

An Empress Betrayed
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Brelia, Empress of Sarpadia, has a feast, tournament, and festival every seven years. During this time she chooses 7 debtors and pays off their debts, releases 7 innocent prisoners, builds 7 bridges and 7 roads, and chooses 7 Champions to send on a perilous quest.

The adventure starts with the PCs at level 1, with mundane equipment. Each PC will face another villager of equal skill in a "1-on-1" battle in the arena. The villager each PC faces wields one magic item, which the PC can take as a prize ONLY IF THEY WIN THE COMBAT.

After the first round, the Empress declares "I'm getting bored. Genral Guren, make this more interesting." At that moment the fighter strikes his hammer knocking everyone prone (except for those villagers with the magic boots).

After the second round, the Empress declares "Priest Belbaubina, make this contest more challenging." The Priest then summons fire, which burns all the combatants (except for those villagers who have magic cloaks).

After the third round, the Empress declares "Songwright, increase this contest's difficulty". He then strums a chord on his lute, emitting smoke. The entire battle ground is now partial cover, and line of sight is reduced to 10 squares.

After the fighting, the crew is sent on a mission by the Empress. They are to rescue an emissary who is being held for ransom by an evil group of anarchists. The crew has taken over a haunted ruin in the forest of Omn. They must sneak in to the hideout, find the prisoner, and escort him to safety. If possible, they must also kill or capture the band's leader Jaron Faust. The PCs will be rewarded handsomely if they cripple the group and destroy or burn down their hideout.

Option 1: go to the last place the emissary was seen, the docks... where they "ask too many questions" and gain the attention of pirates who are in league with the rebels. The PCs collect clues, that the secret hideout is an abandoned temple in the woods.

Option 2: go to the map maker to see if there is an old map of the haunted ruin. The map maker gives the PCs some strange hand signals, facial ticks, and notes, which eventually inform the PCs that he is being watched. The mapmaker is loyal to the Empress, but was forced at knifepoint to inform the bandits of anyone asking about the temple...

Option 3: go straight to the ruin: the PCs sneak in and rescue the ambassador, who is being held by a band of goblins. Finding a note among the goblin bodies, it says "keep and hold the ambassador for ransom. he has knowledge of our plot and cannot be allowed to return with this information to the empress."

A grave with the Empress' name, forshadowing that she has come to the world and died before meets the PCs near the ruin. A mystery?

Encounter At The Docks:

1 Pirate Captain
1 First Officer
9 Pirate Deckhands

Encounter At The MapMaker: a skill challenge

Encounter In The Ruin:

1 Battle Wight Commander
1 Battle Wight Bodyguard
3 Battle Wight Minions
Each Riding a Shadow Battle Worg Minion Mount

When travelling down the road, the PCs catch up to the circus. They ask questions and determine where the cage was dropped off. The circus people know nothing about the contents of the cage. Just one simple skill check should get the circus cronies talking, sharing with the PCs the location of the cage drop-off. They are warned, however, to avoid the graveyard at night, because it is haunted. Is this an old wives tale, or could it be true???

The companions make it to the cage drop off site. They find the rusty and broken cage, and make a nature check to look for tracks. They find a trail that goes up the mountain and into the wilderness...

About an hour of hiking, and they see a ruins in the distance. No matter how they try to sneak up on it, they are ambushed by orcs. The orcs have been watching the party since the road. Compare a group stealth check versus the orcs (MED DC). If the party is surprised, the orcs get a surprise round. Curious: you didn't think anything at the time, but the pirates had an interesting tattoo. These orcs have the same symbol on their shields. Could it be a symbol of the rebellion? (a fist)

After the battle with the orcs, the party finds three magic items and some gold. They also tiptoe into the ruins and find the Ambassador tied up. One lowly orc is there guarding him, but that orc runs away. He informs them that he hasn't even been questioned, and knows little about his captors. He has, however, heard them mention the treasure room, which is down a dark flight of stairs. (Encounter: black pudding, plus awesome treasure.) The Ambassador is now part of the party. If the PCs ask about the secret information, he tells them that he can't reveal it without the password. If the party remembers "mayonaise", then he says that he overheard this message from a pair of conspirators in Ultair:

"The silver eagle will be struck down by a wooden song, when he takes two steps with his left foot." He says that the Empress herself is the only person who will understand the message. He doesn't know what it means.

Now the party must take the Ambassador back to Sarpadia. They know that if they step on the teleportation circle, it will take them back. Now to escape the ruins. Uh OH! They hear a rumbling sound. A flaming boulder crashes through the wall of the ruins, and the whole place lights up like a tinder box! Their only hope is to escape the building. Going north will put them into another battle with monsters who are waiting for them in defensive positions. Curiously, going south will lead them through an undefended cemetery, and to freedom. Why haven't the orcs set up defensive lines in the cemetery???

Ghost battle. The Queen's grave...

#4

The party goes through the cemetery, and fights some undead ghouls. While there, they find a tombstone "Brelia Sarpedan" and a statue in the perfect likeness of the Empress. However, this person lived and died 300 years ago!!! The ambassador takes a mortal wound, and with his last breath, says "There is a traitor in the Empress' midst! I don't know who it is, but this message was intended for them. Trust ONLY the brown fox! That has been my contact this whole time. And though I don't know the identity of this super-hero, I know that he/she is loyal to the Empress..." Then he reveals that the Empress is planning on turning over rule of the land to a 10 person council. Then they finally escape, fast forward to getting back to Sarpadia, where the Empress is turned to stone... We were followers of Melora. When we died, we went through all the appropriate rituals, but we did not leave the mortal realm. The goddess Melora is missing from her throne. Once she returns there, we will be released...

#5

The party defeats the ghosts in the cemetery, goes back to the church where the circle is. A nemesis in a hawk feather mask laughs maniacally, Cedric, I don't know how much you overheard, but anything is too much. You and your peons will not return to deliver the message. Knight, step through the circle with me. The Empire is in danger! You refuse? What a waste. You too must be destroyed... and steps through the portal. Surprise! and fights a black pudding. The Temple was to Melora, but she stopped answering the prayers of her clerics about 50 years ago. Since then, some of her Temples have been abandoned, and others have been defaced. There are some who are still devout, including the Priest of the Elements.

#6

Next: after seeing that the Empress is turned to stone, the PCs meet the Brown Fox at night, who gives them a recipe for bringing her back. They need the dust from a Gargoyle, and must Journey to Aebris to an ancient city to find it. (Fight some battle wights, and maybe some scorpions in the desert). The guards were given sleep wine, by General Guren, who doesn't remember because he was dominated. He is a suspicious suspect because he admits to having gaps in his memory.

Clues so far:

Interview guards: they were given a sleep potion by General Guren, but the General was on the parade grounds with witnesses during the petrification. General Guren admits to having 'blacked out', and he has a gap in his memory of about 15 minutes.

One brother wants to join the Empire permanently, and the other wants to secede. Which brother is the target of the assassination???

Melora left this realm about one year before Brelia became Empress.

There is no record of Brelia before she became a magic advisor to the King of Sarpadia, who she then married.

The feather is from an elven arrow.

The brown fox is the bard.

The priest of the elements is suspect because he wants to destroy the Empire. He wants his land to have a voice, he is actually for the council, he also had some sleeping herbs missing from his lab...

The elven wizard is a suspect because he's an elf, and the arrow points to him... He plans on either being the Emperor, or letting Guren do it while he dominates him more. He has cover because he didn't get his hands dirty, and he professes that the elves WANT to be part of the Empire...

General Guren is a suspect because he gave the guards a sleeping potion and doesn't remember it, and also he may become the emperor since he's the military leader... He has a new necklace...

The Bard is a suspect because...

#7

find gargoyle dust in temple, defeat wraiths, earn 865 gp each, find ritual book, get a trio of magic boots.

return allbrights jar, gain 500gp each

get an animal message from Allbright - the circle can only be used once per year, seek out another circle, get a map of all the circles.

find out about the Stair that goes through the underdark and to the other side of the world
find out about the cult that believes that the world is a dragons egg.

the brown fox rescues you, if you get defeated at the temple. He then accompanys you to Allbright's house via ladder, and you learn his identity... Or he is at Allbright's house already, with a note from Allbright in his hand. The code word "gargoyle dust" is used on BF's note, as well as a note on the table at allbrights. his house has a glimmering shield around it, and you can only enter the foyer.

find out about guren's medallion

who's next in line? the military guy.

Interview the guards, sleeping potion, used herbs from Priest's closet, says someone broke in...

find out about 2 left steps

overhear more about aftons father

Interview General Guren

the legend of a sea: there are two continents. Sailing from west to east creates a horrible wind that blows you up against the rocks. few survive. Sailing from east to west is a pleasant journey at first, but is very long, and then scary at the end, but you stand a much better chance due to the current. Centuries later, people try to build an intercontinental empire, but for centuries, just sending a message to a colony on the "other side" was impossible. Then the stair was created, due to the change in priorities. Carving through the world, they uncovered the dragon egg.

Visit Allbright - Skill Challenge, monkey bats

Find out about feather, either in town at magic shop, or with Allbright

Go to Chathedral to get Gargoyle Dust

The bring it back, and the Empress is revived. Now you must find out who the traitor is... They eventually battle the nemesis, and get their ass kicked, but the Brown Fox comes in to rescue them, and then reveals his identity.

The Empress turns over rule to the council. One of the councillors is the traitor, but which one??? The Cleric suddenly has all his powers back...

Encounter; Escaping the Ruin:

1 Headless Corpse
1 Chain Golem
1 Adjuvant

Encounter in the Woods:

1 Goblin Underboss
1 Goblin Hex Hurler
3 Goblin Sharpshooters
4 Goblin Cutthroat Minions

Encounter in the Catacombs:

1 Iridescent Ooze
??? Tainted Ooze

When they get there:

Option 1: charge in the front door
Option 2: yell "is there anybody home?"
Option 3: sneak in through the window, cellar door, or hole in roof
Option 4: light it on fire, and see who runs out
Option 5: Impersonate a pirate guard, fool their way in

Treasure Room: this provides an additional puzzle for the PCs. If they figure this out, there is bonus treasure. If they decided to skip it due to time constraints, oh well... A square pattern is on the floor tiles. If four living beings stand on the four squares marked with an X, the

During this adventure, the PCs may end up buying a storehouse on the dock as a base of operations. They then have to decide how much money to spend on its defenses...

Do they ally themselves with the thieves guild? Do they hire the town guard? Do they hire rogues???

When they return (either victorious or empty handed) the PCs find that the Empress has been betrayed by someone inside the castle. She has been turned to stone. Who can the PCs trust??? They find clues, such as a feather, and some sleeping potion.

General Guren - Goliath Fighter
Priest Belbaubina - Gnome Elemental Cleric
Xonnith Forestsong - Human Bard
Kaylee of the Frozen Forest - Female Elven Frost Wizard

The guards were given a sleeping potion. By whom? Taking a sample, the PCs go to a local Artificer. They find out which herbs are used in the formula. They then search the Castle, and find those herbs in one of the suspect's rooms. When confronted, of course there is a fight... When the battle is almost over, the suspect escapes...

The PCs can use the law library to see who the crown goes to in the Empresses' absence, and it is the Captain of the Guard. They also find that the General has a brand new necklace that DOMINATES him once per day. When they find out that it was _____ controlling Guren, the PCs battle the jerk... It can be a different suspect each time you play the game. The same player can run this module multiple times, and it turns out different each time...

And also a feather piece, which is later found to be part of an arrow...

Gathering Clues:

Encounter at the Docks: Pirates

Encounter in the Woods: Wights riding Worgs

Encounter in the Catacombs: Tainted Ooze

Skill Challenge: 6/3 DC Moderate for level 1. Try to learn what happened to the ambassador, find out who saw what, gain clues as to who kidnapped him, and where they went... Then battle the pirates...

The last combat is versus a dragon...Next Ideas: the person they rescue says "The Empress is in grave danger! Give this missive to the "Brown Fox" and here is a map to an abandoned monestary where you can find gargoyle dust for the ritual that will ward against petrification!" The ambassador does not live very long after that. The bard is the Brown Fox.

A priest; they think its him, but its not

The elves bow to the empress, but plan on taking the throne and ruling all!

The gnomes: to be ignored. Is it better so serve humans or serve elves??>

The empress is really a goddess, who, when taking human form, no longer replies to her clerics.

The brown fox is really the bard, who is completely loyal to the Empress...

The list of potential suspects...

General Guren - Goliath Fighter, Army Commander, Personal Bodyguard

Priest Belbaubina - Gnome Cleric, Priest of the Elements

Xonnith Forestsong - Human Bard, Public Relations, Keeper of Lore

Kaylee of the Frozen Forest - Female Elven Frost Wizard, Magic Advisor

List of Clues:

The feather piece found at the crime scene is of Elven make.

The next in line to the throne is the Army Commander.

The throne room guards were given a sleep potion by General Guren, but the General was on the parade grounds with witnessess during the petrification. General Guren admits to

having 'blacked out', and he has a gap in his memory of about 15 minutes where he can't remember anything.

One brother from the Brother Kingdoms wants to join the Empire permanently, and the other wants to secede and form an independent nation. Which brother is the target of the assassination???

Melora left this realm about one year before Brelia became Empress.

Brelia's name and likeness has appeared on a tombstone in a graveyard, but the dates indicate that it was 350-300 years ago.

There is no record of Brelia before she became a magic advisor to the King of Sarpadia, who she then married. The King died of a mysterious illness a few years later, leaving no sons or heirs.

The priest of the elements is suspect because he wants his land (Gnemish) to have a voice, he is actually for the council, he also had some sleeping herbs missing from his lab. He was "alone in his room" during the petrification.

The elven wizard is a suspect because she's an elf, and the arrow points to her... The elves actually asked to become part of the Empire, and joined willingly. She was "alone in her room" during the petrification.

General Guren is a suspect because he gave the guards a sleeping potion and doesn't remember it, and also he may become the emperor since he's the military leader... He refuses to answer questions about his new necklace...