

Mini Scenario 09

A Soiree at the Palace

"Mistress Flame, it is time that you and I speak woman to woman."

Summary

Farview (decd)

Pearl (decd)

Horizon (Ruby)

Golden (m. Laurel, decd.)

Tourmaline

Peridot

Lustre (m. Garnet)

Morningstar

Facet

Plane

Hope

Persimmon

Leaf

Absinthe (m. Bitter)

Verdant

Want a storyline that introduces Everway high politics. People who might take an interest:

Absinthe From conversations with Gentle Dew, she knows that the heroes know the dragonlord but haven't spoken of him. She will want to know more.

Persimmon is definitely up to something. Who is the lover who has made her pregnant? The soap opera answer would be Tourmaline or Morningstar, but maybe it's someone more surprising like Garnet, Peridot or Bitter. Whoever it is is likely to know they are the father, though Persimmon could have made a point of sleeping with several Emerald men in close proximity so that she can get control over all of them. She might use the heroes to send messages to the putative father(s). Her long-term plan is to have a son and then bump off Tourmaline, Peridot and Morningstar so that he becomes king.

Facet and Plane will gate-crash any meeting the heroes attend. Facet declares herself bored to death of her life in the palace and not-so-subtly suggests that the heroes entertain her with a piece of mischief.

If Viridian and Crystal Emerald were kidnapped, **Ruby** would do whatever it takes to get them back, both on her own account and to protect Horizon. This might include hiring a band of mercenaries like the heroes.

Tourmaline falls for Flame (and/or Wishbone, though Flame is more his type). He orders Golden to procure her for him.

What could happen at the soiree:

- Meet Loudvoice Mask and a troupe from the Theatre of All Worlds (including a body double). They are there to provide the third act.
- On their way in meet **Ruby** (Horizon's mistress) and Viridian and Crystal on their way to bed. Crystal thinks Slight is "funny" (and has an unnerving ability to see him).
- The performance: How will it go with reduced magical abilities?
- Various of the more fun-loving Emeralds are present, including:
 - **Facet** declares herself to be bored by life in the Palace and promises an emerald to anyone who can amuse her.
 - The pregnant **Princess Persimmon**. She gets the heroes to include messages in their act for the putative fathers of her child.

- **Morningstar** and his hawk. *He would get on very well with Wishbone.* Could do a Northern Lights-style thing where their hawks fall for each other.
- A palace official sounds out Slight about an unofficial mission: "We require your powers of... misdirection... You would be well rewarded."
- A private meeting between Absinthe and Flame.
- Gentle Dew performs her act.
- Needs a dramatic twist. Obvious one is reappearance of Wrath, who has been invited to Everway on a diplomatic mission.
 - Like this because it gives Absinthe a strong reason to invite the heroes. They are a pawn in a negotiated treaty between Everway and the "Dragon Empire".
 - This also means that F.T.'s actions have had consequences.
 - Absinthe knows who Wrath is – why would she put Everway in danger by inviting such a powerful being in? A) She didn't – she is trying to clear up a mess created by someone else (Ulrich?). B) She reasons that Wrath will be coming to Everway sooner or later anyway and this gives them a chance to neutralise or even ally with him. C) She knows exactly what she is doing. This is a play to get a powerful ally on her side to further her ambition to get her son onto the throne. But how would this work? *She wants Wrath to kidnap Viridian and Crystal, with the heroes' help.*
- Other possible twists:
 - Assassination attempt on one of the Emeralds (Bitter?) by someone in the Mask troupe. Who turns out to be Peacemaster Mrraouw.

What Absinthe wants:

- Kidnap?

- Viridian and Crystal Emerald would make excellent victims. Someone wants to gain control over Horizon, who is very fond of his children.
- **Ruby** would do whatever it takes to get them back. Even employing dodgy types like the heroes.
- How would they do it? They would be in the Palace and under guard by the Plumes. Also chaperones at their age.
 - Location: The secure area of the Gardens is probably easiest. A corrupt Gardener could provide a key, and a way of getting them out. Or imprison them in a tree trunk.
 - Only one sensible way – someone with a power like Slight's could convince the guards that they are still there when they aren't. *Cunning!* But why would he? It's horribly risky. But he'd do it for a shot at the Edge and/or the Pearl. So – someone else in the Twelve with an interest in destabilising Everway, who has promised to help Cunning steal the Pearl. Actually, two people – at least three keys are needed to unlock the Chamber of the Twelve.
 - Problem with this is that whoever Cunning's accomplice is, they would have to value destabilising Everway over achieving the Twelve's aims. *Absinthe* would seem the obvious choice – she probably needs to be involved because she would know when the children are allowed into the Garden and where the guards are likely to be stationed.
 - Alternatives: *Redfox, Glint*

So – suppose it's Absinthe. It would explain why she is so keen to meet Slight. She could try to sound him out and then go with Cunning if that fails. What's her overall plan? Nothing less than to get Horizon to announce that Pearl was not Farview's sister and so her son Veridian is Crown Prince. Is this remotely plausible? *Wall Emerald* is key. Maybe she is fond of the children. Or perhaps she was chaperoning them when they disappeared. Maybe she only told

Ruby and they together have been keeping it from the king?

- Plot needs work – it's too unsubtle as it stands.
 - Why would Absinthe imagine that kidnapping the children is going to get the succession shifted as she wants? This is just about plausible, but what would stop Wall / Farview changing the succession back once the children are safe? Because an official announcement would tarnish Pearl for ever more. It could never be revoked.
 - How would Absinthe avoid getting implicated? She would need to find someone to do her dirty work for her that can't be traced back, or at least would be thought to be working for someone else. This implies that it isn't someone in the Palace.

Needs something else – motivation for Wishbone / Walker / Flame / Rathgard to go:

- Something needs to be planted in / taken from the Palace
- Need to learn the Palace layout. Plan a raid?
- Need to talk to someone in the Palace

Characters

- Absinthe Emerald
- Bitter Emerald
- Persimmon Emerald
- Facet and Plane Emerald
- Viridian and Crystal Emerald (children), Ruby Emerald
- Garnet Emerald
- Morningstar
- Gentle Dew
- A special guest...

Visions

Viridian and Crystal Emerald being taken up to bed by Ruby. Crystal: "Hello, Mr Hidey Man. You're funny!"

Prince Peridot wanders past accompanied by several of the Palace guard, with whom he clearly gets on very well.

The pregnant Princess Persimmon. "I wonder if you can do something for me..."

Gentle Dew's performance: An exotic dance. She is incredibly graceful. As she moves, her limbs seem to leave trails in the air.

A closed red velvet curtain with spy holes. Someone is looking through them.

The Plot

Opening: A gilded invitation from the King's Palace inviting "Master Splendid! Outsider and associates. A performance is expected."

Interaction: The heroes will think it's fake or a trap, but hopefully will be sufficiently intrigued. If they ask at the Palace, a pompous Plume tells them that "Master Splendid! and his associates" are indeed invited to the soiree in two days time. He reiterates the warning about weapons.

Action: The heroes prepare as best they see fit. Perhaps they try to smuggle something in. Perhaps they actually practise a routine.

Progress: Entry into the palace is likely to be a complicated affair..

En route they see Ruby taking Viridian and Crystal up to bed. Also Prince Peridot.

The soiree room itself is relatively tasteful, decked out in red drapes and with a raised stage.

Rising Tension: The heroes see (but don't get a chance to interact with) a number of new characters: Gentle Dew, Morningstar Emerald, Absinthe Emerald, Bitter Emerald, Princess Persimmon, Facet and Plane. Also some other Everwayans: Wile Snakering, Grey Snakering, Redoak Crookstaff, Vellum Scratch, Render Crow, Purple Plume.

Action: The heroes perform their act. It may go well or badly. They also get to see the other acts – Gentle Dew's dance (Slight may recognise her similarity to Fish Trader) and a Mask musical ensemble.

Interaction: Between the acts, refreshments are served. The heroes can interact with the characters. Facet and Plane ask for some amusement. Princess Persimmon hints at the father of her child. Morningstar makes a beeline for Wishbone, if present. Absinthe and Bitter retire but Absinthe sends out a footman to take Flame off for a private discussion. Gossip: Princess Persimmon,

Interaction: Flame and Absinthe may get to talk. Absinthe knows a great deal about the heroes' activities and is not afraid to show her knowledge. In return she wants to know what Flame wants.

Rising Tension: Prince Tourmaline turns up drunk and notices Flame. Slight can engineer some unfortunate incidents during the Mask recital.

A Dramatic Entrance: Wrath has been watching from a curtained balcony. [Like the idea, but Slight and the heroes would probably immediately smell a rat and try to identify the figure.]

Decision: How do the heroes respond to Wrath's appearance? What does he want? He says that he is staying at the Host House opposite the Palace and that he only wants to "see his old companions in arms again". He superciliously forgives them for their "previous disagreement". What does he really want?

Climax and Resolution: Assuming the heroes don't resort to violence, they can depart. If they do resort to violence, they can fight their way out, which will close off several diplomatic avenues for them. Do they agree to meet Wrath once again?

Hook: The Invitation

- It's another ordinary day at the cellars when **Cudgel**, one of the bouncers at the Lavender House, arrives. "Mistress Sapling sent me. Said to give you this." He thrusts a gilded invitation into the hands of Rathgard or another PC. "Oh yeah, and come quickly. Messenger's waiting."
- The invitation is written on fine parchment with a gold edge. It reads as follows: "Her Wisdom the Princess Absinthe Emerald requests the pleasure of Master Splendid! Outsider and his company at a soiree at the Palace in two days time. A performance is expected. RSVP."
- Tamarind Emerald is waiting in a private room at the Lavender House, served by a noticeably discomposd Sapling. He is a young clean-shaven man with a pudding bowl haircut who is dressed in a leaf-green linen tunic and trousers with a laced leather jerkin – they are clearly servant attire, but good quality. An enveloping cloak is neatly folded next

to him. He has a cup in his hands. *Slight will recognise him.*

- If Slight is not present, Tamarind will express extreme disappointment. "Where is Master Slight? I am instructed to wait for him. He is Master Splendid!, is he not?"
- Tamarind explains that he is here to instruct the company in Palace etiquette for such events and to answer such questions as Master Splendid! may have.
- He adds that "I have been instructed to inform you that Her Wisdom the Princess Absinthe did not say that she is particularly eager to meet and witness the talents of your fire manipulator [if Flame is present, he glances nervously at her], and that she gives her word that the Host's Oath will be honoured." If questioned about the odd formulation, Tamarind looks noticeably uncomfortable. If questioned directly, he will confirm that Princess Absinthe did not say these things, but Rathgard's truth sense will ping.

The Host's Oath is an Everway tradition that no attempt will be made to harm or arrest a guest while they are in the host's house and for 50 paces around it, unless the guest seeks to cause harm to the host or their property.

- He goes through the regulations: The performance may be no longer than ½ a bell and should be suitable for "persons of refinement". Props may be brought but weapons, explosives and violent magic will not be permitted within the Palace.
- The soiree will start at 2 bells after dusk in the Salon of Musical Delights. The company should come to the side entrance. Unfortunately it will not be possible to gain entry before that time, but refreshments are served between performances to allow time for the next performers to prepare.
- There will be an audience of approximately 20 and three performances in total. It is customary for performers and audience to mingle in the interlude.
- Tamarind can supply the dimensions of the room and describe its layout.
- If Rathgard brings up the matter of payment, Tamarind says that if the performance is adequate, suitable recompense will be made.
- If the heroes bring up the murder of Beautiful Rice or Topaz, Tamarind will profess not to know anything about such matters. Rathgard's truthsense does not ping.
- If the heroes refuse, Tamarind will say that he has been instructed not to express Her Wisdom's *extreme* disappointment, and not to point out that it will not be extended again.
- Before he leaves, Tamarind will ask how many there will be in Master Slight's company. He will demure if there are more than six.

Fish Trader

Gentle Dew will warn him that Absinthe is about to invite them to a soiree and he should get the heroes to accept if at all possible as it is an excellent opportunity to get to know the royal family.

Preparations

How the heroes prepare is up to them. They can prepare an act, or not.

- If they go to the Palace and talk to the gate guards, a pompous Plume tells them that "Master Splendid! and his associates" are indeed on the entry list for two days time. She reiterates the warning about weapons.
- Slight's magic is at -2 because of the nearby Pyramid.

Entering the Palace

- The company is expected to use the side entrance. There is a grill in the door from which a pair of suspicious eyes peaks out. Slight will have to present himself as Master

Splendid! for the party to gain entrance.

- The door opens into a small guard chamber in which lounge an intimidating number of guards (a mixture of Emeralds and Plumes). They are dressed in leather mail and have short swords and clubs. A couple of nets hang on the walls behind them.
- There is also a bored looking Crookstaff (**Pince-Nez**) with an amulet round his neck (**A 4 E 2 F 2 W 6** magic: W illusion 7, air amulet that glows red whenever a spell with spoken component is uttered, counter magic globes of four different types).
- One of the guards has a cheese hound on a leash (detects explosives, W 7)
- The guards are polite but thorough. Each hero will be subjected to a rigorous body search and a scan by Pince-Nez with the amulet. Any weapons or suspicious-looking magic will be confiscated.
 - Flame can amuse herself if she likes. The guard turns to complain to his commander, a curly-haired woman. "Let her in" "Really?" [Shrugs] "Orders."
 - Pince-Nez perks up as he scans Splendid! – "my my, that is good! That misdirection glamour – oh my word! So elegant! Her Wisdom is certainly in for a treat tonight!"
 - Wishbone, if present, will not be allowed to bring Hawk in. "I'm sorry, ma'am, but it is a dangerous animal." Yes – ask Prince Verdant" suggests one of the other guards, which causes chuckles. Rathgard and Slight will need to be very persuasive to overrule them.
- Entry to the rest of the Palace is via a narrow 20' long passage way. There is a grill 10' in which conceals a watch-sprite, who twitters in alarm and flutters around his cage as the heroes pass by, bashing against the bars and ceiling.

An Emerald servant (**Lime**) shows them the way (early 60s, balding). The palace is a confusing maze of passages that lead past various state and meeting rooms. Many of the rooms are decorated in baroque styles with inlaid gems and elaborate architectural features such as whorls and geometrical shapes. The overall effect is rather unsatisfying, however.

Ruby, Viridian and Crystal

- At one point, Lime opens a door and ushers the heroes into a much wider corridor that is clearly one of the main thoroughfares. It leads into a hall with an elegant marble staircase, some 20' wide, spiralling up to the to the floor above.
- An elegant lady dressed in fine clothes (Ruby - 50s, matronly, red hair bunched at the sides of her head) is taking two small children (Viridian and Crystal) up to bed. They are clearly reluctant to go – one is sitting on a step with a sullen expression on her face. "No, I don't *want* to go!" "Now Crystal, it's past 8 bells – you know the rules." "It's not fair! I want to go to the soiree!"
- When the kids see the heroes, their eyes go round. "Are you the magicians?" "Are you going to perform for Cousin Absinthe?" [To Splendid!] Crystal:"Hello, Mr Hidey Man! You're funny! Why is your hair all green?"
- Lime bows and apologises profusely "I am so sorry, my Lady. I had no idea that these players would be such a distraction." Ruby grabs the hands of the children and hauls them bodily backwards. "It doesn't matter, Lime. Now, children! Bed!" She nods to you and retreats with her squawling progeny upstairs.

Prince Peridot

- Lime ushers you into the wide corridor beyond. A door opens and a group of soldiers step into the corridor, chatting cheerfully. In their midst is a youth with a diadem on his head. He is tall with long light brown hair and an unwise attempt at a beard. He is dressed in a very similar manner to the guards that surround him, even wearing a short sword at his waist.

- "Your highness", says Lime and bows deeply, frantically indicating with his hands that you should do the same.
- "Oh come, Lime, no need to stand on ceremony. I'm Prince Peridot."
- Peridot is friendly and has Rathgard levels of charm. "I take it you are here for one of Auntie Absinthe's little dos?"
- "Well, I'm sorry to miss it. Quite frankly I'd much rather be seeing your performance than attending some tedious diplomatic dinner with – who was it again, Kale?" "The high ambassadress of Alabaster, your Highness" says Kale, a lanky young guard. "Just so. Anyway, duty calls – good luck."
 - Observant heroes may notice that Kale keeps glancing at Peridot when he thinks that no-one is looking. They may also notice the little touch that Peridot gives Kale's arm as they move on down the corridor. Lime, if asked, will pretend to be unaware, which will trigger Rathgard's truth sense.

The Salon of Musical Delights

- The soiree room itself is relatively tasteful, decked out in red drapes and with a raised stage. It is lit by glow spheres and has a twenty five foot high domed ceiling decorated with a tasteful but dull mural of a sylvan scene in which satyrs playing harps, pipes and cymbals serenade a group of well-dressed Everwayans who are lounging and drinking wine.
- The room is approximately 60' square. It has a 30' by 20' stage at one end with curtains masking off each side, acting as both wings for the stage and changing rooms for the actors.
- The remaining floor space is taken up with chairs and side tables on which are laid out a buffet and drinks. Emerald-clad butlers and footmen stand ready.
- At the back of the room is a balcony containing three partitioned off boxes. Two are empty but the third has thick drapes drawn across it. Holes are cut in the drapes, allowing people in the box to view the performance without being seen themselves.
- About 15 well-dressed Everwayans are standing chatting in groups . Six are wearing the characteristic green attire of the Emeralds; the rest are a cross-section of the senior Everway families. You don't recognise any of them.

Except for Slight, who recognises Redoak. Fortunately, Redoak doesn't recognise him.
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- There are also half a dozen Masks in small closed group near the food tables. They turn and stare at Flame, their body language radiating hostility.

The Guests

- A cat-eyed woman dressed in diaphanous silks (**Gentle Dew**) is stretching in the wings. She is accompanied by two musicians: a piper and a drummer.
- A small dumpy masked man in a rich frock coat (**Loudvoice Mask**) is trying unsuccessfully to entertain two young Emerald women (**Facet** and **Plane**). He is telling them about his latest play, but their gazes are drifting, particularly towards Trader Gold, who glances nervously back.
- Two middle-aged women, a Digger (**Coalface**) and a Scratch (**Vellum**), are standing with a handsome young man (**Trader Gold**). With them is an Emerald man in his 50s with a square-jawed face and an upright posture (**Garnet Emerald**), who frowning at Facet and Plane. Standing with them but not partaking in the conversation is a heavily pregnant Emerald (**Persimmon**) who is calmly looking around the room.
- Another young Emerald (**Morningstar**) is talking animatedly to **Redoak Crookstaff**. They

are discussing magic. Two guards similar to the ones that Prince Peridot was with are keeping an eye on him.

- Three military types, two men (**Harbinger Raven** and **Purple Plume**) and a woman (**Adamant Keeper**), are sweating in their best military uniforms and having a distinctly stilted conversation about the current political situation with Keep in the Woods. They would clearly prefer to be anywhere but here.
- Lime introduces you to the host of the party, **Absinthe**, a formidable-looking woman with a circlet in her hair. Her hand is resting on the arm of a dark-skinned, sour-looking man in his 40s (**Bitter Emerald**). They are talking to an austere man in his 40s (**Grey Snaking**) and an elderly woman with sharp eyes (**Wile Snaking**). Also with them is a military man with beetling brows and a dark beard (**Render Crow**).

"Ah, Master Splendid! So good of you to come. And your companions also. Is this the fire manipulator I have heard so much about? Delighted to meet you, my dear. We must talk after your performance.

"Ah, but I think we are ready. Everyone, please take your seats! Mistress Gentle Dew is about to begin!"

The First Performance

- The drummer starts a rhythmic beat as Gentle Dew steps forward. She is a strikingly beautiful woman with cat-shaped pupils, dressed in silks secured by snake-shaped bracelets and an elaborate headdress.
- As the piper joins in with a wailing tune, she starts to dance.
- It soon becomes clear that she is mimicking the actions of different animals, both hunters and hunted - a bird taking flight, a snake slithering through the grass, a gazelle taking flight from a lion.
- Her expression changes between wide-eyed fear and innocence for the prey and steely concentration for the hunters.
- Her movements are sensual and mesmerising, with unexpected rushes and darts around the stage.

Slight can tell that she is using magic to subtly change the shape of her body, and on a good FC may link it with Fish Trader.

Flame has seen her bracelets before, sold in a realm called Serpents Coil.

Walker can spot that the piper has a shadow on her lung.

- For the climax of her performance, Gentle Dew, who has been imitating the stealthy tread of a tiger, starts to develop her movements into a belly dance. The dancing gets faster and faster and more erotic, while staying just this side of decent.
- Several of the men in the audience start to look uncomfortable and cross their legs (if the heroes ask: Garnet, Trader Gold, Harbinger Raven and Purple Plume, who is sitting up very straight). The most visibly affected is Trader Gold, not helped by the way in which Facet and Plane alternate between staring at the dancer and at him.
- Gentle Dew is moving so fast that she seems to blur, leaving sensuous after-images of her body (Slight can tell that this is definitely magic). She whirls around the stage, adding athletic leaps and flips to her gyrations.
- The music rises to a climax and suddenly stops. Gentle Dew freezes, her silks swaying to halt. The audience bursts into applause as doors open to admit servants carrying plates of sweetmeats and a large steaming tea urn suspended between two poles.
- Bitter Emerald gets up "Capital show, capital show. Thank you, Mistress Dew." He nods to her and she curtsies in acknowledgement, glancing at Absinthe. "Now, please take

some refreshments while the next act prepares."

The First Interval

- Absinthe and Gentle Dew leave the room.
- The other guests form into the same groups that they were in before. Loudvoice joins the other Masks, while Garnet goes over to Facet and Plane.
- The heroes will probably be busy be setting things up, but can overhear conversations:
 - Vellum Scratch cattily brings up the subject of a "lost shipment" in the Blacksand Desert to Coalface Digger. "That will cause you a few problems, won't it?" Coalface scowls and says yes. "Those Freerider Outlaws are becoming quite a nuisance," says Trader Gold. "Mighty convenient that they knew the route of the caravan. You don't think it's a plot by Desert Fox to get more resources out of us?" Vellum remarks that her proposal might finally get a good hearing with the King. "Paper money?" scoffs Coalface. "Never!"

Slight can tell that Coalface is under some strain.

- The military group: "How's the situation in Temple?" asks Purple Plume. "They're still massing, last I heard," says Adamant. "We've sent a sept through to protect the gate - we should hear from them in a few days." "What about the Glorious Empire?" asks Harbinger Raven. "Sparkling Brook can't be pleased." "We haven't told her yet, but I expect she's aware of the problem. It is their main trade route, after all."
- Morningstar has bearded Redoak again, who is looking uncomfortable. "Your Highness, it is not proper! It would be seen as favouritism by the other families and the king would be bound to hear!" Morningstar pouts. "It's not fair! I'm a prince of the realm! I should be able to do what I want!" "It doesn't work like that, your Highness. Still I'll see what I can do."
- Facet, to Plane: "I'm so bored..." This is in full hearing of Garnet. Plane keeps trying to catch Trader Gold's eye, but he looks resolutely away from her.
- The Masks are all looking at Flame. "It's her, isn't it? The Firestarter? What's she doing here?" "Absinthe must have invited her." "Is she mad? She'll set the palace on fire." "No bad thing." "We should get her!" "Can't. Host's Oath."

Princess Persimmon

- The pregnant Princess Persimmon comes up to Slight. "Hallo, Master Splendid! I am so looking forward to your show. I was just wondering if you could do something for me." She smiles at you. Her appearance and smell are intoxicating.

Slight can tell it's a Power, which doesn't stop it from being effective.

- She produces two notes. "You do sleight-of-hand, don't you? Would you be a dear and slip these to Lord Bitter and Prince Morningstar? I'd be ever so grateful. And make sure that neither knows that the other got a note. It's all a little joke, you see. Thank you so much."

The two notes are individually addressed and sealed with wax. They contain the same message: "You are the father. We will speak later. P."

The Heroes' Performance

- After 20 minutes or so, Absinthe and Gentle Dew return. Absinthe checks with Slight that all is prepared and then announces that the second act is about to begin. Everyone sits down.

Get Slight to describe the act. FC to see how it goes. A bad FC will mean that Prince Tourmaline's distraction comes at the worst possible moment.

- If Morningstar becomes aware of Princess Persimmon's note, he is visibly disconcerted. He will try to get her attention, either during the performance or in the interval afterwards.
- Bitter will hide his shock rather better. Only a very perceptive person will notice, from the way he crosses his legs, that his composure has been disturbed. Absinthe will glance at him.

Prince Tourmaline's Entrance

- Half-way through the performance, the door bursts open. A fat and rubicund young man with golden hair and a petulant expression staggers in, bottle in hand. Behind him are a number of guards in the same uniforms as the ones accompanying Prince Morningstar and Prince Peridot. They look alarmed.

FC result: The distraction could cause Slight's trick to fail if it depends on misdirection.
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- "Oh look!" the man slurs. "It's one of Auntie Absinthe's soir - soir - dos. Why didn't you invite me, eh? Any pretty girls here?"
- "Your highness, please!" says Bitter, but Tourmaline ignores him. He catches sight of Flame and leers. "Why, aren't you a pretty one. Come here."
- "Tourmaline!" says Absinthe sharply. "You are being disrespectful to our guests. Jade, Moss, assist the prince!"
- The addressed guards cautiously approach and a somewhat cowed Tourmaline allows himself to be ushered out. "I do apologise, Master Splendid," says Absinthe. "Please continue."

The Second Interval

- The performance will be met by an appropriate level of enthusiasm depending on how it went. Bitter Emerald leads the applause as the doors open to admit servants carrying platters of cakes and wine.

Assuming it went well:

- Facet audibly remarks "At last, something interesting!"
- Bitter comes over to Slight and Walker. "Thank you, Master Splendid! A fine performance. You will be well rewarded. Do come and have some wine and meet our other guests. "
- Meanwhile Absinthe comes over to Flame. "Mistress Flame, I think it is time that you and I spoke woman to woman. If you would come with me to my office, I can assure you that no-one will overhear us."
- If Flame refuses: "Well, that is very disappointing. I had so been hoping to get to know you better. Are you sure that you will not reconsider?" "Very well. Do stay, I know several of our guests are eager to speak to you."
- If Flame insists on bringing Walker or Slight, Absinthe seems genuinely surprised: "Really? This is woman's work. Why do you need *him*?"
- The Mask troupe starts to prepare their act, which appears to be a dramatic presentation crossed with a circus performance. A variety of see-saws, trapezes and high wires on frames, juggling balls and other acrobatic equipment are being assembled on stage.

Absinthe and Flame

- Absinthe leads the way into a richly furnished office on the other side of the hallway from the Salon. A couple of guards stand ostentatiously outside. Two comfortable divans face each other across a table with a decanter and two glasses - Absinthe pours and offers Flame a glass.
- "First, I must apologise for my little ruse in bringing you here. But you are a person of disputed status, so it would have been improper for me to issue a formal invitation."

- "So - you've have been quite busy since you arrived here - when was it? Four weeks ago? Helping to catch Wormwood Crookstaff's murderer, taking over one street gang and destroying two others, rooting out a slave trader and setting yourselves up as lords of Beggartown. Very impressive. Though there is also the arson, kidnapping, murder and smuggling, of course."
- Absinthe will admit puzzlement about Flame's motivations for all this activity (she assumes that Flame is the Heroes' leader). "So much of it seems contradictory - establishing the rule of law on the one hand, while engaging in criminal activities on the other. It's an impressive smokescreen - the Snakerings are going mad trying to work out how much of a threat you actually are and what family you are working for."
- "So I thought - why not just ask you - woman to woman - what are you actually trying to do here in Everway?"

Flame's likely answers:

- "Destroy you and all your works" or words to that effect. Absinthe takes this calmly. "I see. And suppose your plan comes to pass - what happens then? How would you rule Everway?"
- "Bring justice for the poor of Strangerside" or some such Rathgard-style answer. "A thoroughly laudable aim, which many of us share. Despite what you may think, we are not monsters. But there is only so much we can do without destroying the fabric of our society."
- "Discover knowledge for my master". "Interesting. And who is your master? What knowledge are you trying to discover?"

Other topics that may come up:

- *Prince Tourmaline and the prostitutes*. "Indeed - Golden has been going mad trying to control him. Many of us think that he is temperamentally unsuited to the role of king - far too susceptible to outside influence."

Slight, if present, can sense that Absinthe is very interested in this topic.

- Incidentally, if you are hoping for more custom for that brothel that you own, I'm afraid that you will be disappointed. Golden is looking elsewhere.
- The murders of Beautiful Rice and Topaz. "Yes, I expect that was the Snakerings, acting on Golden's orders. They were probably concerned that given your often-expressed hostility to the Everwayan authorities, you might make accusations that could be used by our enemies. But without witnesses, no-one would believe you."
- *Bliss and the Mothers*. Absinthe knows about the Masks and the Daggerboys, but is surprised to learn of the involvement of the Mothers. "I am sure they have their reasons, but their methods seem a little - extreme. If you wish, I will have a word with them."
- *The "kidnapping" of Woodbeam Digger*. "Yes, of course we know you aren't responsible. He and Carat are in the Walker's Ark with that childrens' runner network of theirs. Quite enterprising of them, I must say. Though we will have to end that little charade fairly soon. Much as I enjoy tweaking Goldring Digger's nose, she is a mother and has a right to know where her children are."
- *The Black Mist and the White Scorpion Warriors*. "Yes, we have heard some worrying reports from other spheres. The Snakerings and Chamber Platinum are investigating them. Thank you for bringing them to our attention."
- *The Twelve*. "So you have heard of them, have you? What do you know?" If suggestion of link to library: "Are you sure you're not confusing them with the Inner Circle?" Absinthe will attempt to laugh off any insinuations. "I've heard of them - they're just a secret society with delusions of grandeur about running Everway. I wouldn't take them seriously if I were you."

If present, Slight can tell that Absinthe is more interested in this subject than she seems. Rathgard can tell that she is out-and-out lying.

If the interview goes well, Absinthe will close it out as follows:

- "Well, I have so enjoyed out little heart-to-heart. It has been a pleasure to meet you. I am

so glad to find that you are not the monster that some have made you out to be, and I hope you have found the same with me! Perhaps, if it seems our plans might align, I might seek your assistance in the future?"

It is possible that Flame might attempt to assassinate or harm Absinthe. Any use of magic in the office will a) bring in the two guards who were standing outside, b) cause a magical force wall to slam down between Absinthe and Flame (speed F6), c) activate several magical traps launching a variety of mental, physical and elemental attacks. Flame will require two good FCs (or some clever thinking) to avoid being subdued. The other heroes will be arrested and they will all be kept in a dungeon cell, where Wrath will visit them.

Back in the Salon

- If Morningstar received the note from Princess Persimmon, he grabs her straight after the performance. "What do you mean by this? Are you sure? It's not someone else?" Princess Persimmon smiles "Why, your highness, I'm sure I don't know what you can be talking about." "You know perfectly well!" "Well, if that's the case, you will also know that this is not the place to discuss it!" Morningstar stalks off in frustration.
- Slight can have as much fun as he likes sabotaging the Masks' performance. There are plenty of opportunities.
- Facet and Plane wave Walker or Slight over. "We are bored. Amuse us. There will be money in it if you do."
- Grey Snakering will find an excuse to talk to Walker. "So, how's the smuggling going?" he asks jovially. Assuming Walker stonewalls, he contents himself with a gentle warning - "we're watching you."

Casing the Joint

- One of the heroes could excuse themselves in an attempt to do a recce. This is not as easy as it seems - there is a small door off the main room leading to a green room and a privy that has no connection to the rest of the Palace. Leaving by the main door would look suspicious, but Slight could probably manage to smuggle himself or Walker out if he can arrange a diversion.
- If he does, he sees a lithe figure just disappearing down the corridor. The figure is one of the Masks. On a lucky FC he can be followed - otherwise a door opens and a couple of guards / servants get in the way. Another lucky FC is required to stop the figure from noticing that he is being followed.
- If the heroes manage to follow him, they can see him climb the stairs and slip into a door on the first floor. By the time they get there, he is already gone. An elderly Emerald in night attire is lying dead on the floor in front of a statue of the Goddess, her throat mauled. Her eyes are open and staring. The window is open.

She is **Wall Emerald**, the wise mother (high priestess) of the Emeralds. Flame and Slight will recognise the wounds as being very like those inflicted by Fish Trader. The window looks on to the street.

- The heroes can:
 - Investigate the crime scene and either escape through the window or return to the salon. Either way, this makes them suspects in the murder. The body will not be found for several hours.
 - Raise the alarm. The Palace goes into lock-down. They are escorted back to the hallway in front of the salon, where a servant goes and whispers in Absinthe's ear. Absinthe stands up and informs the company that there has been an incident, and that for reasons of security the guests are asked to leave the building immediately. The performance is abandoned (Peacock Plume rather bewilderedly asks if this is part of the performance). The heroes are held in the green room, where they will be questioned and visited by Wrath.

The Third Performance

- When all have reassembled, Absinthe welcomes "our friends from the Theatre of the Thousand Spheres" to perform an excerpt from the Glorious Empire play *The Tale of Leaping Salmon*. Loudvoice Mask does not take part but acts as an impresario.
- The performance is a combination of a play and an acrobatic performance. The plot is that Leaping Salmon, a young heroine, is travelling to the Temple of the Six Wise Monkeys to find a cure for a mysterious illness that has struck her village. The villainess, Red Mantis, puts various obstacles in her way.
 - Villainous monologue from Red Mantis, vowing to prevent Leaping Salmon from achieving her aim. It appears that she wants Leaping Salmon's lover Gentleheart for herself and is making him and the rest of the village ill in the hope that she will cure him and he will be grateful.
 - Leaping Salmon asks the way of an old man (who has been paid off by Red Mantis), who sends her up a path to a bridge across a precipitous gorge. The bridge has been reduced to a single rope.
 - Leaping Salmon tightrope walks across. As she reaches the end, the old man appears and cuts the rope. Leaping Salmon grabs the rope as it drops and climbs to safety up the other side.
 - Leaping Salmon finds a cave with a large pile of treasure. She hums and haws about the good that she could do for the village, but ultimately decides to leave it be. This is just as well, as it proves to be a (genuine) illusion, concealing half a dozen sword-wielding assassins. Cue an acrobatic sword fight with much leaping on and off blocks, scissor kicks, somersaults and back flips. Leaping Salmon defeats the brigands, including their leader who tells her that Red Mantis is responsible.
 - Leaping Salmon continues her journey into the mountains, encountering a tribe of ape-people who coming swarming out of the trees to attack her. She dodges them by swinging from tree to tree on trapezes (three of them at angles across the stage). They often swing out over the heads of the audience.
 - Leaping Salmon enters a defile leading to the base of the mountain on top of which stands the Temple of the Six Monkeys. The ape-people pick up rocks and throw them at her. She dives and jumps to avoid them.
 - The piece ends with an encounter with her lover Gentleheart, who has followed her (actually he is an illusion created by Red Mantis). He tries to persuade her not to continue her journey, but she refuses. Red Mantis appears and stabs him. There is a big acrobatic fight and Red Mantis is forced to retreat. Heartbroken, Leaping Salmon vows to continue with her quest, not for her now expired lover but for the good of the village.
- If the heroes do not interfere, it's quite impressive and the audience responds appropriately. Even Facet and Plane are agog.

Walker notices a movement in the drapes covering the box on the balcony. Someone is watching through the eye-holes.

Slight could use his magic to make the curtain seem to be an impediment. Wrath is surprisingly resistant to magic (E4 Resisting Magic) and Slight's magic is down to 4 due to the presence of the Pyramid, so this will need a good FC. If Slight succeeds, Wrath thinks that the curtain is an enemy and starts fighting it. The Masks rapidly improvise that this is part of the performance.

- There is plenty of opportunity for subtle sabotage - anything too overt will result in censure from the assembled company. It may quickly degenerate into farce, or the Masks may prove to be quite adept at keeping the show on the road.

After the Soiree - an Old Friend

- After the polite applause for the Masks' performance, Absinthe stands up. "That

concludes the evening's entertainment. I would like to thank our performers for their sterling efforts and yourselves for coming. Master Splendid!, if I could have a word?" She indicates to the heroes that they should stay behind.

- The guests file out, followed by the Masks who have packed their equipment up remarkably quickly.
- "There is one other person I would like you to meet. He did not wish to join the other guests as his appearance can be somewhat - distracting. Particularly for you - I understand that you did not part on the best of terms the last time you met. My lord! You may enter."
- A figure comes through the door. He is dressed entirely in plate armour - on the breast plate is a symbol of a hand holding a half moon. Two red eyes gleam from the closed helm covering his head. [Some of] you recognise him. It's Wrath.
- "My friends! So good to see you again!"
- Absinthe looks at him.
 - "So you agree? I have kept my end of the bargain?"
 - "Yes. You have been a good servant."
 - Absinthe bristles, but recovers. "Very good. We shall start negotiations tomorrow."

Talking to Wrath

Wrath's long-term aims:

- Destroy Death (the ultimate enemy)
- Take over Everway

Wrath's immediate aims:

1. Reconnect with the heroes: "Our fates are intertwined".
2. Find out what they have been doing, and whether it will lead him closer to the ultimate enemy. What happened to Jayson?
3. Case out Everway for invasion
4. Get them to agree to help Absinthe

Wrath's personality:

Bellicose, domineering and insensitive to nuance. Absinthe clearly finds him a trial. He sometimes speaks over her.

The heroes may wish to question him. If they have any sense, they will demand privacy to do it.

The Twelve

- "The Last of the Twelve" is the first title he awarded himself - "I am the Last of the Twelve" is a phrase that has been in his head ever since he can remember. Other than that, he has no idea what the heroes are talking about.

Wrath cannot remember being a child, or in fact anything at all prior to around 50 years ago. He has always been as he is now.

- Absinthe, if present, will pooh-pooh any idea that "the Last of the Twelve" means that Wrath is connected in any way with the Everway Twelve, pointing out that 12 is a common mystical number in many spheres, so there must be many groups that go by that name - the Twelve Sages, the Twelve Horsemen, the Twelve Witches, the Twelve Wise Owls and so on.

Who told him about the heroes?

- The Guardians. They dress in white robes with an orange stripe. They come to him when he is in the Astral Plain. A portal opens, like a set of double doors, but he cannot step through. Beyond it he can see a stone room with the Guardians in it.

- Now he thinks of it, there are twelve of them, about half and half men and women. He cannot see their faces well - like everything in the Astral Plain, they are blurry.
- The one who speaks to him is a very very old man - he seems to be their leader.
- The old man told him that he is the Chosen One. His fate is to destroy the ultimate enemy - Death.
- The Guardians last came to him when he was using the Astral Plain to look for the heroes in Sweet Dreams. They asked him what he was doing and congratulated him on finding "The Four", whom they said would lead him to Death. He has not been contacted by them since.
- The Guardians first contacted him a few years ago. He trusts them (even though Tempest does not) because the style of their robes seems somehow - familiar...

What is he doing with Absinthe?

- She invited him to Everway after he became Lord of Tales, an informal visit to establish diplomatic relations and to discuss matters of mutual interest.
 - He thought it would be a good opportunity to see what defences the city has before he invades, so he accepted.
 - His precondition was that he must meet "his old friends" again, which Absinthe said she would arrange.
- The King is (presumably) aware of his presence in the city, but they haven't had a formal audience yet.
- Absinthe has a very good spy network - "almost as good as one of mine". She knew all about the fracas in Waterside, and has filled him in on the heroes' activities in Beggartown. He is curious to know what the heroes think they are doing.
- Absinthe hinted that his skills, and those of the heroes, could be of use to "elements who want to see change in Everway". She has asked him to get the heroes' cooperation.

What does he think of Everway?

- "Vulnerable"

Where is Tempest?

- "Around."

Possible Endings

The Diplomatic

- The heroes can try to re-befriend Wrath. This will take some doing - they will need to show him respect. He will arrange to meet them the following day at his quarters in the Host house opposite the Palace.
- Absinthe takes Wrath off while Bitter is left to deal with the heroes. He provides a payment of 250-300 hefts depending on how well the performance went.
- Lime is summoned and the heroes are ushered out the way they came in. Some Watchers are waiting to arrest Flame (thanks to the Masks) but they cannot come within 50 paces of the Palace. It should be straightforward for Slight to arrange for them to disappear.

The Dramatic

- The heroes may take a more antagonistic approach to Wrath. They have no weapons, but this may not stop them.

- This ending could also happen if the heroes incite Wrath to attack the Palace.
- If Wrath is attacked (or encouraged to attack), he shouts "Tempest! To me!" A few moments later, the dome collapses inwards as Tempest lands on top of it. FC to see if hit by flying masonry.
- Wrath's zhi bow is attached around Tempest's neck.
- All around the city, the peril bells begin to chime.
- The doors open and the room floods with soldiers. They are armed with spears and javelins. Absinthe, Bitter and any remaining guests are whisked away.
- If the fight goes on long enough, Prince Peridot will turn up with his gang of four guards. He will be in serious danger if not protected.
- The heroes can choose to help Wrath or help the guards. If they choose the former, they will have to fight their way out of the Palace (possibly discovering Wall's body on the way - Peace Master Rrauw will take advantage of any distraction).
- Wrath and Tempest will not hang around. Tempest will fill the room with flame. Wrath will fire his zhi bow, turning a phalanx of guards into flying meat.
- Those watching from afar will see Tempest and Wrath soar into the air above the Palace. Then a bolt of fire arcs out from the Tower of Roots, hitting one of Tempest's wings. Tempest flies off erratically to the northwest. Smoke rises from the burning Palace.

The Palace has many magicks baked into its walls to deaden destructive effects, including fire, cold, electrical, explosions, acid and mind control. These are at -2 on their effectiveness, in addition to those of the Pyramid. Luckily for Slight, his magic is not deadened, but Flame's is.

Wrath:

A2 (Archery)

E4 (Resist magic)

F6 (War)

W2 (Swimming)

- Virtue: War (Great Effort)
- Flaw: The Hermit (Isolation)
- Fate: Death (Change/Stasis)

Motive: Adversity

Emerald guards (12 then 6):

A2 (Work as one)

E3 (Turn the blade)

F4 (Protect the seniors)

W2 (Identify assassins)

Emerald wizards (3)

A5

E2

F2

W4

Powers: Green Healing 4, Force wall 4, Nullify magic 4

Rewards and Consequences

- If the heroes manage to pacify Wrath, he could prove a useful ally. They can persuade him to return to Tales and fetch his army, or they could suggest that he flies to Keep in the Woods or one of Everway's other enemies.
- If Wrath becomes an enemy of Everway, the Gatelands will be guarded.
- If Wrath and Tempest escape but get hit by the Tower of Roots, they crash-land just beyond the Gatelands. The heroes can go and help them out. Alternatively, Wrath and Tempest could go and take over the Sea Lords.
- The heroes could be suspects in the murder of Wall Emerald. They will face harassment by Watchers, Keepers and Crows. A deputation could be sent to root them out of the Cellars.
- If Absinthe is impressed by the heroes (and hasn't fatally lost face in a showdown with Wrath), she will put wheels in motion to carry out her plot of kidnapping Viridian and Crystal.
- The heroes could also earn the approval of the Palace if they actively fight against Wrath. Perhaps the King will want to see them. Senior Crows and Keepers will want advice on how to fight Wrath and Tempest.
- Absinthe could fatally lose face if the meeting with Wrath goes pear-shaped and the Palace gets damaged. She did ask the King so she has legal backing, but nonetheless the opinion will be that she seriously misjudged the situation.

The Twelve will also want to know what the hell she was playing at. Other than Wile Snakering (who will deny all knowledge), she told no-one. A special meeting will be convened, where Cunning may make his move.

- The heroes may have made friends (or enemies) at the soiree. Facet and Plane may invite them to assuage their ennui again. If the Mask performance was disrupted, they may try to take revenge. Morningstar might get in touch (and meet Wishbone).
- The heroes might choose to follow up any titbits they heard:
 - Problems in Temple
 - Theft of gold in the Blacksand Desert
 - Morningstar and Redoak