



✿ Ring of Deceit ✿

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'I spend my life searching for amorous barmaids, now I am to be paid to do this?'

From the day his father, a nobleman, died and left him with the family fortune, Ingi displayed an ability to get himself into trouble. A compulsive gambler and womanizer, he spent more time indulging his vices than to seeing to the needs of his people. After several poor growing seasons and dwindling trade added to Bailzow's difficulties, murmurs of unrest began to grow into cries of rebellion. Knowing little about the details of running a community, Ingi became desperate. So, when an attractive witch named Yrsa offered him the solution to all his problems, he jumped at the opportunity without much consideration. The pair married and Yrsa took over all matters-of-state. With her skills of diplomacy, stewardship, and magic, she brought the region back from the brink of ruin. Ingi was delighted. That is until his affair with a merchant's daughter.

In a jealous rage, Yrsa transformed the girl into an apple tree and had her planted on the front lawn of the manse. Ingi was allowed a reprieve, but informed quite plainly that he would die a slow and hideous death if he ever touched another woman. Over the next couple of years, Ingi practiced the art of groveling to placate his dangerous wife.

Time passed and Yrsa became increasingly involved in diplomacy and magical study. Ingi became a virtual figurehead, delegated to entertaining guests but little more. Thanks to all his free time and new inflow of money, he never complained. To his credit, he was able to stay faithful to his wife for quite some time. Until he met Tinna.

The pair became lovers the first night they met. Afterwards, Ingi swore the girl to secrecy and bribed her with gifts and money. Greedy to a fault and needing to pay off her older brother's debts, Tinna accepted these offerings and maintained the clandestine relationship. As the months wore on, her avarice got the best of her. She no longer wished to be a simple barmaid and mistress. She wanted to be a noblewoman. More and more, she began pressing Ingi to annul his marriage. He refused.

In retaliation, Tinna stole several pieces of jewelry from Yrsa's collection, including a gold ring. She intended to blackmail Ingi into following her instructions, threatening to reveal the affair if he didn't agree to her demands. The jewelry would be used as evidence of their illicit relationship. Unfortunately for herself, the treacherous barmaid didn't realize the true nature of what she'd taken. In her earlier years, Yrsa had assisted the Arch Mage Gilgad to capture Notarka, a deranged magician.¹ Rather than killing him,² they imprisoned his mind inside a golden ring ... the very ring that Tinna had stolen.

Still aware of his surroundings, Notarka had found a way by which he would eventually get free of his prison. During his incarceration, not only had he contacted his vat creatures, the Hooded Ones, he learned how to influence weak minded people who came into physical contact with the ring. Tinna, charming as she undoubtedly is, is also weak minded and easily swayed, hence she had little defense to the blandishments of the insane wizard. He convinced her to go into hiding, thus providing him more time to gain full control over her body. Also, his vat creatures would eventually track him down. She went into hiding in her late brother's hide out, a few miles from Bailzow.

Meanwhile, Notarka's vat creatures had finally arrived in Bailzow. Unaware of their master's true location, they were drawn to the strongest aura of magic; namely Yrsa and Ingi's manse. Fortunately for Ingi, Yrsa was off conducting research when the Hooded Ones arrived. They inquired about the ring, but Ingi vehemently denied knowing of its existence. Perplexed, the Hooded Ones left and began searching the town and the surrounding countryside.

1. Gossip maintains that this is the normal type of magician, something that I personally feel unable to comment upon.

2. For some reason killing another mage seems to be frowned upon amongst mages. Perhaps they feel that one could develop a taste for it, perhaps they merely find the idea unimaginative. Whatever the reason, mages prefer to humiliate and shackle their opponents rather than merely killing them.

You can understand why Ingi was now near panic. Hence when he noticed several strangers in town he decided to hire them to find Tinna and retrieve the ring. This he would do by offering a generous amount of money for their services. As new faces to the community, they won't raise his wife's suspicions. They would also make excellent scapegoats later on; after all, who were people more likely to believe—a nobleman or a bunch of ruffians?³



Overview

The Characters have stopped in the small town of Bailzow to obtain supplies and take a much-needed break from the rigors of the road. While enjoying all that the town has to offer⁴ they are contacted by the hereditary mayor, Seignior Ingi. He wants them to retrieve his wife's ring from a thief called Tinna. At the moment, his wife is away on business but will return in three days. He needs to get the ring back before then for personal reasons. He will offer to pay handsomely for the ring's retrieval. Ingi is not above threatening the Characters should they refuse his offer; after all he is the Mayor: his word is law.

The majority of the adventure focuses on tracking Tinna down. This can be accomplished by speaking with the locals and acquiring information as to her whereabouts through guile, threats, bribes, or other means. Once she is located they will have to retrieve the ring from her. This isn't as easy as one might think because Notarka, a powerful and insane mage, currently dominates her mind. Notarka's minions are also searching for the ring, and will, if necessary, kill anyone who comes in contact with it. Art⁵ demands that they will show up at the most importune moment to rescue their master. This scenario should give players new to the Dying Earth ample opportunity to practice their skills in suasion while the presence of Notarka's minions offer the chance of combat to those more used to less sophisticated role playing games.

As if the Characters didn't have enough trouble already, Ingi has no intention of wasting good money paying them. When they finally give the ring to him, he refuses to pay and tries to chase them out of town. Yrsa, Ingi's wife and a powerful witch, returns to Bailzow early only to make the situation that much more desperate.

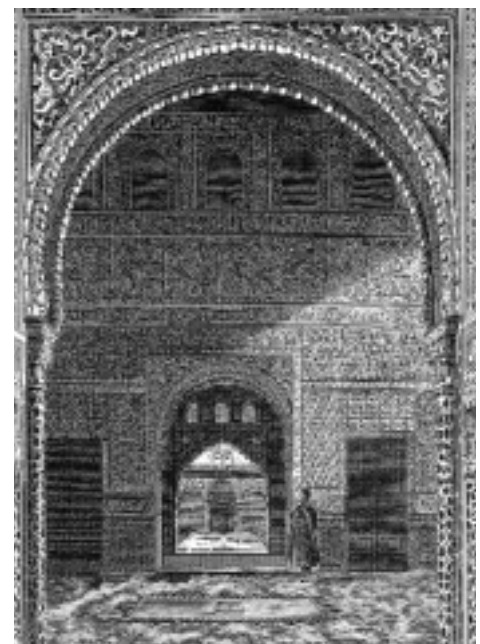


The Setting

Bailzow is the population and economic center of a small fiefdom. The town consists of almost one hundred single-story buildings facing the main road. Far removed from the major trade routes, the citizens have always tended toward self-sufficiency. The majority of commerce revolves around agriculture. Prabaser's brontotaubus is the most common domesticated animal popular for its succulent meat. The brewing of beer is another popular trade as inebriation is the primary local pastime. This township can be placed on any unimportant side road in your on-going adventures.

On a low hill overlooking Bailzow is the mayor's residence, Grast Hall. Due to Ingi's mismanagement of the family fortune, this three-story keep has become run down. The top floor has been abandoned for years, and currently serves as a rookery. The dungeons have been converted into Yrsa's laboratories, including her vats (which are currently inoperable). Most visitors see the main hall, a garishly decorated chamber built for

THIS CUGEL-LEVEL SCENARIO is specifically created beginners using the Quick Start rules although it can obviously be played with the full rules. With a little manipulation it can also be used as the beginning or part of an on-going series. There are enough details and adventure hooks to turn Bailzow into a regular part of your campaign.



The main hall

3. This perhaps shows Ingi at his least perceptive. He perhaps should have asked, "Who was a suspicious wife to believe, her husband or virtually anyone else?"

4. Which cynics say probably takes a full twenty minutes.

5. Art or the whim of the GM.

large gatherings. Only recently have repairs been made to the building at Yrsa's insistence. She has added a more elegant touch, bringing in silks and paintings to decorate the otherwise gloomy castle. In front of the manse is a tall, twisted apple tree (the current form of Ingi's last mistress). Whenever someone walks by it, they can hear a pleading moan. If they examine the tree, delicate feminine features can be detected in the bark.

Behind the building is a beautiful garden, including an intricate hedge-maze. These are Yrsa's pride and joy; the plants possessing a feral sentience.

Tinkzim's Burrow is the local inn, and the second largest building in the town. Tshaya, a round and boisterous woman, owns and operates the establishment. The Burrow offers just about everything; gambling, potentially attractive female company, lodging, and the best food and drink in the region. There is a large brew house to the rear of the building, which works day and night. It is rare that the bar is completely empty, no matter what the hour. A few brawny fellows, Tshaya's sons, make sure the inn remains safe for its patrons and they might be considered excessive in their enforcement of the rules. One of the "permanent" residents of the inn is the local bard, Swato. He can be always found somewhere in the main room, engaged in a game of cards or singing for money.

Marhim's is the town's other drinking establishment. Virtually the opposite of the Burrow, it is dirty, cheap, and dangerous. Only the desperate and deranged come here for the girls. The big attraction is the arena in its basement. Patrons bet on no-rules fighting matches or settle grudges with one another for sport. Fatalities are rare, but have been known to happen. Corpses are typically disposed of by the local brontotabus farmers (which may be why their livestock are so plump).

The town's dentist, (apothecary, barber-surgeon and tooth-puller), Delcancer, owns the place. His lavish (by town standards) house and office are directly across the street from Marhime. He has all the ingredients needed for the care and treatment of most injuries and ailments. As an apothecary, Delcancer on occasion meets with Yrsa to discuss herbs and medicinal concoctions. He is also the local moneylender, offering moneys to anyone willing to pay his frightening interest rates. Should a person be unwilling or unable to pay, his thugs remove a limb or two as compensation for his losses. These, in turn, he sells to Yrsa and other magicians who dabble in this trade for their experimental needs.

The Town Hall is a large brick building with a steeple and bell. It serves as the town meeting place as well as the chapel. Few, if any, ever attend the services to a nondescript municipal deity. During the winter, some of the locals will retreat to this building to live out the worst storms.

Chamin's Feed is another popular locale. Numerous farmers can be found here, talking about the harvest and who owns the best brontotabi. The owner, Chamin, could well be one of the last honorable men left on the Dying Earth. His rates are very fair and he always makes an honest deal.⁶ The establishment has everything needed by farmer and traveler alike. In a modest set of stables in the back there are normally healthy animals ready for purchase. Just behind Chamin's Feed is a wide square filled with wooden stalls. This is the Market. On any given day, dozens of farmers and traders can be found selling their wares. Traders never make this market a destination, but many passing through will set up their stall for a day. Hence it is possible to introduce into the episode any trader you wish. Indeed even the infamous Durma Cloattes has been known to peddle her trinkets here from time to time, especially if her clientele in Kaiin has become jaded of her sundry knickknacks.

In the center of town sits the Paramitsha Fountain. Carved from a single piece of pink marble, it is believed to be the last remnant of an ancient city. Its true origins have been forgotten aeons ago. All that is known about it that the fountain always runs, even during severe droughts. In the winter months, the water never freezes. For these reasons, as well as the water's purity, the town's folk use this as their main source of water. Recently, Yrsa has been consulting with one Borkgrimgag (*aka* Thrumpgan), an itinerant treasure hunter and savant, about the fountain. She is curious if he might have information regarding what civilization the monument comes from and what properties it may possess.⁷

Weapons and heavy metalwork can be purchased from the Blacksmith. The blacksmith herself, Nisred, is an attractive and talented woman. She can fashion or repair just about anything metallic. Her business focuses mostly on farming equipment, but her true skill is the almost lost craft of weapon smithing. It is rumored that in the right hands some of her swords can cut through stone.

6. This ostentatious honesty should reduce your players to rampant paranoia.

7. If characters have encountered this individual previously the GM may wish to give them an opportunity to renew this acquaintance, for good or ill.

The remainder of the town consists of residences and minor shops. For the most part, the town is poor and shows it in the low quality of its housing. As a general rule, the wealthier people live nearest the town center and upwind of the slaughterhouse and tannery.



The People of Bailzow (GMCs)

This is by no means a list of all the important characters the Characters could encounter during their stay in Bailzow. These are the key GMCs involved in the search for the ring. Adjust them as you see fit, or allow them to provide information not listed in their description should the Characters really need the help. How the Characters get the information out of the GMCs is really up to them, be it threats, cajoling, or bribery. Some role-playing tips have been included to help you portray these townspeople more effectively.

Delcancer: dentist and moneylender

A squat toad of a man, as round as he is tall, Delcancer has been serving as the town's dentist, apothecary, and physician for decades. Many people cross to the other side of the street when they see him walking towards them. He is always wearing the latest fashions,⁸ and flaunts his wealth and power whenever he can. He is skilled in the arts of healing as well as being an expert in inflicting pain. Greedy beyond imagining, he runs a very successful money lending operation in addition to his drinking den and more professional (and legitimate) business. Nothing delights him more than when a person can't pay their bills. To make up for his losses, Delcancer has the guilty party dragged in so he can remove as many teeth and/or limbs necessary to make up the difference (some magicians pay a hefty price for such "raw materials"). He also runs illegal fights in the basement of his dive, which in turn creates more business for his surgery. Thanks to his nefarious connections, there is little criminal activity going on in Bailzow that Delcancer is unaware of. He also has dealings with the local brontotaubus farmers, some of whom help him dispose of bothersome bodies. He is not unknown in nearby cities, and his name is spoken of in certain circles with both fear and respect.

ROLE-PLAYING TIPS: Delcancer is a perverted version of your local dentist. He is cunning, ruthless, and darkly mad. Lick your lips and slur your words a lot. From time to time, tell people what lovely fingers or teeth they have. If allowed, squeeze your Characters' arms or legs, and nod in knowing approval. Being in Delcancer's presence should make your Characters want to bathe afterwards.

Note: Delcancer possesses several pieces of Yrsa's jewelry, thanks to Tinna. He will not part with them except under dire circumstances. He has enough bodyguards to make taking the jewelry by force inadvisable.

Information he can pass on:

- ✦ Yrsa is a witch, and a very skilled one at that. She runs the entire town, using Ingi as a figurehead;
- ✦ Tinna's brother owed Delcancer a large amount of money. After he died, the debt transferred to Tinna;
- ✦ Tinna recently came into a great deal of money. Over several months, she has succeeded in paying off her brother's debts;
- ✦ Tinna recently paid the last installment of her brother's loan using jewelry. She seemed rather casual about the whole thing, as if her mind wasn't on the task at hand;
- ✦ Tinna's late brother ran a smuggling operation. His hideout was in a farmhouse a few miles outside of town. If Tinna is missing, she has perhaps gone there.

Abilities: Intimidating 10; Wary 10; Cautious 6; Intuition 7; Health 9

Skills: Appraisal 6; Gambling 4; Physician 11; Scuttlebutt 10; Stewardship 6

8. Fashions tend to ape Kaiin, but are often a year or more later. Thus fashionable travelers will be quizzed on what is being worn and how.

Nisred: the blacksmith

Much to her parent's horror, Nisred never wanted to become a lady of quality. Although of noble birth, the tall, well-built beauty⁹ preferred the company of the folk clustered around the forge to that of the high court, and had an abiding passion for weapons and metalworking. Before her parents could force her to become a noble's wife, Nisred fled to make her way in the harsh world. With keen determination, she gained an apprenticeship with a blacksmith. Her skills matured until she was a craftswoman of great renown. Rather than making an easy living in the city, she traveled to the small town of Bailzow to set up her shop. She has been there ever since, living her dream.

Information:

- Nisred rented a room (located behind the shop) to Tinna. Tinna hasn't been there for several days and her things are missing;
- Tinna's brother was a smuggler and ran into financial trouble with Delcancer some time back;
- Tinna acquired some land after her brother's death. There is only a ruined farmhouse on the property,
- Tinna has had a mystery man in her room on several occasions. They would always go inside under the cover of darkness and try to be as quiet as possible while "enjoying themselves." Nisred never bothered trying to discover who the man really was;
- Recently, a group of incredibly ugly men came to her shop to ask about rings. Unnerved by their otherworldly nature, she set them on their way without any information; and
- Tinna and Nisred are no longer civil after arguing about the concept of nobility. Tinna was infatuated with the thought of being a noblewoman and said she would soon become one.

Abilities: Fortright 8; Contrary 8; Strength 10; Parry 8; Health 11

Skills: Athletics 10; Craftsmanship 13; Engineering 5; Living Rough 3;

Stewardship 6; Wherewithal 6

ROLE-PLAYING TIPS: Nisred is brusque and very matter-of-fact. She prefers the company of craftspeople and can't stand anyone even resembling nobility. The only time she will warm to a person is if they talk about the trade. Constantly wipe your brow with your arm to simulate the heat of the forge.

Chamin: feed store owner and animal physician

If Bailzow had a conscience, Chamin would personify it. An old man, this stalwart has been running his feed store as long as anyone can remember. He may also be the most honest person left on the Dying Earth. Prizing himself on dealing fairly with his patrons, Chamin has acquired a loyal following. Most would stop at nothing to help him, even in these unpleasant times. It is said that people in Bailzow don't set their clocks by the sun, but by Chamin's comings and goings. He is always at his store, unless doing his daily run to drop off feed to the local farms. He has considerable empathy with animals calming them as well as treating their ailments.

Information:

- If it weren't for Yrsa, this town would have blown away with the dust;
- Ingi had an affair once. The day after his wife found out, the mistress disappeared and a weirdly shaped tree was planted in front of Grast Hall;
- Nisred rents Tinna a room;
- Nisred and Tinna had a falling out of late ("The poor dears");
- Tinna's brother was involved with something unsavory;
- A year ago he saw several unfamiliar carts parked near an abandoned farmhouse just outside of town; and
- There have been some strange-looking fellows sneaking about at night. They wear black, hooded robes and have glowing eyes.

ROLE-PLAYING TIPS: Pleasant to a fault, he is always willing to help and radiates a feeling of trust and calm about him. When speaking for him, always ask the Characters if there's anything you can do for them, making certain they're alright. When he has to speak badly of someone (typically Ingi), he always begins with, "Well, I don't mean to speak ill of anyone, but ..."

9. It has to be admitted that beauty lies in the eye of the beholder. If the lady in question holds a newly-finished blade in one hand and a lump hammer in the other, who is going to query this or cast doubt on her attractiveness?

Abilities: Charming 9; Pure-hearted 10; Strength 10; Sure-footedness 6; Health 8

Skills: Appraisal 3; Craftsmanship 5; Living Rough 8; Riding 10; Scuttlebutt 8; Stewardship 8

Ingi: The mayor and Yrsa's husband

Seignior Ingi inherited the fiefdom of Bailzow when his father died of consumption. No matter how his father tried, he failed to turn his spoilt brat into a successful heir. The land was left in the hands of a crass fool who'd rather spend his money on ale than keep his home intact. It was not long before the entire region wavered on the verge of revolt because of mismanagement. Even then, Ingi blamed all his woes on everyone else, then drank himself into a stupor. Just before the local farmers hung him from a convenient tree, a stroke of luck arrived in the elegant form of Yrsa. In exchange for marriage, the wise and skilled witch helped put the fiefdom back together again. Ingi was ecstatic and returned to his old ways, leaving the matters of state to Yrsa. He quickly found out that she wouldn't allow his misdemeanors to stain the reputation of their union. Finding himself a prisoner in his own fiefdom, Ingi sank into a pit of self-pity. Only recently has he had the courage to go against his wife's wishes and restart his life of debauchery. This, of course, led to his current predicament.

Information:

Ingi is relatively ill-informed when it comes to the world. He is too self-absorbed to know the causes of what's going on around him. For this reason Tinna's disappearance has left him confounded. All he can tell the Characters is that Tinna stole some jewelry which his wife was very fond of. Should the characters ask how Tinna gained access he will deny any wrong doing and explain her away as a temporary housekeeper.

Abilities: Charming 12; Obtuse 10; Cunning 11; Parry 10; Health 14

Skills: Etiquette 5; Gambling 10; Quick Fingers 3; Concealment 4; Scuttlebutt 8; Seduction 5; Appraisal 5

ROLE-PLAYING TIPS: Work offends Ingi, and he'll always take the path of least resistance. If he could, he'd spend his entire life gambling, drinking, and looking good. Egotistical in the extreme, he is always trying to fulfill his pleasures no matter the cost. Be rude and obnoxious, but act as if you think that you're the most charming person on the Dying Earth. Think of the worst, most spoiled, 'rich-kid' you've ever met, and you have Ingi. But no matter how stupid his actions, up until now Ingi has always come out of the situation with his hide intact.

Notarka: the trapped magician

Before his entrapment in a ring, Notarka was a megalomaniac¹⁰ wizard. When he gained real power, his mind finally plunged over the edge into pure insanity. Wishing to reshape the world in his image, he began raising an army of vat creatures and humans loyal to his cause.¹¹ Like most tyrants, he overestimated his own power. Notarka angered a powerful Arch-mage, Gilgad, who was irritated by his antics. Gilgad tracked the chaotic mage down and seeking an easy way to overcome him, Gilgad enlisted the aid of the beautiful witch Yrsa. In exchange for Vojnomir's training and protection, Yrsa seduced Notarka and placed a magical ring on him; one of Gilgad's design. Before Notarka realized he had been betrayed, Yrsa spoke the words of incantation and activated the ring. The ring's power ripped Notarka's soul from his body and trapped it in the ring. He has been there ever since, desperately trying to get out. He has realized that the wards on the ring do not prevent him from slowly influencing weak minds should they come into contact with his miniature home. Being locked away in Yrsa's jewelry box for decades, this did him little good. This recently changed after Tinna stole the ring. Now he has limited control of the girl and is plotting an eventual escape.

Information: Other than the information in his own past, Notarka knows nothing useful and has no interest at all in the petty concerns of lesser folk.

Abilities: Because of his disembodied state, Notarka can only use certain abilities, and even then only when in physical

ROLE-PLAYING TIPS: There won't be much chance to role-play Notarka because of his current situation. He is completely insane and power-hungry. He believes himself superior to everyone, and reminds people of that fact constantly. Laugh at your own witticisms, even ones that don't make any sense. Threaten, browbeat, and insult the Characters whenever you can.

10. This is an occupational hazard and most mages seem to succumb to some degree.

11. With the sun about to flicker out, this was taken as absolute proof of his madness.

contact with a weak minded person (Rebuff of 4 or less). The only important abilities to note are Obfuscatory 13; Obtuse 12; Magic (Forceful) 5 (or 12 when freed).

Skills: N/A

Spells: Notarka's magical skills are limited in his current form. Although he knows all the simple spells listed in the Quick Rules (and more), he has expended his remaining memorized spells by the time the Characters encounter him.

Swato: the bard

This young man is a handsome rogue with a shock of red head. Despite missing both his legs, he makes a fair living as a bard. The son of a pig-farmer, Swato dreamed of something more than life on the farm. Having a talent for stories and an ear for music, he left home to become a traveling musician. He got about as far as town. Once at the Tinkzim's Burrow, he settled in as an entertainer. He did well for himself in the beginning, but a love of drink and cards soon led him into trouble. Before he knew it, Swato owed Delcancer a large sum of money in the form of gambling debts. He was unable to collect enough money in time and the moneylender took Swato's legs as reimbursement. Ever since, the bard has been living at the Tinkzim's Burrow as a permanent feature (so to speak).

Information:

- Tinna has been muttering about being the mayor's wife for weeks. Funny that when you consider Ingi is still married;
- Ingi has been asking about Tinna of late, appearing rather flustered;
- Yrsa is a witch, and a jealous one at that. When her husband cheated on her the last time, she turned the mistress into a tree. Why she hasn't killed Ingi yet is anyone's guess;
- Delcancer had a debt hanging over Tinna's head for ages after her brother died. Somehow she's paid it off;
- Tinna's brother had a secret hideout where he hid the goods he smuggled;
- If anyone knows about illicit activities in Bailzow, it's Delcancer;
- The town is run by Yrsa, no matter what Ingi says; and
- Chamin can be trusted with your life and always knows about the goings-on in Bailzow.

ROLE-PLAYING TIPS: Losing your legs was the best thing that happened to you. At least, that's what you say when you've got enough money for ale. You're the life of the party and can be found raising the roof with one of your risqué songs. The working girls adore you, so you're rarely lonely. You love life and people, and know the darkest secrets of everyone in Bailzow. He will occasionally compare himself to the almost forgotten singer Junispan, and will quote the last lines "Sad Gorodas, ground hugging, tree crowned, God fearing and erb-haunted, seen once from the boat and as soon forgotten". Characters may even consider that this short verse has some relevance to their situation. Do not disabuse them of this delightful misconception.

Abilities: Eloquent 11; Penetrating 8; Cunning 4; Vexation 6; Health 7.

Skills: Concealment 5; Etiquette 6; Gambling 9; Pedantry 10; Perception 5; Quick Fingers 7; Seduction 4; Stealth 4

Tinna: barmaid, mistress, and thief.

The apple didn't fall very far from the tree with Tinna. Her family has been a thorn in Bailzow's side for generations. Her parents were hung for thievery when she was hardly ten. Her brother sold her to Tshaya in order to pay off his bar tab. At first she worked as a scullery maid, but soon moved up to the illustrious level of prostitute. During her career, Tshaya attempted to teach her from the writings of eroticists like Casfagecas, Jorpenpodle, and Vrazizardlam. All she really learned was that carrying the books around made her appear more intelligent. When she wasn't "entertaining," Tinna worked the tables as a serving girl. This is how she met Ingi. Sensing the chance for advancement, she planted an aphrodisiac in Ingi's ale¹² and seduced him thanks to his suggestible state. When he begged her not to reveal their affair, she agreed, knowing that it would provide her leverage over the noble. The relationship progressed and provided her with increased wealth, which helped her considerably. Her brother, a smuggler by trade, had died during a duel,

12. She used a version of Vrazizardlams' Reliable engager of affections. A simple process, one merely chants the incantation over something that the object of your affections will drink. There are no embarrassing problems with strange tastes and off flavors. Unfortunately should you inadvertently inverted the stress on the second and sixth syllables then you will be treated with only the most distant and formal affection. If you invert the stress on the third and seventh syllables then the caster of the spell falls deeply in lover with the target of the spell.

leaving behind an enormous debt to Delcancer. He came to her for payment of her late brothers debts, informing her which of her limbs would be suitable compensation. Desperate, she began forcing Ingi into giving her more money. Her greed and fear soon turned into envy, and she demanded that he divorce his wife and marry her. After Ingi refused, she stole Yrsa's jewelry, paid off Delcancer with most of it, and kept the remainder as blackmail material. Before her plan could succeed, her mind was taken over by something evil living in the gold ring she took.



*ROLE-PLAYING TIPS: Tinna has the personality of a stunned sheep. Play with your hair a lot and be shocked by the simplest discoveries ("Ingi doesn't like me any more? Oh ... brontotabus droppings!") *insert annoying weeping noises*). Female players will probably hate Tinna after the first five minutes of contact. She's greedy and slow to grasp new ideas. Her blackmail idea came during a rare burst of genius. This doesn't make her any less dangerous, and she does know how to survive if need be. While under the Notarka's influence, Tinna potentially becomes a cunning and deadly opponent.*

Information: Other than the information about her blackmail scheme and the affair with Ingi, Tinna's only other important contribution has to do with the ring. She will say that something "evil" lives inside of it and talks to her. She thinks it must be a "witch's thingie or something."

Abilities: Eloquent 10; Wary 3; Finesse 6; Misdirection 7; Health 8

Skills: Appraisal 4; Athletics 3; Seduction 10; Stewardship 4; Quick Fingers 5; Concealment 2

Tshaya: owner of *The Tinkzim's Burrow*

Tshaya has always been a self-made woman. After her husband died in a tragic brewing accident, she took over *The Tinkzim's Burrow*. Now she runs the bar/brothel/inn with the help of her well-fed sons. A workaholic, she is constantly fussing about, making certain that every aspect of her business is running smoothly. Under her careful management, the Burrow has become the social center of Bailzow. Thanks to her success, she has begun planning to expand the business even further. Her skills at brewing are spoken of throughout the region, and many travelers come to the town just to try the beer. She had Tinna in her employment for years, much to Tshaya's regret. She unerringly tried to coax Tinna into opening her eyes to the real world, but it is like talking to a wall. Instead, she was reduced to shouting at the girl to get anything done. Frankly Tshaya is more relieved than worried at Tinna's disappearance.

ROLE-PLAYING TIPS: You're bigger than life and twice as large. Tshaya is smart, witty, boisterous, and incredibly industrious. Her personality is intoxicating, and soon anyone that meets her, loves her. Laugh a lot, slap people on the shoulders, and make sure they have enough to drink between telling naughty

Information:

- ✦ Tinna used to work for her, but disappeared recently. Tshaya has no idea where;
- ✦ Tinna and Swato talked a great deal, usually in secret;
- ✦ Tshaya bought Tinna from her brother, a local ruffian;
- ✦ Ingi is not to be trusted. He's a no-good snake that should have been strangled at birth to save the town the all misery he's brought to it;
- ✦ Yrsa is the best thing to happen to Bailzow. She's a shrewd and intelligent woman. Why Yrsa ever married Ingi is beyond her; and ...
- ✦ Tinna moved out of her room at the inn some time ago. Rumor is that it was because of either a man or money problems, maybe both.

Abilities: Fortright 9; Penetrating 10; Ferocity 7; Sure-footedness 7; Health 10

Skills: Brewing 13; Engineering 6; Scuttlebutt 10; Stewardship 10

Note: The skill of Brewing simply allows the character to create alcoholic beverages, especially ale and beer.

Yrsa: witch and Ingi's wife

Although a witch of notable skill, Yrsa has had a difficult time getting to where she is today. So far she has been able to avoid the anger of the arch-mages because of an arrangement she made with Gilgad. In exchange for helping him capture Notarka, Yrsa was allowed autonomy so long as she did not adopt too high a profile. Together, they were able to seal Notarka's mind into a ring. This remained in Yrsa's possession as proof of her deal with Gilgad, and as a potential bargaining chip if one were ever needed. She immediately started looking for a place to settle and conduct her magical experiments. An opportunity arose when she encountered Ingi, a disgruntled noble. It was not difficult to sway him into marrying her, offering her beauty and wisdom in exchange for his wealth and status¹³. Now with a foundation from which to build, she quickly strengthened the local economy, weeded out Ingi's more unsavory friends, and created her laboratory. Ever since, she has been involved solely in her work, rarely coming out of her books and research to fix whatever problem her husband has managed to get himself into. Only once has she had to force the fool back into line. He'd become enamored with the pouty-faced daughter of a local merchant. Not wishing a scandal to disrupt her world, Yrsa disposed of the girl and browbeat Ingi into submission. Ever since, she has been keeping an eye on him. Currently, she has been working to get her vats operational, and this has become the main focus of her efforts. Her love of flowers and trees has greatly influenced her magical study, and a great deal of her research focuses on this passion. She will be engaged in a meeting of the minds with her connections to the Cobalt Mountain Witches, Isapinai and Ulanke, during most of the adventure, until her early return.

ROLE-PLAYING TIPS: Yrsa is a practical woman, using anything and everything to her advantage. While a naturally pleasant person, if she feels she is being lied to she might be the most terrifying force the Characters encounter. Her rage knows no bounds, and she is likely to dispose of anyone she considers a threat without hesitation. Strangely, she has a jealous streak in her, even though she holds Ingi in some contempt. Her patience is coming to an end with regards to her husband. Indeed if she can further her goals without the continued need for Ingi's presence, she will probably dispense with him.

Information: None. At the moment, Yrsa is totally unaware of what is going on.

Abilities: Intimidating 12; Lawyerly 13; Ferocity 9; Dodge 9; Health 12; Magic (Devious) 11

Skills: Pedantry 6; Etiquette 3; Physician 10; Scuttlebutt 2; Stewardship 10; Appraisal 6

Spells: Feel free to add whatever spells you want to Yrsa. Most will focus on transformation and the manipulation of plants (including a spell that turns people into trees).

Minor GMCs

The Hooded Ones

The Hooded Ones are Notarka's vat creatures. They dress in black, hooded robes and typically skulk about in their never-ending quest to retrieve their master. Their master's love of non-figurative artwork has influenced the creation of his minions. As such, their faces are all twisted and malformed much like a Maot block painting. When they die, they immediately dissolve into a pile of stinking pigments. While not mindless, they focus entirely upon the task of getting their master back; even to the risk of their own lives.

Abilities: Glib 4; Obtuse 5; Cautious 9; Misdirection 9; Health 11

Skills: Stealth 10; Tracking 9; Wherewithal 8



13. To be honest, Ingi would have married anyone who could save him from the hang man's noose. The fact that Yrsa is attractive and has a pleasant personality merely sugared a bitter pill.

General Ruffians

These could just as easily be Tshaya's sons, Delcancer's bodyguards, or Ingi's thugs. Each one is very much like the other; only the names and appearances differ.

Abilities: Intimidating 6; Contrary 6; Finesse 8; Parry 8; Health 10

Skills: Vary from person to person.



Episode Outline

The Offer

The Characters are relaxing in the small town of Bailzow, weary from their current travels. As they are enjoying some of the benefits the town has to offer, a weasel of a man (Glusmin) approaches them. He introduces himself as the servant of the town's mayor, Seignior Ingi. The mayor wishes to speak with them, as they are strangers in this land. Fine wine and good food will be served at his manor when they arrive. If pressed, Glusmin will reveal that the mayor is very anxious to meet them and that money may be involved. His knowledge of the nature of Ingi's request doesn't extend further than that.

The meeting with Ingi is a rousing affair as the noble is an excellent, albeit boisterous, host. Unaccustomed to having company, he intends to show off and befriend the Characters. After the Characters have filled their bellies, drunk their fill, and lost several rounds of cards, Ingi will offer them a proposition. He informs them that a local girl named Tinna recently robbed his estate. She stole several items of his wife's jewelry, including a gold ring. He needs these items retrieved for him within three days, before his wife returns home. He stresses that the ring (a purely sentimental token) is of the utmost importance. Ingi can't go into the details, but he informs the Characters that this needs to be done as quietly as possible. If the girl happens to fall onto a sharp object in the process so much the better. In exchange for their services, Ingi will pay for their stay in Bailzow and provide each of them with 500 terces once the ring is returned. He is willing to barter, mostly because he is desperate, and allows the Characters to take advantage of his generosity. The final price will not matter, as Ingi has no intention of paying it. As the night closes, Ingi suggests the Characters talk to some of the townspeople about Tinna. They might know where she has disappeared to. A good start might be Tshaya, the owner of Tinkzim's Burrow and Tinna's former employer.

The Search & the Hooded Ones

From this point there are no real set events. Progression will depend on who the Characters speak with and how they follow up that information. They should eventually be pointed to Delcancer or Gemile, who in turn might point them to Tinna's current hiding spot. Feel free to add whatever information you feel is required to assist the Characters in their inquiry. Use the GMCs details as a guideline, not as the rule. There are plenty of opportunities for subplots to grow from these interactions. NB Remember to keep track of the time they spend doing their search. Ingi's timetable is incorrect, and Yrsa will return in two days, not three.

Like people everywhere, the townspeople of Bailzow are generally suspicious of outsiders, which may create a problem for Characters. This poor attitude will only worsen if they discover that the Characters are working for the mayor (Ingi is not a popular fellow).

Feel free to add a penalty to their rolls if the Characters act in an offensive manner. As they wander about the town, the Characters will be followed by one of Notarka's minions, curious about the group's affiliation with Ingi. Request that the Characters make sporadic Perception rolls. If they fail, let them go about their business as if nothing happened. A Dismal Failure could result in a PC being ambushed by a Hooded One should they happen to be alone. Should they succeed in their roll, provide them with the following information:

- ✦ *Hair's Breadth Success: The PC has the sneaking suspicion that they are being watched or followed. They cannot put their finger on the feeling or who might be responsible;*
- ✦ *Prosaic Success: The PC catches a fleeting glimpse of a figure in a black robe ducking behind cover. The person was obviously watching the group; and*

- ❖ *Illustrious Success: The PC sees a robed figure watching the group. They see the figure's face; which is inhuman and contorted. The figure will run away, but can be tracked if the Characters decide to pursue him.*

This figure is one of the Hooded Ones. Should it realize that the Characters have seen it, the creature will immediately flee. If the Characters pursue, conduct an Athletics contest; otherwise, the Hooded One gets away without a trace. Not wishing to endanger his companions, this Hooded One will try to lead the Characters on a wild-goose chase as far away as possible from the others. If the Characters catch up to it, the Hooded One will fight to the death. From this point forward, the Hooded Ones will be more careful in their observations ...

Tracking down Tinna

Tinna's hideout is a cave dug into a hill just outside of Bailzow. Once belonging to her brother, it was used as storage for his smuggling operations. Directed by Notarka's influence, she has been hiding there ever since she stole Yrsa's jewelry. Wisely paranoid, Tinna's brother installed a camouflaged, periscope-like, viewing glass into the top of the hill. With it, Tinna has had a 360-degree view of the countryside but it is possible to take advantage of natural cover to get relatively close without being seen. Unless the Characters take specific actions to hide their approach, Tinna will be prepared for their arrival (see below). Notarka's nervousness ensures that Tinna keeps a good look out.

From the outside, the hideaway appears to be an abandoned farmhouse with its rear wall built into the hillside. One wall is missing, as is part of the roof. The weather has rotted the brontotabus-hair-and-dung plaster off the walls and decaying shingles lie scattered on the weed-choked ground. Even on closer inspection, the dilapidated building appears deserted. The inside is a tangled mess of collapsed roof and broken furniture. There is a hidden door at the rear of the building. A successful Perception roll will help the Characters locate it. It leads to a rough-hewn corridor that descends into the hill. Behind the door, several bottles have been strung together. When the door is moved, they clatter together, thus warning the hideout's inhabitants. Another Perception roll will help spot this, and a successful Quick Fingers roll will help prevent this alarm from going off. The corridor itself leads down fifteen feet to an open archway. This in turn opens to a large room stacked to the vaulted ceiling with crates. The only light comes from small oil lamps on the wall. The interior of the hideout is a maze of boxes, filled with pilfered goods from the old smuggling operation.

If the Characters have somehow managed to remain undetected up to this point, they take Tinna totally by surprise. Completely under the influence of Notarka, she now knows two spells; 'Phandaal's Mantle of Stealth' and 'The Illusion of Vile Arthropods'. She will try to avoid capture, hoping to slip past the Characters and escape outside the building. The Characters have several options to deal with the situation. For example, one or more could attempt to convince her of their noble blood and romantically offer her marriage in exchange for giving them the ring.¹⁴ The Characters' intentions will be at odds with Notarka's attempts to escape so he will act to thwart their plans. Therefore in matters pertaining to the ring they should match their persuade against his rebuff, not Tinna's. Perceptive Characters will notice that her voice resembles that of a man's whenever Notarka gets angry and has the upper hand. Tinna's mind will only return to her full control after the ring is removed, be it by force or persuasion.



Should the viewing glass or bottle-alarm give Tinna advance warning of the Characters' arrival, she will be ready to fight. Using fear to completely possess her, Notarka now has almost full control. He will help Tinna cast Phandaal's Mantle of Stealth on herself, and will position her behind a medium-sized crate in front of the archway. As the Characters reach the halfway mark down the entrance corridor, Notarka helps her cast 'The Illusion of Vile Arthropods.' This creates the illusion of a Jairyncys Fire Scorpion¹⁵ which will appear to fling spikes from its tail at the Characters while simultaneously blocking the end of the corridor. In reality, Tinna has begun firing arrows at them from her hiding place. Because there is no cover and because of confusion caused by the illusion, Characters will suffer a levy of one to defense rolls while in the corridor. Notarka's mind is controlling the illusion, not Tinna's, hence she may act freely without causing the illusion to dispel.

After the initial attack, the Characters have several choices of action.

Once Tinna has expended her quiver of 12 arrows, she will retreat further into the maze of boxes and attack only from

14. The offer should not be put quite so baldly, Tinna may not be very bright but she is still smart enough to spot this sort of approach.

15. The fire scorpion is as large as a mermelant, has two stingers which can fire their barbs and can blast streams of fire from its jaws. It is almost certainly hypothetical.

ambush (as she is still invisible). Fighting in this manner could be very dangerous for the Characters. Tinna can still be persuaded to give herself up, just as above and granted Notarka doesn't convince her otherwise. In the end, if she is incapacitated or the ring is removed, Tinna's full personality will return and Notarka's mental influence over her will be broken. With the ring gone Tinna will become embarrassingly helpful. She will tell the Characters that something evil is living in the ring and that it should only be given back to Yrsa ("she'll know what to do with it"). Thanks to her experience Tinna believes that Notarka and his minions would kill whoever had the ring rather than reward them. Using all her charm and fragile beauty¹⁶ she will try to stay alive, offering money or herself (or both) in exchange. She will also tell them where she's hidden the remaining jewelry and the truth about her and Ingi.

Back to Bailzow ...

Now that the ring is in their possession, the Characters should think about heading back to town to collect their reward (and get rid of that accused ring). Notarka has been attempting to summon the Hooded Ones and if they have been following the party, he will be able to communicate with them. As the Characters are about to leave the hideout, several of Notarka's Hooded Ones will suddenly arrive outside. How many depends on how weak the party is and whether or not they've already disposed of some or all of the Hooded Ones before (in which case skip this encounter). Have enough Hooded Ones to make a straight fight look uninviting.

The creatures will threaten the Characters with slow death unless the ring is turned over to them immediately. It is obvious that they will kill the Characters anyway. Once again, the Characters have several options, but handing over the ring is not perhaps the best. The creatures aren't overly intelligent and may be tricked. The Characters may have plenty of Yrsa's jewelry and could attempt to give the Hooded Ones the wrong ring. Combat may be avoided as there are numerous paths creative Characters can take to get rid of these opponents.

Once the Characters have dealt with the Hooded Ones, they should return to the town to deliver the ring and other jewelry back to Ingi. Depending on how long they've taken to complete the task, they may encounter Yrsa on the way to Grast Hall. In fact, they might specifically wait for her to get back. Dealing with her before she meets Ingi will be very much easier as the Characters won't have Ingi present attempting to sway his wife's feelings. She might be confused and angered as to why the Characters have her special ring with them (as she can sense its presence), but will listen to them before passing final judgment.

Should Yrsa's return (two days after the Characters' meeting with Ingi) come before the Characters retrieve the ring, matters become more complicated ...

Panicked by his wife's early arrival, Ingi will immediately brand the Characters as thieves and blame them for the ring's disappearance. This will, of course, enrage the witch and she will have the Characters hunted down to bring them before her for punishment. The Characters will have to plead their case quite well to avoid becoming new additions to Yrsa's garden. As in the situation below, it will come down to their word against Ingi's.

If the Characters get to Grast Hall ahead of Yrsa, Ingi will be waiting them. The town guard, a bunch of his cronies, will be waiting with him. He will be very grateful for the return of the stolen property, thanking the Characters profusely. His friendly demeanor will immediately change the moment payment is mentioned. He refuses to pay them the amount agreed upon, saying their 'expenses' far outweigh the reward he offered them. (Given the way most players proceed this might even be true.) Should the characters argue (and who wouldn't), Ingi tells them that he is more than willing to publicly blame them for the entire mess and have them hung as thieves. They can either leave Bailzow quietly, or he'll be forced to 'do what is right' and act to uphold the law. Just before everyone comes to blows, Yrsa finally returns home (if this is earlier than two days, so be it: you are GM and should not allow trivial reality to stand between you and artistic imperative). The witch doesn't know what has transpired, but instantly knows no good can come of it. She will inquire about the presence of the Characters and their purpose in her home. Ingi realizes he is in deep trouble and will accuse the Characters of thievery. In turn, the Characters can plead their case and, with any luck, expose Ingi's adultery-an easy thing to do if Tinna is still with them. Yrsa will side with the most compelling group,¹⁷ so the reward inventive ideas. Even if Ingi is more convincing, the Characters can also try to sway Yrsa in other ways. She is tired of Ingi already, so a better husband (such as a noble or wizard) would be very appealing to her.

With luck in the end Yrsa will side with the Characters for one reason or another. She will dispose of Ingi in a poetic

16. The fact that she uses her fragile beauty like a bludgeon somewhat detracts from the effect.

17. In truth Ingi is at something of a disadvantage in this contest. After all, Yrsa knows him.

and painful manner. Unless someone pleads her case, Yrsa will also dispose of Tinna if she's still present. Yrsa's continued reaction to the Characters will depend on whether or not they failed to convince her of their innocence (unlikely) and/or if they surrendered the ring to the Hooded Ones. If the Characters have lost or given up the ring, Yrsa will demand that they find it (which could turn into another adventure). If they refuse, she'll make their lives briefly but intensely unpleasant before transforming them into new additions to her garden. Otherwise, her reaction will be quite positive. She will pay each of them 750 terces for their trouble and heal their wounds. She will be grudgingly willing to help train any wizards in the group and share research for a price. Yrsa can become a key feature in the lives of the Characters, and serve as an excellent contact later on.

The End

The adventure is at an end. Now is also a good time to wrap up any subplots that may have developed during the game. Reward the Characters with 1 improvement point each, and don't forget to add extra points if they made appropriate usage of their Taglines. Successful Characters should be richer and wiser for their efforts. They've gained allies, made enemies, and may even be thought to 'own' a smuggler's hideout. Depending on how they've handled Yrsa, one of the Characters could be seriously involved with her, or even married to her (thus becoming the mayor).



Story Hooks

After the dust settles, the Characters could decide to stay in Bailzow. There are many other challenges that could arise during a stay in this peaceful little town. The chance of adventure increases dramatically if they've befriended Yrsa and/or important townsfolk.

- ✦ Yrsa's vats are nearly ready for use but she needs one last ingredient to create her first vat creature. This rare mushroom grows only in some ruins at the heart of a cursed swamp several leagues from Bailzow. Something very unpleasant has made a home for itself there and doesn't like trespassers. Yrsa hires the Characters to deliver a large collection of the special mushrooms to her.
- ✦ Tshaya has recently acquired the famous cook Makarapass as a customer. He wishes to purchase her beer to serve at his master's manse in Kaiin and, as it is his master's money he is willing to pay handsomely. She hires the Characters to guard her first big shipment to the city against brigands. In exchange, they can have 10% of the profits. Sadly she does not know that Delcancer wishes her to fail. Tshaya's sons owe him money, and he wishes to keep them in debt so he can eventually take the bar from their mother. He has hired several men to make sure the shipment never arrives at its destination. Should this attack fail, one of his associates, Hetta the Austere, a lady of strong temperance principles, will also hire a band of desperadoes to attack the party as it nears Kaiin.
- ✦ After much consideration, Yrsa finally decides to uncover the secrets of the Paramitsha Fountain thanks to her dealings with Borkgrimfag. Now, with the Characters' aid, she begins an in-depth investigation into its origins. The fountain is a monument from a lost city of the ancients. By conducting a complex ritual, its water can act as a conduit to the original source. The possibilities for adventure once the Characters arrive in this New World are only limited by your imagination.
- ✦ Enemies of Tinna's late brother have been searching for a shipment of goods he tricked them out of. Finally, they locate his hideout; the same one the Characters are now using. Of course, they mistake the Characters as the brother and his compatriots and decide to kill them.
- ✦ Chacowille the Dikas is a leading citizen in Kaspara Vitatus. He was also a suitor for Nisred's affections. When she refused his advances and offers of marriage, he was enraged. Before he could get his revenge, she left the city and came to Bailzow. Chacowille has posted a reward for any information pertaining to her whereabouts. This story could be played many ways, with the players trying to collect the reward or trying to help Nisred avoid being dragged back to the libidinous Chacowille.

and so forth ...



Tag lines

Prabaser's brontotabus! More succulent than the average brontotabus.

A town of dangerous women: swordsmiths, thieves, perhaps even witches.

Charm will open doors where intimidation merely causes blades to be loosened in their scabbards.

*Of course I trust him, we have his word as a nobleman.
Perhaps we should approach his wife instead?*

*Look at that buffoon. He obviously thinks that puffed britches are more fashionable
when liberally anointed with brontotabus dung.*

*After talking to him I am reminded of my father's injunction that a good flogging improves
many and a swift hanging improves the rest.*

Madame your beauty has cut me to the quick. Marry me now, love such as ours will be can brook no delay.

None but a fool drinks twice there.

