes the *handy haversack*, the platinum pieces, half the gold pieces, and the gems with her.

Concluding the Adventure

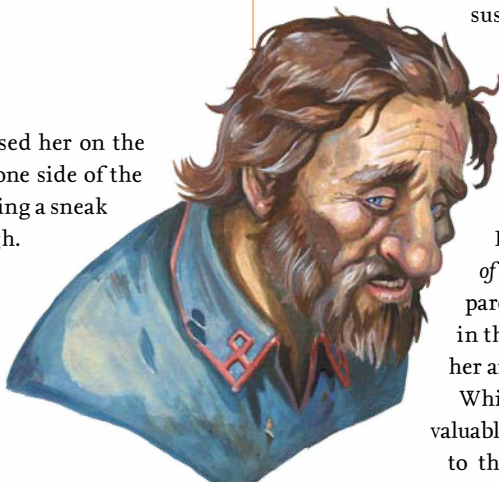
Once Borvius is defeated, the salvation of the Umbra Carnival has already begun. Even if the PCs fail to crush the guild completely, Sheriff Feldane has enough suspicion and conviction to continue where they left off, eventually driving the guild out of town. Exposing Borvius is the tipping point for things to change for the better. If Robella escapes without her husband, she returns to Korvosa. If the PCs didn't get the *scarf of the suggestive dance* from Milandru's parents earlier, Ika gives it to them now in thanks for the service they've done for her and the Umbra Carnival.

While the thieves' guild contains many valuable trade goods, these rightfully belong to the victims. Sheriff Feldane suggests that the PCs be allowed to take the magic items and thieves' personal possessions, but leave the rest to be returned to their

owners—particularly the silver chalice set that belongs to the temple. As long as the PCs return a reasonable amount of stolen goods, the town rewards them with 800 gp.

If Borvius's plot to frame the PCs succeeds, the circus's reputation is ruined. The Gilded Hands reduce their activities until things settle down, a bitter Sheriff Feldane puts Amara Delisen to death, and Ika flees heartbroken into the woods. The wedge between Chelaxian and Varisian grows wider. Eventually, the Monchellos could be contacted by House Arkona in Korvosa to help drive the wedge deeper so that Ilsurian is pushed toward becoming an actual holding of the Crimson Throne.

If the villains are utterly defeated, the Umbra Carnival is completely exonerated. The crowds return to the carnival and performances sell out. The town seeks a replacement for the kindhearted Sister Woodmere, as well as guardians for the Braeton children. Chelaxians and Varisians set aside their differences in an annual memorial to the victims. A greater understanding is reached, and the community grows even stronger. The Gearwright Brothers offer the PCs lucrative work acting as security for their engineering contracts throughout Varisia, including mysterious locales such as Kaer Maga. Potentially more enticing is a personal invitation from Ika and Almara Delisen to join the Umbra Carnival and travel all across Avistan as part of a new family—and the start of a unique campaign.



Barengar Gearwright

MURDER'S MARK

APPENDIX 1: PANOTTI

This bald humanoid looks strikingly human except for the long folds of skin that droop from his head and neck to just above his ankles.

PANOTTI CR 2

XP 600

NG Medium humanoid

Init +1; **Senses** blindsense 60 ft.; Perception +2

DEFENSE

AC 16, touch 12, flat-footed 14 (+2 armor, +1 Dex, +1 dodge, +2 natural)

hp 19 (3d8+6)

Fort +5, **Ref** +2, **Will** +2

OFFENSE

Speed 30 ft., fly 20 ft. (poor)

Melee short sword +4 (1d6+2/19–20) or 2 wings +2 (1d4+1 plus push, 10 ft.)

STATISTICS

Str 15, **Dex** 13, **Con** 14, **Int** 10, **Wis** 12, **Cha** 11

Base Atk +2; **CMB** +4; **CMD** 16

Feats Dodge, Hover^B, Multiattack

Skills Fly +3, Perception +2 (+6 listening only), Survival +6; **Racial Modifiers** +4 Perception (listening only)

Languages Common

SQ elephantine ears

ECOLOGY

Environment any land

Organization solitary, pair, or tribe (5–11)

Treasure NPC gear (leather armor, short sword, other treasure)

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Elephantine Ears (Ex) A panotti can flap its huge ears to fly awkwardly. A panotti can also wrap its ears around the length of its body for warmth and protection from the elements (similar to using a bedroll or heavy blankets), or use them as secondary natural attacks (as per wing attacks).

The panotti are a race of humanoids that strongly resemble humans except for one startling difference: their enormous ears. A panotti's ears are attached to the side of their heads, like those of a human, but they remain connected to the body down to the neck. When at ease, the folds of their ears hang loosely, like an elephant's, but extend almost the length of their bodies. These sheets of hanging flesh and skin appear

PANOTTI IN MYTHOLOGY

The panotti are cryptids drawn from real-world mythology, specifically *Natural History* by Pliny the Elder in 77–79 A.D. They are also counted among the strange creatures living in the legendary kingdom of Prester John, along with the blemmyae, cynocephali (proto-werewolves), and monopods.

limp and superfluous, but appearances are deceiving. Panotti possess remarkably smooth muscle control along the upper ridges of their ears, allowing them to extend and control their ears at will.

Even though panotti look ridiculous by most humanoid standards, the source of this ridicule offers them several distinct advantages. By flapping their ears, adult panotti can lift off, hover, and even fly. While in combat, a panotti can slam opponents with its ears to propel them away. Panotti's hearing is sharp enough to detect the presence of even an unseen adversary.

Finally, panotti can wrap themselves up in their ears like a cocoon, staying warm on the coolest of nights. Some sages speculate the panotti originated in a kingdom that fell beneath a curse—though the panotti themselves deny it. The rare couplings between a human and a panotti usually result in panotti children.

Culturally, the panotti are a reclusive people, preferring the company of their own kind—mostly due to the reaction they receive from other humanoids. Nevertheless, panotti are not a cruel or unkind race, and their culture is rich with music and storytelling traditions. They adapt to most classes with ease, but favor bard, fighter, and ranger. Treated with respect and dignity, panotti can be generous and steadfast allies. When treated as laughingstocks, however, panotti can become fierce, and they're naturally hearty and capable warriors.

On Golarion, panotti live primarily in Casmaron and central Tian Xia, with a much smaller number residing in Avistan.





APPENDIX 2: THE UMBRA CARNIVAL

THE UMBRA CARNIVAL

CN Village

Corruption -1; **Crime** +1; **Economy** +0; **Law** -2; **Lore** -1;

Society -1

Qualities Notorious, Tourist Attraction

Danger +10

POPULACE

Government Autocracy

Population 163 (107 humans, 5 dwarves, 2 elves, 11 gnomes, 5 half-elves, 7 half-orcs, 14 halflings, 1 “sphinx,” 12 others)

Notable NPCs

Mistress Almara Delisen, Proprietor (CN female human illusionist 3/rogue 4)

Jherizhana, Master of Shows (N female gynosphinx illusion)

Berthold Flavion, Master of Beasts (NG male half-elf aristocrat 4/ranger 2)

Clerk Atepmo, Master of Accounts (LN male human expert 5)

Venlok the Scourge, Master of Licenses (NE male human adept 2/sorcerer 4)

MARKETPLACE

Base Value 750 gp ; **Purchase Limit** 3,750 gp; **Spellcasting** 3rd

Minor Items 3d4; **Medium Items** 1d4

Dangerous yet comforting, exotic yet familiar, the Umbra Carnival wanders Avistan and beyond, bringing a touch of the bizarre to every settlement through which it passes. What begins in the morning as a motley parade of wagons and dray animals erupts by nightfall into a brilliant community of entertainments and experiences unlike anything seen in everyday life.

Over a decade ago, grief-stricken adventurer Almara Delisen began a traveling show, impressing small towns with her magic and the collection of oddities gathered over the course of her adventuring career. Like attracts like, and before long other outcasts and mistreated people flocked to her side, gathering into a community with no roots and few obligations.

The Umbra Carnival’s layout varies greatly from one location to another, depending on the terrain, the time of year, and how many hangers-on it maintains, but several features always remain.

1. The Parade Grounds

A vast, open field always serves as the carnival’s heart. By day, this space offers dozens of free shows and events to lure in the cheap and idle, and by night crowds gather to watch displays of magic and fireworks imported from distant Vudra and

Tian Xia. Vendors wander the area constantly selling food, streamers, and flowers, though the carnival's guards (N human warriors 4) aggressively repel outside peddlers.

2. Big Top

The Umbra Carnival's big top houses an astonishing assortment of shows, from traditional clowns and acrobats to music recitals and dramatic plays—whatever Almara believes will draw a crowd or the crew has taken a recent interest in. Inevitably, the star attraction is Jherizhana, the “ferocious performing sphinx only barely held under the ringmaster's magical control.” She frequently “breaks free” and terrorizes the audience during shows. In truth, the sphinx is an illusion created by the bard Ika (see page 4).

Entrance fare varies widely, depending on what the local market can bear. In smaller communities, tickets may be a mere copper for daily shows and 2 cp for an evening show, while in wealthier urban areas ticket prices for an evening show climb as high as 5 sp. A visitor may stay in the big top as long as she likes, but reentry requires payment should she leave.

3. Midway

On the caravan's previous trip through Varisia, Almara coaxed a small crew of Janderhoff's dwarven engineers to join them, crafting several mechanical amusements powered by beasts of burden.

The midway's games of chance charge a single copper, and challengers usually need to beat a DC 13 skill check of one variety or another, hit an AC of 13 with a ranged or improvised weapon, or succeed at a DC 12 ability check to beat whatever challenge is presented. Prizes are cheap but memorable: paper dolls, dried flowers, ribbons, and sweets from distant lands. The map of the midway in Ilsurian appears on the inside front cover.

4. Traveling Zoo

The down-on-his-luck Taldan noble Berthold Flavion runs the zoo. He personally grew the zoo's collection, starting with only the trained lapdogs owned by his own family. The zoo is the only portion of the Umbra Carnival in which Almara takes no interest. Ever eager to master new creatures, Berthold often travels between the carnival's destinations with only a small team of handlers, always watchful for new beasts and monsters to expand his displays. While most of the zoo's cages feature mundane creatures from across Avistan, a few genuine monsters never fail to wow locals, including three animated skeletons, a manticores, and a monitor lizard being passed off as a baby dragon. Admittance to the animal tent and zoo is always free, but the animals' handlers beg aggressively, often with smaller animals in hand to accept donations.

5. Crew Wagons

Regardless of their position, the carnival refers to all its permanent residents as crew, and affords them wagon space behind the big top. While Almara Delisen, the carnival's Varisian proprietor, cares little for who joins her travels and for how long, her studious Osirian accountant and paymaster, Clerk Atepmo, demands some level of reliability, otherwise he confines travelers to the Winding Market and its throngs of unofficial hangers-on. Six full-time cooks work constantly to provide meals, while a crew of a dozen carpenters constantly maintain the carnival's wagons, tents, and equipment. Crew are encouraged to deal with trespassers as they see fit, so long as they leave no marks.

6. Sideshow

This eccentric collection of trinkets and biological oddities serves as the carnival's true foundation. Part museum and part freak show, the sideshow boasts ancient artifacts, foreign costumes and jewelry, and a variety of magical artifacts and technological innovations. The objects include a colorful blend of genuine valuables, creative fakes, and dangerously mislabeled oddities.

Like the museum, the Umbra Carnival's freakshow includes both genuine geeks and creative fakes. A sword-swallower, a fat lady, and a tattooed man headline most locations, but the carnival's “orc” (an obese Galtan woman with a deformed nose), “fire giant” (an extraordinarily tall, redheaded Ulfen), and “choker” (an actual pesh-addicted choker) draw thrill-seekers and young men looking to prove their courage. By far the biggest draw is the elusive “Saggy Man,” a Varisian boogeyman played by a farmer's son with an unusual skin condition.

Sideshow admission rarely fluctuates from the standard 1 sp, but individual exhibits and performers frequently move out to separate tents for a day or two at a time, with individual prices of only 1 or 2 cp a peek.

7. Winding Market

In every town, large or small, local merchants pour out of their shops to set up stalls in this snagged, disorganized knot of tents and walkways adjacent to the festival to take advantage of the crowds it draws. Other merchants, performers, diviners, and prostitutes travel alongside the show longer-term for the same reason, journeying to the next town or the next continent. While the Winding Market is not officially a part of the Umbra Carnival, Almara's guards collect a healthy tax from its residents, or else wisely coax them into traveling elsewhere. Venlok the Scourge, chief of the carnival's enforcers, ensures that members of the market pay promptly and that the criminal element among them preys on the various settlements visited, rather than on the rest of the carnival.

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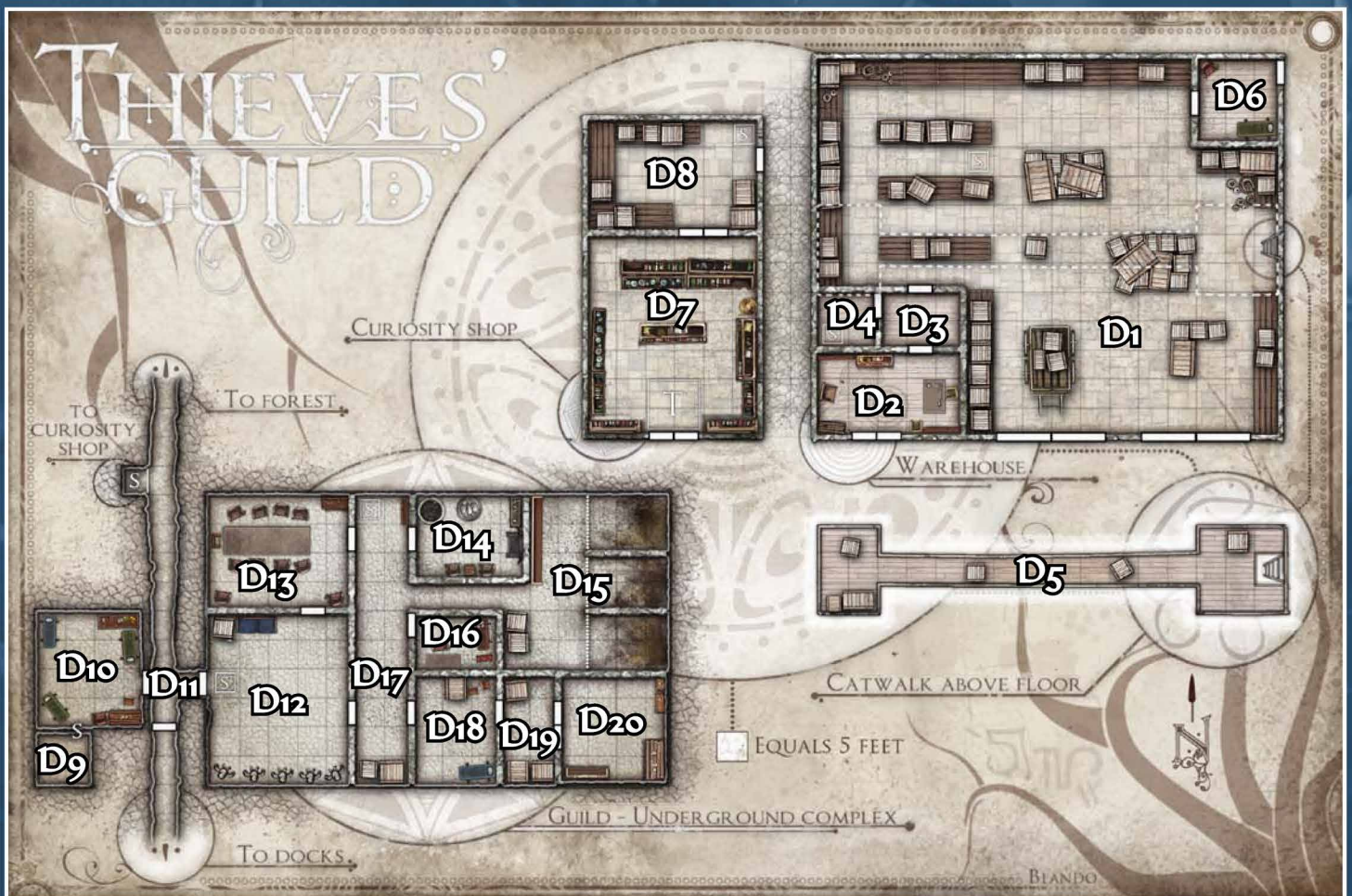
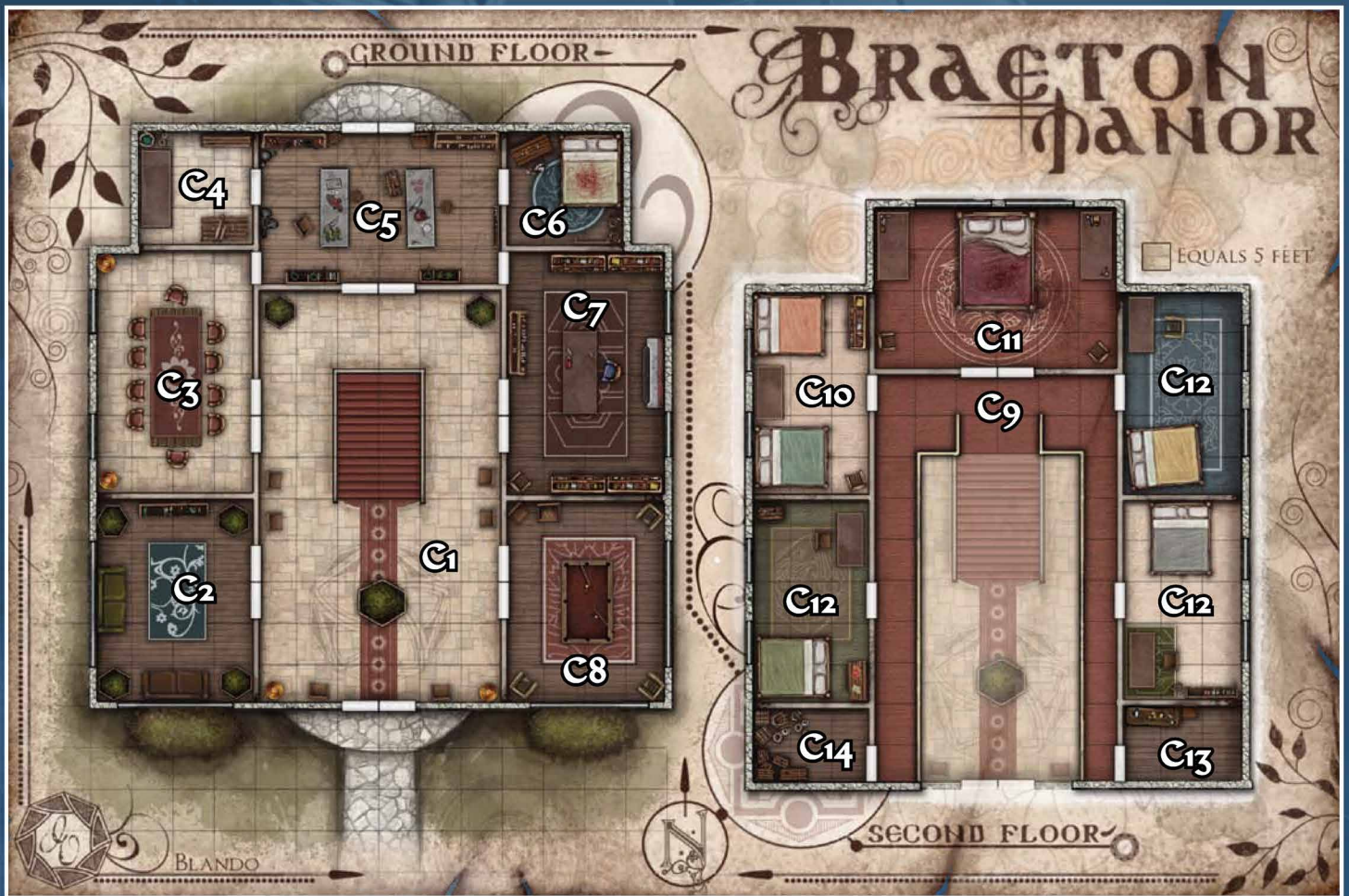
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BLOOD BENEATH THE BIG TOP

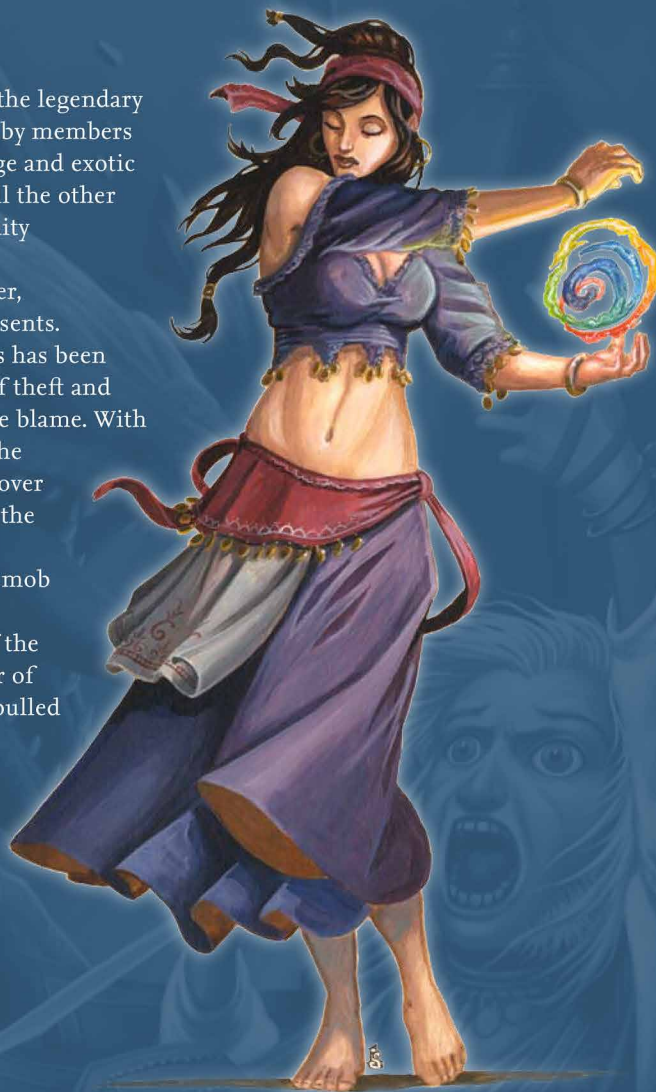
Pathfinder Module MURDER'S MARK

Everyone in the fishing town of Ilsurian is excited when the legendary Umbra Carnival rolls into town—even if the show is run by members of the much-maligned Varisian ethnic group. With strange and exotic beasts, scandalous performances, games of chance, and all the other fun of a traveling fair, who could resist such an opportunity for entertainment?

Unfortunately for both the town and the circus, however, entertainment isn't the only opportunity the carnival presents. Hidden within Ilsurian, a guild of thieves and scoundrels has been waiting for just such an occasion to launch a campaign of theft and murder—leaving the strangers from the circus to take the blame. With tensions mounting between locals and performers, and the body count rising on both sides, it's up to the PCs to uncover what's really going on and clear the circus's name before the entire town erupts in a firestorm of ethnic violence.

Murder's Mark is an adventure of mystery, illusion, and mob justice for 1st-level characters, written for the Pathfinder Roleplaying Game and compatible with the 3.5 edition of the world's oldest RPG. This volume also contains a gazetteer of the traveling Umbra Carnival and a brand-new monster pulled from history and mythology, all of which can easily be adapted for use in any campaign setting.

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