

# FANTASY AGE

## ENCOUNTERS



## DRIVE FOR JUSTICE

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# DRIVE FOR JUSTICE

## WHERE ARE THE CHARACTERS?

This encounter can take place in any settlement that receives limited attention from major political centers. The kingdom where this occurs is presumed to be a law-abiding if somewhat inflexible place, but the exact details of the case can be changed as needed to fit a number of settings.

## WHAT'S GOING ON?

A sheriff approaches the party and expresses concern over the treatment of a recently jailed knight, Sir Sedwin. The local lord, Gernard, seems intent on keeping the prisoner isolated until an arbiter of justice arrives from the capital to pass judgment and determine Sedwin's fate. Gernard targeted the knight on behalf of another knight, Dame Ayella, who holds a personal grudge against Sedwin. The lord framed Sedwin for the theft of thirty head of cattle and prevented the local sheriff from investigating. When the arbiter arrives, Gernard knows his word will carry more weight and Sedwin's holdings will be forfeited to him. The lord intends to gift those holdings to Ayella in return for her support.

Sedwin's ultimate fate is a bit fuzzy. The law generally hangs cattle thieves, but there hasn't been a case on the books of a knight or other noble being charged with such a crime in centuries. At the very least he will be stripped of land and titles. He might also be executed to "set an example." In any event, the stakes for the knight are very high.

## WHAT DOES THE PARTY NEED TO DO?

The sheriff, a halfling named Estik, needs the heroes to reach the accused knight, currently under the watch of Ayella's henchmen, and help prove Sedwin's innocence by gathering evidence for his defense.

## WHAT'S AT STAKE?

The reputation of the otherwise well-liked knight stands in question. Although not immediately clear, the reputations of the lord and his conspirator, Ayella, also hinge on the heroes' actions. The characters might gain favor with the sheriff for their trouble.

## THE SETUP

Sheriff Estik seeks out one or more of the characters, either because of their reputations as defenders of justice or their ties to underhanded dealings. Unable to investigate without risking her position as sheriff, she needs agents willing to work outside the law to gather evidence. The sheriff has not heard the testimony of the imprisoned knight, only the cattle rustling charge against him, and she has been barred from the jail by order of the lord. Because Sedwin is so well-liked in the community, Estik is suspicious of the situation.

The sheriff asks the heroes to infiltrate the jail and speak with Sedwin. She knows Ayella's hirelings watch the jailhouse by order of Gernard. Estik anticipates the arbiter's arrival sometime tomorrow and does not expect a fair hearing for Sedwin. She offers the characters a small sum of coin for their investigative efforts. The sheriff might also offer to conveniently "forget" about a past (or future) crime committed by the adventurers to sweeten the deal.

# THE JAILHOUSE

The jailhouse is rarely occupied for more than a single night at a time and accused criminals are typically released on their bond until an agreement between aggrieved parties is reached or an arbiter arrives from the capital. The lord refused to allow Sedwin to offer anything up as a bond, fearing the man might prove his innocence or, worse, flee to become a persistent thorn in his side as an outlaw.

The one-floor, stone and mortar building is twelve yards by eighteen yards. There is a single heavy, reinforced wooden door and each facing of the structure has two shuttered windows. A chimney juts from one corner of the roof and, based on the climate or time of year, a fire might be burning in the fireplace. The interior is a single, large room with a pair of cells made of iron bars set from floor to ceiling. Both cells are locked (with the keys held by one of the guards) and Sedwin occupies one of the two cells. Neither cell is accessible by the windows.

The front door to the jailhouse is not secured but noise from combat or shouts of warning causes the guards inside to bar the door, requiring a successful TN 15 STRENGTH (MIGHT) test to bash through it. The locks that secure the cells can be picked with a successful TN 13 DEXTERITY (LOCK PICKING) test or forced open with a successful TN 15 STRENGTH (MIGHT) test.

## THE GUARDS

A band of thugs, beholden to Ayella, are tasked with keeping the prisoner isolated until the arbiter arrives. Two thugs stand watch outside the jailhouse along with a guard dog. The dog is older and poorly treated and it could be enticed away from the jail with a handful of meat or even befriended by someone with a gentle hand. Inside the jailhouse there are as many thugs as PCs.

If one or more of the guards is captured, they are of limited use. They are not aware of the scheme surrounding their prisoner and do not know where the cattle have been taken. They can inform the party that they have been paid by Ayella and that Gernard checked in on them once to ensure no one had spoken to Sedwin.

# THE ACCUSED

Sedwin did not resist when taken in by the lord. He believed the sheriff would help clear up the matter in less than a day, but when she failed to appear at the jail, the knight suspected something was wrong. The heroes' appearance surprises Sedwin and he hesitates to flee custody if they encourage it, insisting that an innocent man does not run. Not a fool, though, he asks the adventurers to bring a farmer, Kait, who can corroborate his alibi for the arbiter. He also suggests locating evidence of the lord's missing cattle.

## WITNESS FOR THE DEFENSE

On the night that Sedwin is accused of making off with the lord's cattle, he was wooing Kait. His visit ran very late into the evening and, although admitting to it may spur talk among area gossips, she will corroborate Sedwin's story for the arbiter.

If the guards are attacked but survive they warn the lord of the incident. Gernard will prepare additional false evidence against Sedwin to make the party's dealings with the arbiter more difficult.

## EVIDENCE FOR THE DEFENSE

Investigating the lord's cattle pasture reveals tracks of the herd that lead out of an open gate. The trail heads for Sedwin's pasture before disappearing into a shallow, broad creek. A successful TN 13 PERCEPTION (TRACKING) test reveals the cattle were driven downstream and herded into a wooded dell with the creek used to conceal their passage. The lord intends to keep them there until after the trial, as he is not about to waste thirty head of cattle.

Gernard told the hired ranch hands who drove the cattle here about an ogre he spotted near his ranch. He said he would return for the cattle after dispatching the creature. Only two of the five ranch hands remain. The other three ran off after several nights guarding the cattle in the wilderness. The remaining two ranch hands are eager to abandon their posts, and flee at the sound of the heroes' approach, panicking the herd in their haste.

## JAILHOUSE THUGS

| Abilities (Focuses)  |                               |              |
|--|-------------------------------|--------------|
| 2  | Accuracy (Light Blades, Bows) |              |
| 1  | Communication                 |              |
| 2  | Constitution                  |              |
| 1  | Dexterity (Stealth)           |              |
| 2  | Fighting (Heavy Blades)       |              |
| 0  | Intelligence                  |              |
| 1  | Perception (Searching)        |              |
| 1  | Strength (Intimidation)       |              |
| 1  | Willpower (Morale)            |              |
| Speed  |                               | Health       |
| 11   |                               | 15           |
| Defense  |                               | Armor Rating |
| 11   |                               | 3            |
| Weapon   |                               | Attack Roll  |
| Longsword  |                               | +4           |
| Dagger   |                               | <b>+4</b>    |
| 1d6+1  |                               |              |
| Special Qualities  |                               |              |
| <b>FAVORED STUNTS:</b> Skirmish, Knock Prone                           |                               |              |
| <b>TALENTS:</b> Archery Style (Novice), Armor Training (Novice)        |                               |              |
| <b>WEAPONS GROUPS:</b> Brawling, Bludgeons, Heavy Blades, Light Blades |                               |              |
| <b>EQUIPMENT:</b> Light Leather, Dagger, Longsword, Short Bow          |                               |              |
| Threat: Minor  |                               |              |

Rounding up the cattle and driving them back to the settlement requires succeeding at a TN 15 COMMUNICATION (ANIMAL HANDLING) test. Based on when the adventurers begin the cattle drive, and their degree of success, they might be forced to abandon the herd to reach the jail in time for the knight's trial.

## THE HOUR OF JUSTICE

When the arbiter arrives, the lord, the rival knight, and the sheriff are all present. Gernard insists that Estik is biased and calls the adventurers interlopers, and demands their exclusion from the proceedings. A TN 10 COMMUNICATION (ETIQUETTE) test earns them a place in the jailhouse for the trial and

## RUNNING OTHER TRIALS

While it doesn't happen all that often in fantasy stories or games, the occasional trial or court proceeding can be an interesting diversion and open up ample new opportunities for roleplaying and even new adventures. From relatively minor trials involving theft to full blown accusations of murder and treason, a trial can be an interesting way to let Communication and Intelligence heavy characters shine while challenging those who usually just blast or slash their way out of every problem.

GMs can use advanced tests to run other legal proceedings, especially those determined by the findings of a single magistrate, arbiter, or judge. Justice systems that use different methods or officials might require some small modification, but the general rules should work the same. For example, a trial that has a jury and a judge may require an advanced tests to convince a jury of various facts and another judge to let important evidence, witnesses, and documents reach the jury in the first place. The exact ability and focus used in such cases may also vary. GMs should reward characters who find ingenious and entertaining ways to bring their knowledge and experience to bear in a legal proceeding.

permits them to present their evidence to the arbiter. Modify the test based on how the heroes conduct themselves in front of the arbiter.

The arbiter is a stern-faced old woman named Berella. Arbiter Berella has decided matters of justice for the kingdom for a long time and may be known to both law-abiding and criminal characters alike. She's seen it all and relies on justice and facts, not sentiment. She's inclined toward harsh but fair punishment, and convincing her to be lenient with a guilty party is not an easy proposition.

### MAKING A CASE

The arbiter listens to testimony and legal arguments on behalf of Sedwin for one hour. The trial is an advanced test with a success threshold of 15. Each test made by the characters takes ten minutes, meaning they can make up to six skill tests before the arbiter renders her decision. Those participating in the trial should make a **TN15 COMMUNICATION (PERSUASION) or INTELLIGENCE (CULTURAL LORE)** test, modified as listed on the **Case Modifiers** table.

| CASE MODIFIERS |   |
|----------------|---|
| MODIFIER       | CONDITION   |
| +1             | Sedwin is present.  |
| +1             | Sedwin was not freed despite the opportunity.               |
| +1             | Kait testifies on Sedwin's behalf.                          |
| +2             | The heroes have returned with the supposedly stolen cattle. |
| -2             | Gernard was warned of the heroes' interference.             |

### POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

If the check is successful, Sedwin is cleared of all charges and freed. Furthermore, the hero who played the most significant role in establishing his innocence is awarded the honorific Trustee of Royal Justice.

In the event the arbiter is unconvinced, Sedwin is found guilty and stripped of his holdings. Gernard presents them to Ayella who immediately pledges her support to the lord in several upcoming political challenges. If the players have

not already discerned what transpired, it should now become clear. Heroes still seeking justice are left to their own devices outside the law. Depending on how they performed, the sheriff might still be willing to support their efforts.

Either way, the groups' interference earns two powerful enemies, the lord and Sedwin's rival, Ayella. If they choose to keep Gernard's secret and allow Sedwin to be found guilty they gain a potent ally, but they soon find themselves at odds with Estik and Kait.

### HONORIFIC: TRUSTEE OF ROYAL JUSTICE

The character is known as an advocate for truth and is trusted as a witness and investigator by the arbiters of justice. They receive a +1 bonus in positive or negative social interactions with those who respect the judgments of the arbiters in matters that concern the hearing and resolving of legal disputes. The character also receives a +2 bonus in positive social interactions with arbiters themselves. This bonus can even be of benefit in neighboring kingdoms and lands, provided the individuals know of the arbiters and respect their procedures and decisions.