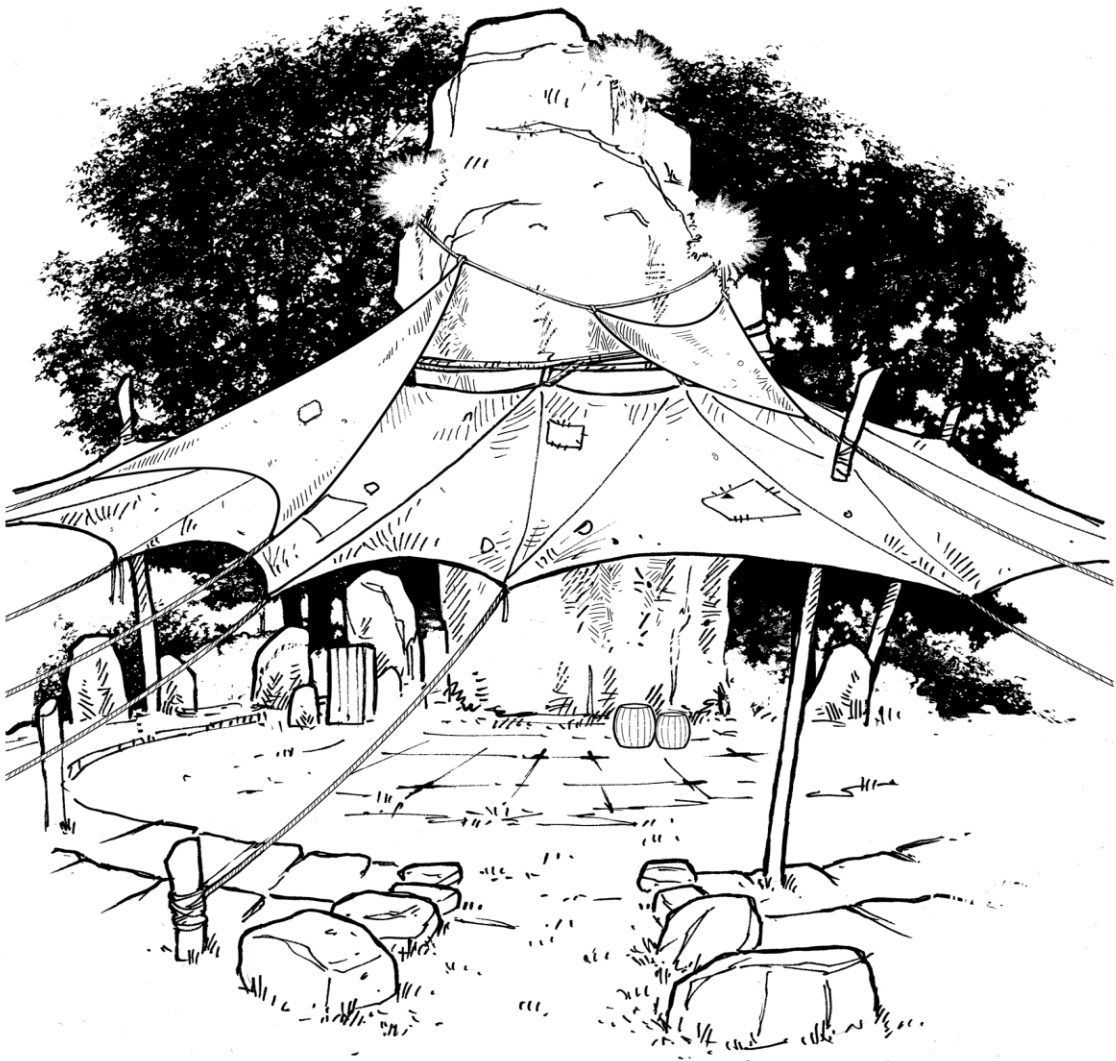

DELECARTE'S CARNIVAL OF WONDERS



Delecarte's Carnival of Wonders

Rumours & Hooks

Lady Ignis, an influential noble and powerful money lender, has offered a sizable bounty for the capture of *Mathias the Viper*, a fugitive criminal.

A town crier bellows "*Hear ye, hear ye! Delecarte's Carnival of Wonders is leaving soon! Goggle at the Giant Gators! Puzzle at the Moustached Lady! Behold the Giant Egg of Corvex! Delight at Grumpleton's Magic! More Marvels than the Gods Know What to Do With! Just three days left! Three days only! Two Silvers Entry, or Three with the Grand Event! Tickets Here! Get your Tickets Here!*"

Mathias the Viper

Lady Ignis, a wealthy money lender and land owner, has an urgent task for the adventurers. She wishes to hire them to hunt down the fugitive known as *Mathias the Viper*, accused of murdering Ignis' husband *Gustarn* three nights earlier (in her experience the city watch are blithering, incompetent fools). The lady has procured word that Mathias is masquerading as a member of *Delecarte's Carnival of Wonders*, hoping to slip out of the city when the show departs in three days time.

The viper is an exemplary actor, skilled impersonator, and master of prosthetics and disguise. To carry out his assignments, he often adopts multiple identities, bypassing guards and other security measures before eliminating his target. At his core he is cunning, ruthless, and sorely lacking in common decency or compassion.

As might be expected, few people know what the viper actually looks like, but Ignis has unearthed the following genuine facts:

1. Mathias has a deep scar on the back of his left hand, care of an old sword wound with a knight.
2. He is almost entirely bald.
3. He has a natural medium build, and is approximately 5' 9" to 6' tall.

Mathias has indeed infiltrated the circus as *Nimbin "Squirrelboots"*; a harmless alcoholic who lost his family to plague, with a strong back and a penchant for sleeping late. His clown persona, "Squirrelboots", is a jovial fellow in bright patchwork garb, white face paint, a green wig and brown furry boots.



The viper signed on with the company a week earlier (a few days before he assassinated Gustarn), along with several others throughout the week (two female acrobats; *Urta* and *Flamel*, three labourers; *Bok*, *Rudgur* and *Mikhail*, and a new 5 man clown act: *Artur*, *Rinbo*, *Morgus*, *Telefed* and *Nimbin* - aka Mathias).

Of the new recruits, 1d3+2 of the men roughly match Mathias' height and build descriptions (including Mathias). Only one of them is bald (not Mathias, who is wearing a wig). None of them display scarred hands (Mathias covers his hand scar with paste and makeup, or wears gloves).

The Circus

Delecarte's travelling circus consists of 15 wagons, 33 horses, and approximately 85 crew, performers and guards. Stalls, animal enclosures, tents and rest grounds are spread out over some 500 yards, adjacent to a lake or other waterway.

Entry to the grounds is 2 silvers, or 3 silvers with the Grand Event. Two guards stand at the gates, and another eight walk the wire fence perimeter. Crowds filter through the grounds between noon and sundown, with the Grand Event running approximately 2 hours from 7-9 pm.

Clues & Legwork

If the party make small talk with the crew/performers about newcomers to the circus who might be (i) bald, (ii) have scars on their hands, or (iii) seem like murderous killer types, they might learn the following (Charisma checks and/or modifiers at GM's discretion). If the party manages to extract some information, roll 1d4:

1. A few nights earlier, a tent nearly blew away in high winds. Nimbin grabbed a rope and wrestled it back to earth, but cut his hands up in the process. The back of one hand in particular had a bloody gash in it.
2. Some kids in the crowd were throwing eggs, one of which hit Nimbin on the head. Shocked, he pulled off his spoiled clown wig and threw it at the kids in mock anger. He was bald underneath.
3. One afternoon three roughnecks were giving the Ringmaster a hard time outside

his wagon until Nimbin intervened. He pulled the three aside and whispered something to them. The group left immediately and never returned.

4. Yesterday, one of the crew accidentally locked herself in the gator enclosure. Nimbin somehow popped the lock open in a flash.

Random Encounters

While wandering the grounds looking for clues to Mathias' whereabouts, there is a 50% chance of a random encounter every hour. If an encounter occurs, roll 1d8:

1. A half drunk band of 2d6 young ne'er do wells (*Bandit*, LFG p.139) accost the party, wanting to brawl with the most fearsome looking adventurer.
2. *Celuria*, a wealthy noblewoman, takes a liking to one of the party and strikes up a conversation. If befriended, she might be able to open doors to the party in the future.
3. A *Sabretooth Tiger* (LFG p.127) escapes its enclosure (breaks loose, or is set free by a business rival or reckless drunkard), and pounces on a nearby onlooker.
4. A band of 3d6 *monkeys* (Dex 17) scampers by, swinging from tent ropes and leaping from the shoulders of onlookers. They entertain the crowd with playful winks, touches and calls, and are harmless. Their handler however, *Zookie* (a young teenager with buzz cut hair) is a pickpocket, and will attempt to steal something while the party is distracted (Perc (Detection) vs Dex 16 contest).
5. 2d4 mimes wearing faceless masks appear in the crowd. At first they interact

with others, but quickly surround and mimic the party alone. The mimes are utterly silent, copying the PCs perfectly. This goes on for a minute or two, until a sudden screech rises above the hubbub of the crowd, causing the mimes to scatter like rats.

6. An elderly, barbarian soothsayer by the name of *Argyle the Decrepit* waves one of the party members over to her stall. She gestures for the adventurer to lean in close to her, whispers something unintelligible, then casts some bone runes on the table between them. She studies the runes, and...

- a. (50% chance) shakes her head sadly, draws back into her booth, and pulls the curtains shut behind her (PC suffers disadvantage on their next *Luck* check).
 - b. (50% chance) smiles a toothless grin, pats the stranger on the hand, and whispers “you earned it”. (PC may turn one failed *Luck* save or check into a success this adventure).
7. *Corvex*, the falconer, is clearing a path and directing 4 labourers who are rolling an enormous, 6 ft speckled egg through the gawking public at speed. The falconer is angry and obviously wants the egg back under cover quickly.
8. *Dao Mai*, a towering, sumo-like warrior (Barbarian 5) from the far east, is walking the grounds, enjoying mixing with the crowd, crouching down to shake hands with small children. He has a range of garish tattoos covering his bulbous frame. He speaks broken common. Anyone he find annoying is dubbed “Shen Gwa!”

Investigative Encounters

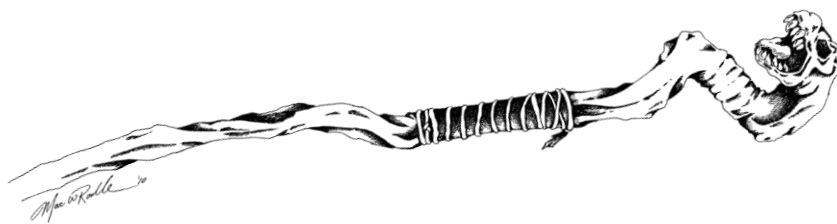
Seven circus performer encounters are provided below as examples for the PCs to interact with. Encounters 1–6 might reveal a clue that guides the party towards Mathias (or contain some other point of interest). The last encounter deals with the viper himself.

(1) The Moustached Lady

The moustached lady, *Roberta*, is a tanned behemoth of tremendous strength and heart. She is a talented yodeller, and as part of her act crushes melons between her thighs and ample bosom.



Far stronger than most men (Str 18), she is also a skilled combatant (Fighter 2), and does not hesitate to intervene if she becomes aware of matters of domestic violence, especially against children. Many a fool has underestimated her speed and met their fate at the end of her mighty fist. Roberta doesn't know anything special about Mathias/Nimbin, but might make a valuable henchmen, ally or mobile contact for the PCs.



(2) Falconer's Loft

Corvex the Falconer (dark skinned, braided, receding hair, wheezing laugh), puts on an amazing hunting bird demonstration, showcasing a wide range of hawks, falcons, eagles and owls. In the last week, Corvex happened upon an extraordinary opportunity: a genuine *Roc* egg. The egg is speckled, 6 ft tall, heavy, and warm to the touch. Anyone placing their ear against it can hear the heartbeat of the baby roc within. Unfortunately for everyone at the carnival, the mother roc has been tracking her egg for days, and might just find it. At the GM's discretion, there is a 50% chance the egg hatches while the party is near, freeing a goop laden, 5 ft featherless chick! The chick immediately begins a loud, repetitive squawking.

Every minute thereafter, there is a 50% chance the mother roc homes in on her newborn, diving out the clouds with a blood curdling screech! Untold chaos follows, the roc tearing apart anything and anyone to reach her chick. If the roc retrieves her baby, she is likely to grab a human or two as lunch, then depart. If the chick is anything other than intact, however, she will go on a bloody rampage.

Roc, AC 13, HD 14, 2 Claws 2d6 and Bite 2d10+2, 19: special, S23 D13 C20 I2 P14 W16 Ch10, L14, Mv 240 ft flying, 15 ft reach. On a Claw 19-20 attack roll, the target is grabbed and flown away with (target may spend an action to make an opposed Str or Dex check to slip free).

With respect to Nimbin clues, Corvex can say that he has noticed Nimbin watching the birds for extended periods, as if transfixed by their predatory nature. Or perhaps he likes their sleek feathers. Who can tell.

(3) Zookeeper

Guntharrg (5½ ft, blonde ponytail, broad shouldered) is the carnival zookeeper, maintaining multiple fenced and caged areas for dangerous beasts such as a giant crocodile, sabre tooth tiger, dire wolf, and terrifying owlbear. Two guards stand watch at every steel cage, ensuring no-one meddles with the enclosures or the monsters within. The zoo also includes an assortment of very cute and cuddly animals such as rabbits, deer, squirrels and so on for attendees to pet.

Guntharrg is a bitter soul, angry at society, and prefers to keep the company of his beasts. What series of unfortunate events led him to this point is left for the GM to determine, but there are camp rumours that his wife left him for another when his mining business ruined them years earlier.

Guntharrg knows little of Nimbin, but has noticed a calmness about the man which he likes. Most folk are nervous around his beasts, but Nimbin has an unexpected ease about him, and Guntharrg enjoys their "companionable silence".

(4) Grumpleton of the Seven Suns

The elderly *Grumpleton* (70's, thinning grey hair, jet black robe embraided with seven golden suns) is the resident "wizard" of the travelling show. He employs a mix of flash powder, rudimentary fireworks and other parlour tricks to achieve most of his magical effects. He does however possess a genuine enchanted object; the *Staff of T'Serossk*.

T'Serossk was a serpentman of the Second Age, a scheming warlock dedicated to the rites of the *Cold Bloods*. Many a crying babe was sacrificed

to the *Nest Beyond the Stars* to fashion his staff. A person attuned to the weapon may invoke a *Phantasmal Force* effect once every 1d4 days. If the wielder unlocks the second attunement, the staff may also transform into a 10 HD *Giant Serpent* once per month (LFG p122). If the serpent is killed, the staff reverts to normal but does not function for 1d6 months.

Over the years, Grumpleton has unlocked both attunements. Whilst no sorcerer, he is acutely aware of the dangers of true magic (anyone who carefully observes Grumpleton over a long period might notice that he does not breathe; see *Breathless* LFG p.58). The charlatan almost never invokes the staff's power, but from time to time, when his arthritic fingers fail him and the crowd turns angry, he will call on the staff to wow spectators.

Grumpleton is a friendly but increasingly confused and dangerous old man, who has so far managed to avoid the true terrors his staff might unleash. He enjoys entertaining the crowds, is proud of his fame, and treats the circus as his home. He does not know anything special about Nimbin, and even if he did, would not rat on a fellow "carni".

(5) Doctor Ruben's Miracle Tonics

"Doctor" Ruben (40s, female, genuine beauty, amazingly shiny hair, Dex 15, Cha 17, Bard 2, especially skilled in deception) has travelled "all over the land", explored every "nook and cranny", from the "highest peaks of the Ironhull Ranges" to the "deepest interior of the Suurat Wilds", to gather together, distil and perfect the most powerful, most potent, most effective and most delicious medicinal elixirs known to woman or man!

The doctor offers a wide range of strange elixirs, including:

- *Dr Ruben's Effervescent Restorative* (increases stamina for intimate late night antics),
- *Dr Ruben's Affliction Effluxion* (causes the imbiber to quickly throw up whatever they last ate, might be helpful for certain poisons, etc),
- *Dr Ruben's Incogitable Cure All* (the most expensive of Dr Ruben's mixtures, this cloudy tincture smells of chlorine and causes skin to redden. If ingested however, the drinker gains one final save to resist any non-magical disease or poison they are suffering).
- *Dr Ruben's Salts of Exuberant Rhapsody* (taken with water, the salts greatly elevate serotonin levels, making the imbiber feel "happier" for 1d6 days, at the end of which they lose 1 Con).
- *Dr Ruben's Hairful Helper* (rubbed onto skin, this ointment causes hair to quickly sprout from the affected area within 1d6 minutes, before dropping out in a further 1d6 hours. Could be handy for disguise purposes).

Ruben has as many doses of her mixtures available as the GM decides (alternatively 1d6+1). They are generally 2 gp each, or 50 gp for the *Incogitable Cure All*.

The doctor had a one night stand with Nimbin a few nights ago (part of his alibi - Mathias slipped away later that same night to kill Gustarn). With some persuasion, she might reveal that Nimbin wears a wig (for reasons she can't fathom; Ruben finds him perfectly handsome as is).

(6) Ringmaster Delecarte

The circus owner and ringmaster lives in a modest wagon with a three crown flag. Delecarte is in his 50's, tall & gangly, with expressive eyes

and curly black hair, born and raised in a travelling show.

Contrary to appearances, Delecarte is extremely wealthy, holding significant investments with a number of prestigious lending houses. Despite his material success, Delecarte continues as ringmaster because he loves the crowd: the adoration, the applause, the wonder, and sometimes even the anger. For the ringmaster, his life is a perfect cavalcade of unending pleasures, dangers and surprises – with himself at the centre of it all.

Delecarte presides over the Grand Event, introducing acts, calling on volunteers and generally ensuring the crowd has a wonderful time. The main show runs about 2 hours, including acrobats, contortionists, jugglers, fire breathers, eastern “sword saints”, dancers, wild beasts and freak show exhibits, not to mention Roberta, Grumpleton, etc.

(7) Clown Town

The clown tent, aka Clown Town, is where *Artur*, *Rinbo*, *Morgus*, *Telefed* and *Nimbin/Mathias* can generally be found, entertaining the people with foolish antics and bawdy songs. Brightly painted suns, moons and clouds adorn the tent, accompanied by wooden cut outs of bears, griffons and dragons. Rickety chairs, low tree branches and the grass serve as seating for onlookers.

The five men have their gear and sleeping rolls stashed out the back, in five curtained off sections. 1 x Carry Loot (LFG p.136) might be scavenged after a thorough search (note the clowns come in from time to time during performances for a quick change, or cup of water/ale).

Nimbin/Mathias’ area contains a locked suitcase (with curious straps that allow the case to be slung over one’s back) with a large variety of realistic and show wigs, make up and artificial prosthetics

(noses, ears, etc), as well as a sharp, finely made knife (perfectly clean). Mathias keeps the key on him at all times (the lock may be picked with a Dex (Traps & Locks) check at a -1 penalty).

Three clown costumes hang from pegs, inspection of which reveals hidden straps and pockets, large enough to hold small alchemical satchels or blades (currently empty).

Concealed at the very bottom of the bedroll is a long, thin tube about half an inch in diameter. A small incision on one corner has been stitched up. Inside the tube are 2 x doses of flash powder (LFG p.24) and 1 x dose of wyvern poison (LFG p.130).

If Mathias suspects he is being hunted by anyone competent, he will keep an eye on them, but take no immediate action. If he suspects he has been found out, he departs at the first opportunity, hoping to disappear into the city. He will attempt to retrieve his suitcase and bedroll first, if possible.

If cornered, Mathias will not hesitate to take hostages, set the wagons on fire, or loose monsters from the zoo to facilitate his escape.

Optional Twist

At the GM’s discretion, the following twist might apply. Mathias killed Gustarn, true enough, but his main objective was not to slay Gustarn, but to rescue *Sunni*; a 2 year old toddler, from her grandfather’s cruel clutches. Sunni’s mother, *Kristen*, has been trying to retrieve her daughter for months (after being exiled from the family for an extramarital affair).

In this twist, Sunni is also inside the suitcase, in a drug induced coma (no long term ill effects, but she appears non-responsive and her breathing is shallow). An adventurer skilled in apothecary might wake the child with an Int check and the right herbs. If woken, Sunni will be incredibly

scared, but believes that Mathias is helping her return to her mother in a nearby city.

If the party kill or capture Mathias, the fate of Sunni will be in their hands. In this instance, if the party seeks the bounty for dealing with the assassin, Lady Ignis will inquire about the girl, and demand her return.

Mathias the Viper, Boss Monster, AC 15, HD 8 (90 hp), 2 x Dagger 1d4+4, 19: as dagger, S15 D18 C10 I15 P16 W14 Ch16, L14, Mv 30 ft. He has Backstab, Skirmisher and Finisher abilities like a 8th level rogue, and may choose from the following tricks 3 times per combat: *Choking Dust*, *Hidden Blade*, *Quick Reflexes*, *Smoke Bomb*, *Cat's Grace*, *Flash Powder*, *Unseen Whip*, *Glue Pot*. Mathias is a Boss Monster with all the usual benefits (LFG p.95).

Mathias carries an enchanted set of 2d4, two inch tin warriors. Once per month, if thrown on the ground (as an action), they enlarge to life size and follow his orders for 2d6 rounds (no action, as Skeleton LFG p.124, but AC 17, 3 HD). If defeated, Mathias is carrying 1 x Carry Loot and 1 x Valuables (LFG p.136, 147).

Aftermath

If Mathias is slain or captured, Lady Ignis is pleased and promptly pays the agreed bounty, keeping the party in mind for future endeavours.

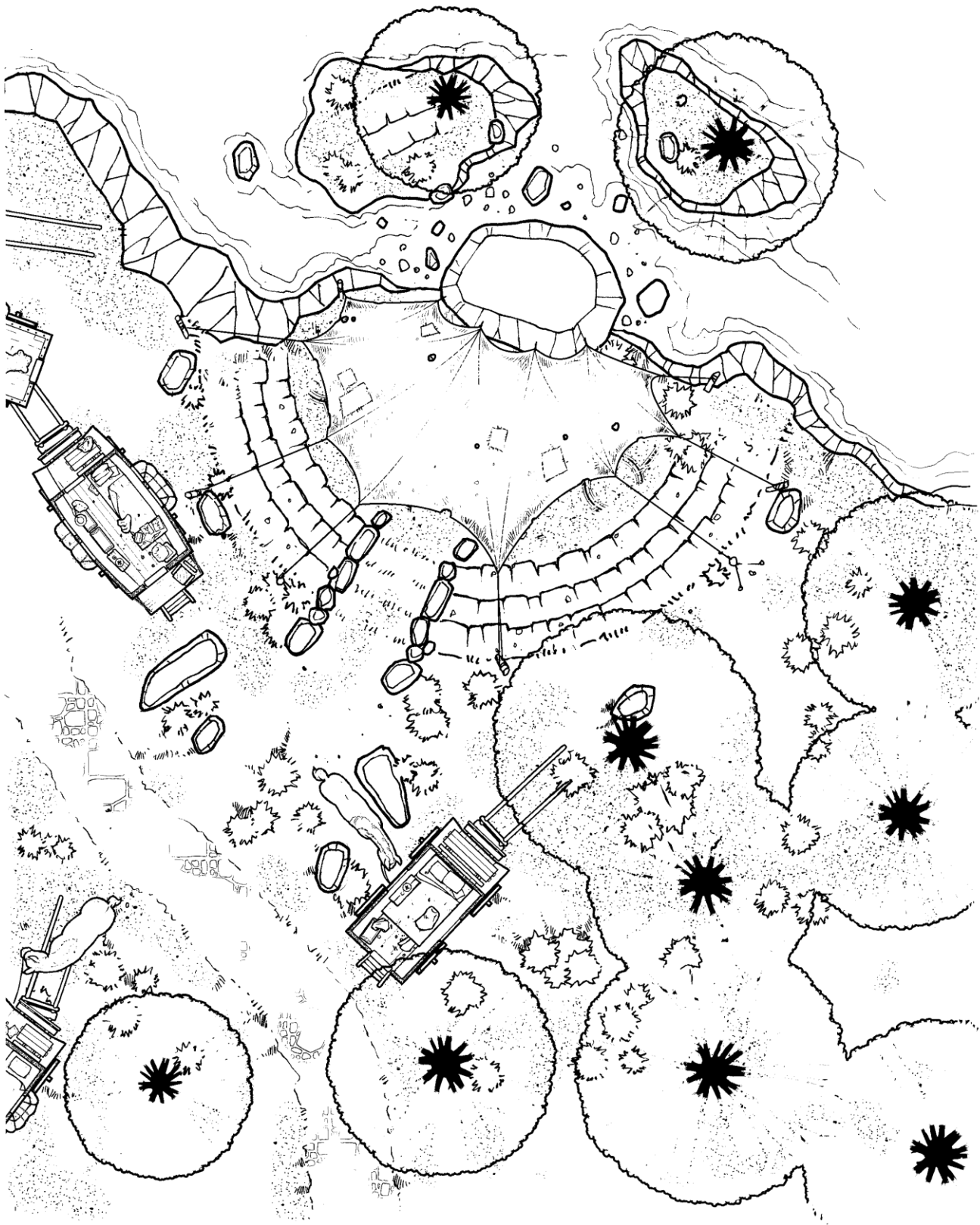
If the party doublecrosses Ignis (including to sort out Sunni, if that variant is used), the lady holds a long grudge, and will take steps to punish the PCs if the opportunity arises down the track.

Returning Sunni to her mother earns the party the family's eternal gratitude, as well as some honourable fame within the city as word spreads.

If Grumpleton is left with his staff, in a further 1d12 months, the party hears the sad news that the carnival was disbanded after a hideous monster slew scores of spectators in the midst of Grumpleton's act.



Skirmish Map



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