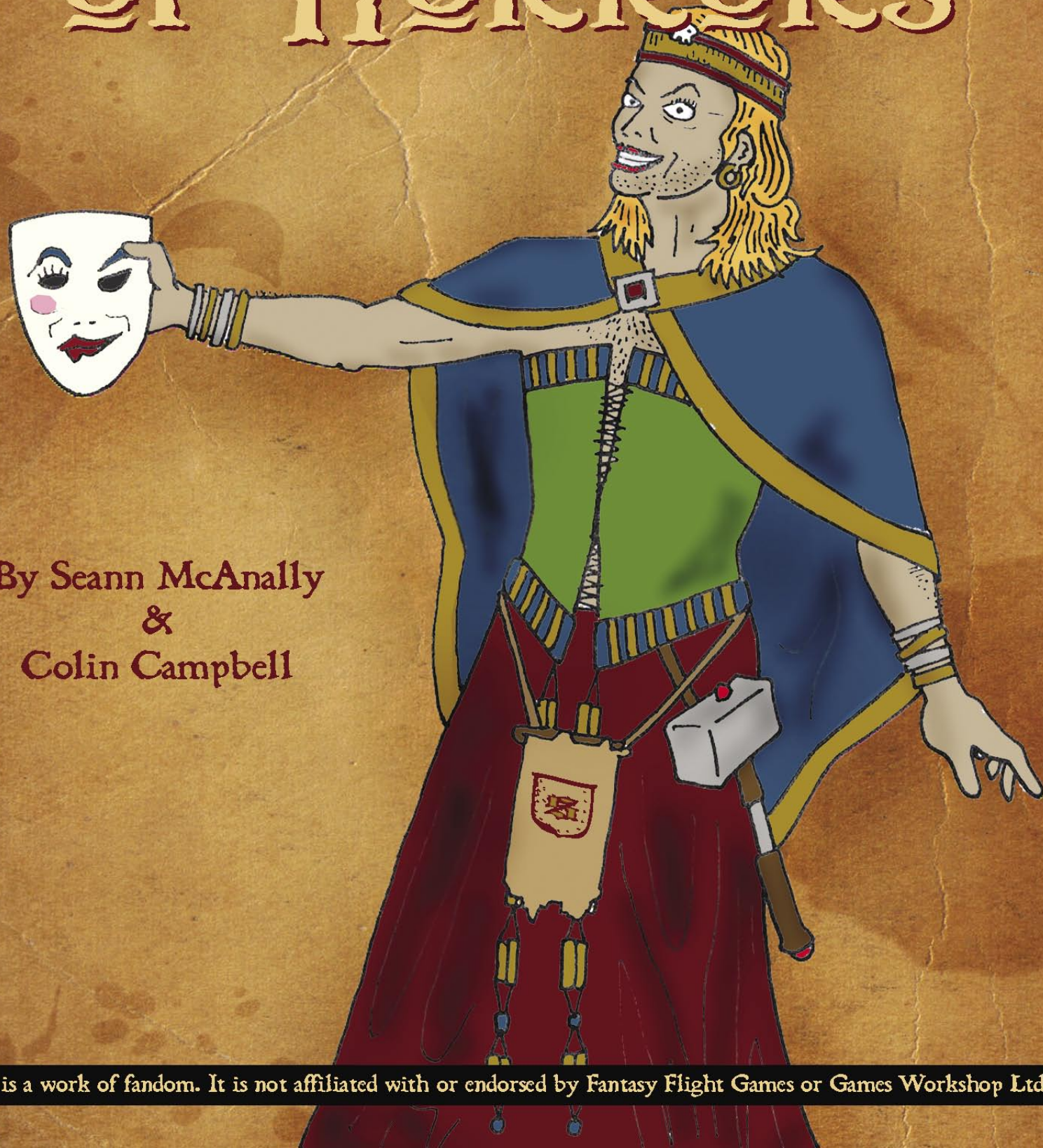


A Scenario for WARHAMMER FANTASY ROLEPLAY, Second Edition

MASQUERADE OF HORRORS

By Seann McAnally
&
Colin Campbell



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M*asquerade of Horrors* is a short adventure for characters in their first or second careers, though it can be adapted for weaker or stronger parties by giving the major NPCs some advances. The stats for the major NPCs mentioned in the adventure are collected together on page 8.

The action begins when the PCs find the wreck of a boat drifting slowly down the Reik. On board, they encounter a deranged witch hunter and discover a strange mask – a cursed item, an artifact sacred to Slaanesh. Meanwhile, a Chaos cult masquerading as a river-borne theater troupe discovers that the PCs have the mask. The cultists intercept the party in the next town and give them a performance they'll never forget...

This adventure is set in the vicinity of the village of Halbherzig, a tiny Reikland settlement near Grissenwald. The adventure could just as easily be set almost anywhere else in the Empire (or the Old World, for that matter), as long as there is a village and a river nearby.

The adventure also assumes the PCs are traveling by boat, but they could also be traveling by road alongside the river. A possible hired boat is briefly described on page 8.

Background

The Von Barbe clan is minor noble family of Averland with an estate in Streissen, where they are patrons of the local university and are known for their artistic bent. The family has a black mark on its name due to its involvement in the failed Averheim revolution of 2502, but have since managed to ingratiate themselves with the powers-that-be.

By all accounts the Von Barbes were an attractive, intelligent, well-bred bunch. When the handsome young Gustav wed Gretchen, a ravishing but demure girl with immense musical talent (and a third cousin by marriage to the elderly Grand Countess Ludmilla, no less), the family rejoiced and placed much hope in the offspring of the union. Given the exceptional beauty and talent of the young couple, everyone was certain their child would be something very special.

Some ten months later, Hermann Von Barbe was born, and he was indeed a special child – but not in the way his parents had hoped.

Whether by Chaos-inspired mutation or by some more natural fluke of nature, Hermann was born a hermaphrodite, having both male and female organs. Gustav was devastated, and in a rage, strangled Gretchen, who he accused of consorting with demons and bringing mutation to his family.

Luckily for the child, Vera Hungus, the midwife who attended Hermann's birth, spirited the child away before his distraught father could have him destroyed. Vera was extremely close to Gretchen. She was determined that the infant Hermann should be spared. She stole away to the small village of Aussen near Grunburg, where she managed to live in secret.

Vera was also something of a hedge wizard and herbalist. This, plus a personality that irked local authority figures, led to her being burned as a witch a few years later. Poor Hermann grew up on the roads as an orphan. Very early on he encountered a theater troupe and fell in love with the life. Over the years, his natural charisma and talent made him the leader of the troupe.

During his travels, Hermann picked up all sorts of knowledge, both wholesome and unwholesome. Realizing the benefits of

magic to his stage show, Hermann took some time off to study in Altdorf, and became well-versed with the Grey Order – the magic of Shadow. Unfortunately, he was also exposed to secret whispers, dark rumors of a greater power to be had through the gifts of the Chaos Gods. When he learned more about Slaanesh, Hermann considered the condition he was born with and became convinced that he had been marked from birth to serve the Lord of Pleasure.

When Hermann left his studies in Altdorf, he had enough coin to pick up a small river boat, which he converted into a floating theater called the Paradise. He recruited some talented but morally ambiguous thespians and began to travel the waterways of the Empire, seeking out fellow cultists and spreading as much decadence and sin as he could. Von Barbe began brazenly using his real name, but so far no one has voiced any suspicions about his true parentage – after all, many theater folk use stage names.

Eventually, several small cults of Slaanesh came to Hermann's attention. These formerly isolated groups began to communicate, with Hermann as their go-between to exchange messages and useful items. Hermann became a close associate of one Vanessa Haut-Gropus, a minor noble who was the head of a Slaaneshi cult based in Grissenwald. Rather taken with the young man, and perversely interested in his special condition, Haut-Gropus showed Hermann an artifact she possessed – a fabulous theater mask, the right-hand side of which was male and the left-hand side female. Haut-Gropus hinted that the mask was an artifact fashioned by the Lord of Pleasure himself, and that it possessed unholy power. Hermann became obsessed with the mask. To possess it, he felt, was his destiny, because it seemed to represent and glorify his own secret affliction. He began to lay down plans to take the mask from Haut-Gropus – but he never had a chance.

A Sigmarrite witch hunter from Altdorf – one Gunnar Krauthosen – discovered Haut-Gropus' cult in Grissenwald, capturing or scattering its members. He also confiscated the mask, but found he could not destroy it – it resisted the blows of his hammer and was unaffected by the hottest flames. After setting the night ablaze with heretics, including Haut-Gropus herself, Krauthosen decided to return the mask to Altdorf, so that officials of the Cult of Sigmar could determine if it could be destroyed.

He never got there. Herman Von Barbe and his minions ambushed Krauthosen's boat, slaughtered his crew, and critically wounded the witch hunter, leaving him for dead. Unfortunately for Von Barbe, he could not find the mask – Krauthosen had hidden it too well. In a towering rage, Von Barbe stormed away to search elsewhere for the artifact, leaving one of his henchmen to keep an eye on the wreck of Krauthosen's boat.

Enter our party of bold adventurers...

Beginning the Adventure

Masquerade of Horrors is best suited as a one-shot adventure played as a break during an extended period of river travel. As noted earlier, if the PCs are traveling by road, the adventure can still take place as long as a river is nearby.

As the PCs move through the region, they may hear some of the rumors listed in the sidebar on page 2. The river traffic around them is typical – trading vessels bringing goods down from Nuln and beyond, fishermen plying their trade in the shallows, and peddlers and pilgrims traveling along the riverbank.

The GM is free to improvise whatever encounters he or she likes – this is a well-traveled route and there are plenty of folks to

interact with.

All in all, it is a typical and uneventful journey – until the PCs cross paths with Von Barbe.

The Wreck

On a cool, clear morning during the party's travels, they encounter the drifting wreck of the Divine Retribution, a small river boat that has seen better days. It is listing heavily to one side, having taken on water, and is slowly but surely sinking. Carrion birds are all over the wreck.

Such sights are not uncommon on the waterways of the Empire, but his particular wreck is special. The GM should, of course, use every means at his or her disposal to ensure the PCs investigate the boat – it's crucial to this adventure.

If the party is traveling by land, getting to the boat might be tricky. The GM may wish to have the craft close to the riverbank, perhaps snagged on a bar or by some overhanging branches.

If the party is traveling by boat, a simple Row test will allow them to draw up alongside and tie on.

A **Very Easy (+30%) Perception Test** reveals a large number of coins scattered on the bloodstained deck. This is all the PCs can see from a distance. If they board the vessel, they will also find several savagely mutilated corpses, their eyes being pecked out by carrion birds. Depending on the PCs' level of experience, a Willpower Test may be in order as they witness this grisly sight. Those who fail gain an Insanity point, as they ponder the fate of their own final remains...

As the PCs investigate, they hear a low moan coming from the deck house. If the prospect of looting the boat does not prompt the PCs to investigate, perhaps the desire to rescue survivors will.

Moving about on a tilted, blood-spattered deck shouldn't be easy. The GM may wish to impose Agility tests from time to time during the investigation, where dramatically appropriate (or funny).

Severed limbs lie scattered about the deck in the drying pools of blood. Crates and casks have been broken open, their contents strewn carelessly about. Most of these items are mundane, but the GM should feel free to place more useful loot in the mess. The coins the PCs noticed earlier can be picked up, but it will take time – about a half-hour and a **Hard (-20%) Perception Test** to get every single one: 15 Crowns, 3 Shillings and 6 Pennies.

If the PCs investigate the corpses closely, they'll find that most of them were initiates of the Cult of Sigmar, along with a boatman or two. Minor items like holy symbols, hand weapons and whatnot are still clutched in the dead hands of the bodies.

The PCs will probably first be drawn to the moaning from the deck house. Upon entering, they see pieces of another initiate scattered among the remnants of what appears to be a hasty search. Several boxes and barrels lie open and empty, their contents scattered about just as on the deck.

From a further, curtained doorway in the deck house – most likely the captain's quarters – a big man in black suddenly looms through the doorway, covered in his own blood. Open gashes reveal entrails spilling from his bowels, and his left arm hangs limp and useless. He wields a warhammer in his right hand, and a weird light gleams in his eyes. He screams at the PCs:

"What! More vultures come to pick my bones? I tell you, by the Hammer, you shall never find it!"

This is, of course, Gunnar Krauthosen, the witch hunter. The "it" he refers to is the mask of Slaanesh, which he has hidden by

stuffing it in an old valise and hanging it out of the cabin window on a string, so that it is submerged in the Reik.

Unfortunately for Krauthosen, his fate has run out; his last critical hit gave him one Insanity point too many, and he now suffers from a particularly insidious case of *Profane Persecutions* (WFRP, p. 206). At best, he's convinced the party are opportunists come to loot the Divine Retribution. At worst, he sees them as minions of Chaos sent to reclaim the mask. Combat with Krauthosen is inevitable.

Krauthosen is an experienced NPC. At full strength, he would be a serious challenge for a young party. However, in his current state the PCs should have no trouble dispatching him rather quickly. Even if they entertain thoughts of healing and rehabilitating the witch hunter, his insanity has firmly taken root. It is important to the story that Krauthosen not survive this encounter, so the GM should ensure his death (which is likely, in any case).

The purpose of this combat is not necessarily to provide the PCs with a challenging fight, but to set a disturbing tone for the adventure and introduce some moral ambiguity: the PCs are forced to kill a once-great servant of Sigmar to save their own skins.

If the PCs take the time and effort to bury Krauthosen respectfully on the riverbank, the GM might consider giving them a small blessing of some sort – perhaps a +10 bonus to one test of their choice over the course of the scenario.

The Hidden Artifact

Upon dispatching the doomed Krauthosen, the PCs will most likely wish to search for the "it" he referred to – after all, someone was willing to kill to find it. A **Hard (-20%) Search Test** reveals

Rumors on the Water

Successful Gossip tests along the river will reveal the following rumors. Some have a bearing on the adventure, while others simply provide atmosphere.

1-2: "Did you hear about Grissenwald? Witch hunters dug up a cult there, yes indeed. Burnt 'em all, of course, and good riddance, I say! The gods love the smell of burnin' heretics in the mornin'."

3-4: "Times are hard up north. One o' my cousins – third cousin twice removed by the way of marriage, y'understand – had a nice mill near Krudenwald, but it ain't there now. Stomped and burned by the Nameless Ones, it was. Too bad. My cousin was a decent chap – for a Hochlander."

5-6: "I hope you're not planning on staying on your boat in any of the towns up ahead. Ol' Count Bruno of Grissenwald has decreed you can't do that no more. Gotta stay in town. It's the influence of the merchants, of course. Dirty coin-grubbers. They don't care about folks like you and me."

7-8: "Have you seen the showboat? It stopped through here yesternight. What a show! Jugglin', tumblin' comedy, tragedy... by Sigmar, us common folk need some good entertainment in these dark times!"

9-10: "Watch out for wreckers near Kemperbad! There was some kind o' trouble in the Belladonna family recently – don't ask me how I know – and a bunch o' them dirty Stirlanders they were usin' as muscle got the sack. Now they're loose on the river! It's too bad the nobility don't look after us more."

Note: These wreckers are actually present in Halbherzig, but have nothing to do with the main plot.

a thin string tied to the outer hinge of the shutter of the cabin window. The string runs down the side of the vessel into the Reik, dragging something that is submerged (the valise that contains the mask).

The GM can make it easier to find the valise if necessary – Von Barbe couldn't find it, but the shutters may have been jostled as the PCs fought Krauthosen. Perhaps the valise bangs against the hull a few times, drawing the party's attention to it and making it easier to find. However, it is not absolutely necessary that the PCs find the mask for the rest of the adventure to take place.

Pulling up the waterlogged valise, the PCs find a bizarre mask, clearly of great antiquity. The right-hand side is carved into the likeness of a sneering male face; the left-hand side has been designed to resemble a leering female face. It appears to be constructed of simple materials, and despite its antiquity might not seem that valuable, outside of the fact that the witch hunter clearly took pains to hide it, and that someone else was willing to slaughter a boatload of initiates to obtain it. PCs with Magical Sense might feel that there is something odd or vaguely unwholesome about the thing, but they will be unable to determine exactly what.

PCs being PCs, it is likely they'll take the mask. They may wish to deliver it to the Cult of Sigmar or some other authority, or they may try to sell it or otherwise profit from it.

Someone may even decide to try it on. If a PC dons the mask, it seems to those watching that it is subsumed into the PC's face! Within a few seconds, the character doesn't seem to be wearing a mask at all. Everyone will soon notice, however, that their companion has never seemed as attractive, charismatic and brilliant as in this moment. In fact, the mask raises a character's Fellowship score, but ultimately, it has dire consequences (see the sidebar on page 4 for details).

The rest of the Divine Retribution consists of the cargo hold, which is partially underwater and full of broken crates and barrels. The GM may allow the PCs to find something here worth looting, but most of the material has been ruined by the inflow of the Reik.

Eventually, the party will have to move on. If they seem to be taking too much time poking about the wreck, an approaching patrol boat of Riverwardens might encourage to get the party moving...

The Watcher in the Woods

Little do the PCs know they have not gone about their tasks unobserved. Well-hidden on the riverbank nearby, Heinrich Weikal, a low-ranking member of Hermann Von Barbe's dark entourage, has watched their every move. He was stationed here by Hermann to keep an eye on the Divine Retribution to ensure that it eventually sinks and to report any strange goings-on. As soon as the party leaves the wreck, Heinrich will rush to his hired mount, which is hitched up nearby, and ride to Halbherzig, where he will report everything to Von Barbe. He will also be sure to give his master a detailed description of the PCs.

It should be noted that even if the party does not find (or take) the mask, Heinrich still reports their presence on the Divine Retribution. Being a paranoid sort who leaves little to chance, Von Barbe will act on the assumption that the PCs somehow found the mask – at the very least, he'll want to learn whether they discovered any clues he might have missed. He will therefore move to intercept them in Halbherzig.

Halbherzig

The village of Halbherzig is neither prosperous nor well-known. Situated roughly halfway between Grissenwald and Nuln, its primary importance is that of a boat-stop, and there are very few permanent residents. It is essentially a strip of some half-dozen buildings between the Reik and a steep, forested hill, so no map should be necessary unless the GM would like to flesh out the place. Herr Guber's Emporium is a somewhat shoddy second-rate general store where PCs can stock up on mundane goods.

At this particular time, there are not many visitors at Halbherzig, either. As the party approaches the village, they can see that the docks are sparsely populated. They will not be able to miss a small, outrageously decorated showboat in a berth at the far southern extremity of the docks. There are a few other trade boats here, but in general it's a quiet day in a quiet village.

As the PCs (or their crew) are tying up the boat, Richard Blitzen, the so-called Harbormaster, approaches.

"Hoy there, travelers. Welcome to Halbherzig. Just passing a bit of information on by way of a friendly reminder...them as knows what's best for us – them bein' the nobility and the local councils, y'understand – have decreed that no visitors are to sleep on boats, but must patronize the local merchants. Hope you enjoy your stay – and don't cause any trouble!"

If the PCs do cause trouble, there are always a few watchmen close at hand, although Halbherzig cannot boast (and does not need) a full-fledged militia. In a pinch, villagers will join in to bring down anyone who seriously threatens their village.

If the party is traveling by road, they will not encounter the Harbormaster, and will not unless they try to camp within view of the village for some reason.

Should the PCs wish to visit the showboat (they may be curious if they've heard rumors about it), a tall, thin man (Leopold Magnus – see page 8) will warn them off.

"Away with you, now! The company is below-decks rehearsin'! Be off, and watch the show later like everyone else!"

A Place to Stay

Halberzig boasts two inns, the Shooting Star and the Muskrat. The Shooting Star is of better quality, but the master of the house, Herr Schlueter, has upper-class pretensions and likes to "price out the riff-raff." The GM should apply a small markup on all goods and services here. The Muskrat, operated by Herr Bergwand, is much seedier and less appealing, but has the benefit of being cheap. Times are hard, and Bergwand is letting private rooms go at half the normal rate for the time being.

It does not matter which inn the party chooses. The following text refers to the inn and innkeeper in a generic manner. The GM can simply substitute the appropriate names.

Wreckers and Gamblers

Most of the patrons of the inn are local folks – fishermen, charcoal burners, farmers, and the like. Besides the adventurers, there are two other groups in the inn tonight who are definitely not locals...

At a corner table sits a loud and obnoxious group of four burly men. One has an eye patch, another a peg leg, and they have various other scars and physical blemishes resulting from violence. These

The Mask

The Mask of Slaanesh is one of several artifacts said to be created by the Lord of Pleasure in the blackness before time. Over the millennia, favored worshipers have been gifted with these foul treasures in order to better serve their perverse deity.

The Mask itself is very old and unremarkable, but for a faint aura of unwholesome magic. It depicts a face split down the middle into male and female.

Wearing the Mask is like wearing a second skin. Once someone actually places the Mask on his or her face, it is subsumed into the flesh. The wearer does not appear to be wearing a mask at all, but they do suddenly appear far more attractive and charismatic than they actually are:

Anyone who wears the Mask gains a +20 to Fellowship tests and related skill tests. However, there is a down side.

Every time a character tries to remove the Mask, he or she must make a **Challenging (-10%) Willpower Test**. If this is failed, the character permanently loses 5% from his or her Fellowship characteristic. If someone persists in wearing the Mask, his or her ultimate fate is to be hideous without it – a victim of vanity.

For every 24 hours the Mask is worn, the Willpower test to remove it becomes more difficult – from Challenging to Hard to Very Hard. If anyone should decide to wear the Mask permanently, they would soon find that their minds could not stand the Chaotic forces that surge through the artifact. For every 48 hours a person wears the Mask, they must make a further Willpower test or gain 1 Insanity point. For every 48 hours thereafter, this Willpower test becomes more difficult, as described above.

are indeed the wreckers referred to in the rumor table, but they serve as an annoyance and have no direct involvement in the main plot.

They are, however, rude and not above picking a fight for almost no reason. The wreckers will take particular pleasure in goading any Elf that might be a member of the party. If things are moving slowly, the GM may wish to have them start a brawl with the PCs (it will be broken up in 10 rounds by the locals, including whatever watchmen they can muster). The wreckers will draw off and leave the inn (and possibly the village!) if the fight isn't going their way, but they're not above waiting in ambush for the PCs later.

Louis-Phillipe Cheauteau is a Bretonnian gambler who happens to be passing through the region. He may offer the party a game, and may well cheat. If he is caught, he will try to laugh it off and offer to buy the PCs a round of drinks. If they insist on delivering justice in the form of a beating, the wreckers may decide to intervene, if they are present. As above, any fight will be broken up by locals within 10 rounds if necessary. No one is interested in prosecuting Cheauteau for cheating – they'll just run him out of town.

A Pretty Visitor

During the evening, a gorgeous girl will enter the inn. She wears an emerald-green dress and has long raven-black hair. Her skin is the color of fresh cream. All eyes turn when she enters.

After looking about in confusion for a moment, she locks eyes with the most attractive male PC – or the PC who looks most like the leader of the party – and hesitantly approaches the table.

"May I sit with you for a bit?" she asks. *"I need a good stiff drink*

but would prefer not to keep company with any of the others in here." She sniffs with distaste as she glances sidewise at the locals.

This is, in fact, Fran Poppenbutel, a member of Hermann Von Barbe's entourage (see page 8 for her stats). Fran's mission tonight is to ingratiate herself with the party so that at the very least, Von Barbe will know what room they are staying in – he hopes to burgle the mask before resorting to violence.

Fran will use her real name, but will say she has come to Halbherzig to marry a local winegrower, Rutgar Helstrom. She is staying at his house in the widow's quarters he built for his dead mother until the wedding, which is in two days.

Over the course of a few drinks, she will begin to appear a bit drunk (she's not) and will lean in closer to the PC she fixed her gaze on earlier.

"Rutgar is such a brute," she purrs. *"I wish my father had seen fit to arrange a marriage for me with someone like you."*

The GM will have to handle this encounter carefully, depending on the roleplaying style of the group. Fran won't want to arouse the PCs' suspicions, but she is determined to find out what rooms they are staying in. She'll assume the most attractive PC or the leader of the group is the person who actually has the mask. She might also try to gauge which PC has it by other subtle clues (each GM knows his or her players best, and may have to improvise a bit here – after all, Fran is). Ultimately, she will try to guess which PC has the mask, and will attempt to arrange a predawn tryst. At some point she pulls the PC aside and whispers:

"I so long for one moment of real passion before my lifetime of drudgery! My betrothed will go out to check his vineyards before dawn, so I will be able to get away for several hours. Tell me what room you are staying in, and I will meet you there!"

If this doesn't work, Fran will leave, looking as if she feels totally humiliated. She isn't, but she's a vain woman and her ego will be bruised regardless if the PC acts uninterested. Later, she will bribe the information out of a maid or other minor functionary at the inn (she'll automatically succeed at this).

If the PC accepts her offer, she will smile and tell him she can't wait. She then says she had better get back before she is missed, and leaves the premises.

Of course, she'll go right around the corner into the alley behind the inn and sneak back in through the kitchens and the rear stairway. Using her skill as a contortionist, she will enter the PC's room through the open transom over the door (or some similar opening – the point is she does not pick the lock, and is only able to get in due to her special talents).

Once in the room, she'll go through everything in an attempt to find the mask. If it is actually there, she'll take it and run! The rest of the adventure still takes place, however, as Von Barbe wants to punish the PCs for finding the mask when he could not. If the mask is not in the room, she will return to the Paradise and report this to Von Barbe.

The Cuckold

To make sure the party is distracted while Fran is busy upstairs, Rutgar Helstrom, another member of Von Barbe's entourage, bursts into the inn and glowers at everyone in the room. His eyes fix on the same PC Fran attempted to seduce earlier. In a rage, he approaches and begins to castigate the PC:

"What kind of a man are you? How dare you shamelessly flirt with my beloved little flower? I should cut you in half, you rascal!"

Rutgar is huge. He does not look like a vintner, even if he is dressed like one (Von Barbe has a nice selection of costumes). He will use his Intimidate skill to best effect, but has no intention of actually attacking. If the PC denies any involvement with Fran, the wreckers (if they are there) will happily chime in, reporting that they “*saw the whole thing*,” even embellishing bits.

Just as the situation looks like it might actually erupt into violence, Rutgar’s face will twist from rage into pathetic sadness, and he bursts into tears. Where just before he seemed ready to kill the PC Fran was flirting with, he now sinks to his knees, weeping, and hugs the PC instead.

“*Why doesn’t she love me?*” he wails. “*I’m a hard worker...I’m honest...she is smitten with wild men who have no homes, who seek their fortunes over the next hill...she has read too many silly romances...oh my little Fran! My dear little Fran!*”

The GM should play this up for laughs, but not for too long. Soon, Rutgar will stand up and run out into the night, weeping. He only needs to give Fran ten or fifteen minutes to go through the room. He is also new to acting and Von Barbe has warned him not to “overdo it!”

The Invitation

As the night winds down, but before the party goes off to bed for the evening, Hermann Von Barbe himself will enter the inn. An extremely charismatic and handsome man, he is nevertheless done up to the hilt in his theatrical regalia. As men impersonating women is fairly common in such troupes, especially in comedies, this is not as shocking as it would be for a regular citizen. Nevertheless, the wreckers may tease him if they are still present, but he simply ignores their comments. After ordering a drink from the innkeeper, Von Barbe moseys over to the PCs’ table.

“*Greetings!*” he says. “*I hope you don’t mind if I join you for a moment?*” Assuming he’s allowed to sit, he comes quickly to the point. “*I am Hermann Von Barbe, and I am the master of ceremonies, director, writer, and lead actor of Von Barbe’s Players, whose boat, the Paradise, you no doubt saw earlier. I have a bit of a problem, however. We have a performance in Silberwurt in a few days, but we are dreadfully under-prepared! You see, we have a new piece, a farcical little romp called ‘Sigmar’s Folly.’ It’s quite entertaining. It’s about the real reason Sigmar left no heirs.*” He winks. “*We’re just a little out of practice, you see, and some of our troupe fears that the subject matter might be a bit...controversial. A bit of a stretch for these yokels, I fear. I don’t suppose you’d be willing to come out to the Paradise tonight and preview the performance, and give us notes – that is, let us know what you think? We routinely do a preview show, but there is no time, and...well, look around you. I think you’re the only folks in Halbherzig who could even begin to appreciate High Art!*”

If necessary, Von Barbe will offer free refreshment during the performance – including a bottle of fine Bretonnian wine (labeled as “Produce of Sudenland,” but Bretonnian nonetheless). If the party flat-out refuses to go with him, Von Barbe will leave graciously and activate his last-ditch effort (see “Plan B,” below).

If the party accepts his invitation, Von Barbe will be delighted, and ask them to meet him at the Paradise. “*We’re way off on the south end of the docks,*” he says. “*We wouldn’t want to bother the locals with our shenanigans.*” He dashes off with a wink.

By this time, the PCs may well suspect that something is up. Von Barbe is clearly an oddity, however, and curiosity will probably be

enough to get the PCs to the Paradise. They may take whatever precautions they wish, however, before they attend the premiere of “Sigmar’s Folly.”

Plan B

If the party has refused Von Barbe’s invitation, he does not simply give up. At some point after Von Barbe has left the inn, but before the party retires for the night, a cry comes from just outside, and a young man (Heinrich Weikal, the “watcher in the woods” from earlier”) enters in a flurry.

“*The boats! They’re stealin’ the boats!*” he yells. If the PCs arrived by boat, he points at them and screams: “*It’s your bloody boat they’re after! You’d best hurry! I’ll rouse the Watch!*”

If the party arrived from the road, Von Barbe will come up with some other ruse – he might stage a scene just outside with Rutgar “beating” Fran, hoping to lure the PCs outdoors. Almost any trick to get the PCs in the open will do.

Once the party is outside, Von Barbe will order his minions to attack right in the street, and he will be quite put out that he did not get a chance to indulge in his morbid dramatics. Other than the change in location, the rest of the adventure will progress in more or less the same fashion.

“Sigmar’s Folly”

As the party approaches the Paradise, they see it is magnificently decked out, well-lit with glowing paper lamps that rock in the night breeze. Comfortable benches have been set out for the party on the dock itself, and the whole starboard side of the Paradise has opened to reveal a small stage.

A young man (Heinrich Weikal) welcomes them and asks them to be seated, providing them with refreshment if necessary (Von Barbe considered poisoning the party at one point, but his flair for the dramatic got the better of him). Heinrich then takes up a position to stage left, opening a bulls-eye lantern to create a serviceable spotlight on the stage.

The party sees a magnificent bedchamber – a four-poster bed, a chair, and a desk crowded with paper and writing materials. A treasure chest sits next to the table. A backdrop features a painting of a window overlooking the spires of Altdorf.

A disembodied voice (Von Barbe) rings out from behind the scenes: “*Ladies and Gentles, please make yourselves comfortable for a tale of darkness and delight! Von Barbe’s Players presents for your edification and amusement the story of Sigmar’s Folly!*”

The GM may wish to gloss over or paraphrase the play. Others who share Von Barbe’s dramatic bent could actually perform it for their players.

The action begins. Von Barbe, dressed as Sigmar but wearing a boustier, enters from stage right, followed by his scribe (Leopold Magnus). The scribe comically juggles ink bottles, a pen, and sharp letter-opener.

Von Barbe walks to the window and gazes out over the city. “*Josephus, my loyal scribe,*” he says in a deep, appropriately Sigmarian tone, “*Look at the progress we have made! I tell you, I have no doubt that I have founded an Empire that will last for thousands of years, one that will withstand the many lashings sure to crash upon it, hurled by the Ruinous Powers.*”

The scribe agrees with Sigmar, wordlessly and mockingly. Sigmar, of course, is oblivious to the mockery.

"If only I had an Empress to stand by my side," Sigmar laments. "For a man without a woman is only half a man. How I long for a woman to be the baldric in which I hang my bugle."

The scribe looks at the audience, silently guffawing.

"But alas," continues Von Barbe as Sigmar, "I am surrounded by a bevy of mindless courtesans. They are pleasing to the eye, but I dream of a sturdy peasant woman like my dear mother. A strong woman, who will rule beside me, not under me."

Again the scribe guffaws.

"Scribe, take a letter!" commands Sigmar, moving to the table. The scribe sits, juggling the letter-opener and ink with one hand while he writes with the other.

"To all my loyal subjects," Sigmar begins. "The time has come when I must secure the future of our Empire by begetting an heir upon a woman that is worthy of me. I must forthwith search high and low throughout these great lands, from the fair Teutogen girls of the north to the sun-brown Burgundians, for a woman to be my bride and rule you all as Empress. I fear no suitable woman shall ever be found. I ask of you all, please help your beloved Emperor find a loving hilt in which to rest his mighty hammer. Sincerely, Sigmar, Emperor of Everything, Smasher of Goblins, Ruler of the Heights and Depths, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera."

The scribe finishes the letter with a comic flourish, all the while continuing to juggle. Sigmar says, "Now put that letter with the rest of my missives and proclamations and decrees and let it be distributed throughout the land!"

At this point, Sigmar stoops to pick up the chest that is lying next to the table. A **Hard (-20) Perception Test** will reveal that Von Barbe struggles a bit with the weight of the chest. The scribe – still juggling with one hand – opens it, and a Deamonette leaps out, doing a head-over-heels flip above Sigmar to land behind him.

Obviously, it's not a real Deamonette, but a woman in a costume. An **Easy (+20%) Perception Test** reveals that it is, in fact, Fran Poppenbutel!

"Look no further than me, Lord Sigmar!" she cries. "I will take you to the heights and depths of pleasure!"

At the point, even party members who aren't in the least bit pious might get to feel uncomfortable. Not only is the play flirting with stake-worthy blasphemy, Fran's presence is a definite sign things are seriously amiss.

Von Barbe holds a warning hand up to the Deamonette as the scribe, still juggling, backs away to the window in mock fear.

"Stay away, foul spawn of Chaos," says Sigmar. "Do you not know that I am a man of the stiffest integrity?"

"Indeed," cackles the Deamonette, "you will be a God in ages hence! But what of your progeny? Love me, and I will give you fine sons and daughters!"

Sigmar shakes his head. "I cannot! I stand firm! You are from that screaming pit into which all that is corrupt and wicked descends! I will not risk the future of the Empire by loving such a fiend as you! Be gone from my bedchamber, or I shall be forced to hammer you harshly from now until dawn!"

The Deamonette replies, "But my lord, am I not pleasing?"

"Nay!" Sigmar yells. "You are a lie, and you travel with liars. You and all foul beasts like you would slay all good men! You would even kill a weak and defenseless witch hunter, would you not? Would you not kill such a man, and loot him thoroughly?"

If the PCs have still not figured out that all is not yell, then they're just not thinking.

Von Barbe continues, but he now turns to the audience. "Would

you not take whatever blood-stained treasure you could find? Would you not seek to profit from it, instead of handing it over to HE WHO TRULY DESERVES IT?"

At that prompt, Leopold the Scribe hurls the sharp letter-opener at the PC closest to the stage. Unless the party specifically said before this point that they were setting up a defensive position or were expecting trouble, then they are Surprised by Von Barbe's players.

The rest of the fight should be a real challenge for the party. Von Barbe himself will stay at a distance, using his spells to the best effect possible. Leopold will continue to throw knives from the stage. Meanwhile, Fran leaps from the stage and attacks the party in melee, while Rutgar Helstrom, no longer playing the part of a weeping groom, attacks from the shore end of the dock, hollering like a bull elephant and swinging a great axe. Heinrich, however, hangs back and hides once things go sour – he's not a combatant, and isn't treated well by the others anyway. He'll escape if he can.

If the party looks like they might be defeated, the GM may wish to take pity on them by fudging rolls or having sleepy watchmen come blundering down the docks to help them. They are somewhat out of their element, but the whole village has been alerted by now and the watchmen have to do *something*. If things get to this point, Von Barbe will attempt to take the mask and get the Paradise out of there, at any cost. He will even leave the Paradise itself if he has the mask, making for the woods and betraying his companions.

If you want to use Von Barbe as a recurring villain in a sequel to this adventure, you'll want to ensure his escape at this point, with or without the mask. He will swear vengeance upon the PCs, and will turn up again as soon as he is able (that is, after a suitable period of dramatic skulking and scheming).

Whether or not Von Barbe is killed or flees, it's unlikely he'll be able to escape in the Paradise. Heinrich will quickly surrender if overpowered; the others know the fiery fate that awaits them at the hands of witch hunters, and will fight to the death if they can't run or leap into the river and swim away.

Prepping for the Sequel

If you plan to keep Hermann alive to strike again, here is a suggested course of action for him to take.

Hermann is resourceful, so you needn't feel as if you've cheated the PCs if he manages to get away. While he has "loved" all of his minions, he truly cares about none of them, and will not hesitate to sacrifice them if it means saving his own skin. This ruthlessness, in combination with his clever use of spells (see WFRP pp 157-159) should give him opportunity to slip away into the town before he is missed.

With that, he'll run to the hills and attempt to make his way to Auerswald. While he is not a skilled outdoorsman, his early life as a wandering orphan has given him the confidence to take off into the wild blue.

In Auerswald, Von Barbe will disguise himself as a woman (a fellow cultist known to him here will give him a place to hide at first, then introduce him as her cousin). After several months, Von Barbe will hire a party of adventurers to escort him to Altdorf, where he will disappear back into the theater community, re-establish connections with the cult, and rebuild his band of minions. All the while, he will keep the PCs firmly in mind, seeking rumors of them and the Mask. The next time the PCs pass through Altdorf, Von Barbe will be waiting with a few nasty surprises.

Looting the Paradise

A quick search of the Paradise quickly absolves the PCs of any trouble they might be in for the disturbance. Evidence on the boat reveals that Von Barbe and his minions were thoroughly steeped in the worship of Slaanesh.

If the GM doesn't want to give the PCs the chance to loot the boat, simply have the watchmen and Richard Blitzen the Harbormaster rush in to explain that the property must be impounded and disposed of legally.

But if the PCs do get a chance to loot the Paradise, here's what they find:

Almost all of the space on the main deck has been given over to the stage. In a small room to the rear of the stage are several multi-purpose pieces of furniture, a small table and chair set, and a few boxes of various props (wooden swords, an hourglass, a bust of Ludwig the Fat, an old skull, etc.).

A small fore-house holds what appears to be a combination green room and make-up area. It is illuminated by two bright lanterns. A high-quality mirror hangs on one wall. A little vanity table holds dozen of make-up tins, brushes, and wigs. A trunk-bench built into one wall holds costumes – PCs who look through them can find an outfit for almost any occasion, past or present, although the clothes are all “theatrical” and would look out-of-place in everyday life.

Below deck, things get more sinister.

A large common area takes up most of the hold. There are traditional boat-bunks along the sides, overlarge and screened off with curtains. In the center of the room is a pile of pillows upon a well-worn but once-valuable rug from far Cathay. The floor appears comfortable enough, and seems a suitable area for the indulgences inherent in the worship of Slaanesh. Beyond the central floor area is a curtained doorway.

Within the individual bunks, the PCs will find what personal items the troupe possessed. The GM is free to improvise here. It is likely each of them would have collected at least a few valuable or interesting items over the years – this is the GM's chance to drop some surprises or rewards into the PCs' laps.

Beyond the curtained doorway lies Von Barbe's inner sanctum. Here, a blatant representation of Slaanesh – a small statue – sits on the headboard of his bunk, which is draped with valuable silks and

other fabrics. A wardrobe is affixed to one wall. Inside are several suits of best craftsmanship clothing and a small iron box with a standard lock. Inside the box is a spectacular hand-held mirror – Von Barbe spent a great deal of time gazing into it. It is encrusted with jewels of various types, and is made of solid silver. Surely such a treasure will bring a pretty penny!

Beyond Von Barbe's room is the rest of the hold, which contains the fruits of the troupe's tour of Chaotic piracy. Depending on the nature of the overall campaign, these might be valuable trade goods – silks, oils, spices, and the like – or something more mundane in the form of basic staples. There should be at least one truly rewarding item here – perhaps a golden candelabra taken from some noble's river-yacht, an illuminated manuscript, or even a cask of old or foreign gold coins.

It's entirely possible the NPCs will claim the Paradise itself, and attempt to keep or sell it. The best thing to do with the boat, of course, is to burn it – dark deeds have been committed both on its decks and in its hold. Anyone who stays on the boat for very long may find that they have disturbing dreams that increase in intensity the longer they stay. After a week or so these will become so intense (both nightmarish and strangely arousing) that the PCs will have to make Average Willpower Tests once per day or gain an Insanity Point.

Of course, if the GM *wants* the PCs to have a small riverboat-theater, the boat's curse can be ignored. But Von Barbe – and the Paradise – have acquired a reputation. Any PCs who take the Paradise for themselves may find odd and unwelcome visitors stopping by in the dead of night, asking for Hermann...

Beyond the Masquerade

The story need not necessarily end here. After all, if the party is successful, they will still possess the mask. Will they turn it over to the authorities, thus completing Gunnar Krauthosen's mission? Maybe some powerful NPC sends them on a quest to destroy the mask, which could lead to an entire series of adventures.

Or will the PCs keep the mask and try to profit from it, either by selling it or using it? Maybe the PCs themselves (or one of them) is slowly corrupted by the Mask, becoming villains in their own right.

Perhaps the local authorities don't quite buy the PCs' story that they are unconnected to Von Barbe – when word gets around, the party may find themselves the target of some righteous witch hunter. If they're still in possession of the mask, they might have a rather tough time trying to explain what they're doing with it.

If Von Barbe lived, he will surely attempt to reclaim the mask at another time – see the sidebar on page 7 for suggestions on how to handle this. A sequel to this adventure, *Masquerade in Altdorf*, is scheduled for release sometime in 2010. That scenario assumes that Von Barbe – or at least one member of his entourage (except for Heinrich) – is alive at the end of this one.

It is also possible that the fabulous silver mirror in Von Barbe's boudoir is yet another artifact of Slaanesh. Perhaps the tale of the mask is merely the first chapter in a much larger, darker story.

Written by Seann McAnally & Colin Campbell

Cover Illustration by Seann McAnally

Backgrounds and borders adapted from public domain images.

Thanks to Chuck Morrison (www.windsofchaos.com)

If you enjoyed this adventure, let us know – seann.mcanally@gmail.com

The Happy Traveler

If the party needs a boat at the beginning of this adventure, wants to hire one along the way, or wants to sell the Paradise, Captain Sigmund Spule of the Happy Traveler will be happy to oblige.

Captain Spule is not the most successful merchant on the Reik, but he's an agreeable, affable fellow who has learned over the years to mind his own business. His small crew is unimaginative and dull, preferring to go about their own work without bothering any adventurers who happen to be on board.

Spule will purchase the Paradise from the PCs, if it comes to that, paying a third of the price of a new boat (about 200 gc) or whatever price the GM thinks is appropriate. Of course, if there is anything on the boat, undiscovered by the PCs, that implicates its previous owners in the worship of the Ruinous Powers, Spule will quickly report it (and the descriptions of those who sold it to him) to the authorities.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Stats for important NPCs are given here. Others - the wreckers, guards, and Heinrich Weikal (a pickpocket) should be drawn from the "Common NPCs" on pp. 233-235, WFRP.

Gunnar Krauthosen

Race: Human

Career: Witch Hunter (ex-Judicial Champion, ex-Mercenary, ex-Sergeant)

Main Profile							
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
67	61	43	50	55	41	63	49
Secondary Profile							
A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
3	17*	4	5	4	0	6	0

*Current Wounds: 0

Skills: Academic Knowledge (Magick, Theology); Animal Care; Charm; Command; Common Knowledge (The Empire) +10%; Intimidate +10%; Navigation; Outdoor Survival; Perception +20%; Ride +20%; Search +10%; Secret Language (Battle Tongue); Silent Move; Speak Arcane Language (Classical)

Talents: Marksman; Public Speaking; Quick Draw; Rain of Blows; Scary; Seasoned Traveler; Sixth Sense; Specialist Weapon Group (Crossbow, Fencing, Gunpowder, Parrying, Throwing, Two-Handed); Street Fighting; Strike Mighty Blow; Strike to Stun

Armor: Chain Shirt, Leather Jack, Leather Leggings (Head 0, Arms 1, Body 3, Legs 1)

Weapons: War Hammer

Trappings: Good Craftsmanship Clothes; Tatty Hat; Overcoat; Holy Symbol (Hammer)

Hermann Von Barbe

Race: Human

Career: Journeyman Wizard (Ex-Apprentice Wizard; Ex-Entertainer)

Main Profile							
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
31	41	33	31	44	46	56	50
Secondary Profile							
A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
1	12	3	3	5	2	5	0

Skills: Academic Knowledge (Magick); Animal Care; Charm +10%; Common Knowledge (The Empire) +10%; Gossip +10%; Perception +10%; Blather, Channeling +19%; Magical Sense; Performer (Actor); Performer (Singer); Read/Write; Speak Arcane Language (Classical); Speak Arcane Language (Magic)

Talents: Mimic; Public Speaking; Aetheric Attunement; Lesser Magic; Petty Magic (Arcane); Arcane Lore (Shadow); Fast Hands; Meditation

Armor: Leather Jerkin (Head 0, Arms 0, Body 1, Legs 0)

Weapons: Dagger

Trappings: Comedic Sigmar Costume (Best Craftsmanship Clothes); 138 Crowns; Riverboat (The Paradise) and contents.

Leopold Magnus

Race: Human

Career: Outlaw (Ex-Rogue; Ex-Entertainer)

Main Profile							
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
41	47	34	32	45	33	30	32
Secondary Profile							
A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
2	15	3	3	4	0	3	0

Skills: Swim; Blather; Charm +10%; Common Knowledge (The Empire); Evaluate +10%; Perception +10%; Performer (Actor); Performer (Juggler) +10%; Search; Sleight of Hand

Talents: Quick Draw; Specialist Weapon Group (Throwing); Flee!; Sixth Sense; Public Speaking

Armor: Leather Jack (Head 0, Arms 1, Body 1; Legs 1)

Weapons: Throwing Daggers (8)

Trappings: Comedic Scribe Costume; 18 Crowns.

Fran Poppenbutel

Race: Human

Career: Thief (Ex-Entertainer)

Main Profile							
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
35	41	27	34	51	35	32	54
Secondary Profile							
A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
1	15	2	3	4	0	2	0

Skills: Animal Care; Charm +10%; Common Knowledge (The Empire); Evaluate; Perception +10%; Performer (Acrobat); Performer (Actor); Scale Sheer Surface +10%; Concealment; Disguise; Pick Lock; Silent Move

Talents: Lightning Reflexes; Quick Draw; Alley Cat; Trapfinder; Contortionist

Armor: Leather Jerkin (Head 0; Arms 0; Body 1; Legs 0)

Weapons: Rapier

Trappings: Comedic Deamonette Costume; 23 Crowns; Silver Anklet.

Rutgar Heltstrom

Race: Human

Career: Entertainer (Ex-Seaman)

Main Profile							
WS	BS	S	T	Ag	Int	WP	Fel
50	34	47	32	35	21	29	38
Secondary Profile							
A	W	SB	TB	M	Mag	IP	FP
2	15	4	3	4	0	2	0

Skills: Common Knowledge (The Wasteland); Consume Alcohol; Dodge Blow; Row; Sail; Swim; Charm; Gossip; Perception; Performer (Actor); Charm Animal

Talents: Street Fighting; Seasoned Traveler; Strike Mighty Blow; Public Speaking; Wrestling

Armor: Mail Shirt (Head 0; Arms 0; Body 2; Legs 0)

Weapons: Hand Weapon (Axe)

Trappings: Burgher's Garb (Good Craftsmanship Clothes); 2 Crowns; Furry Hat.