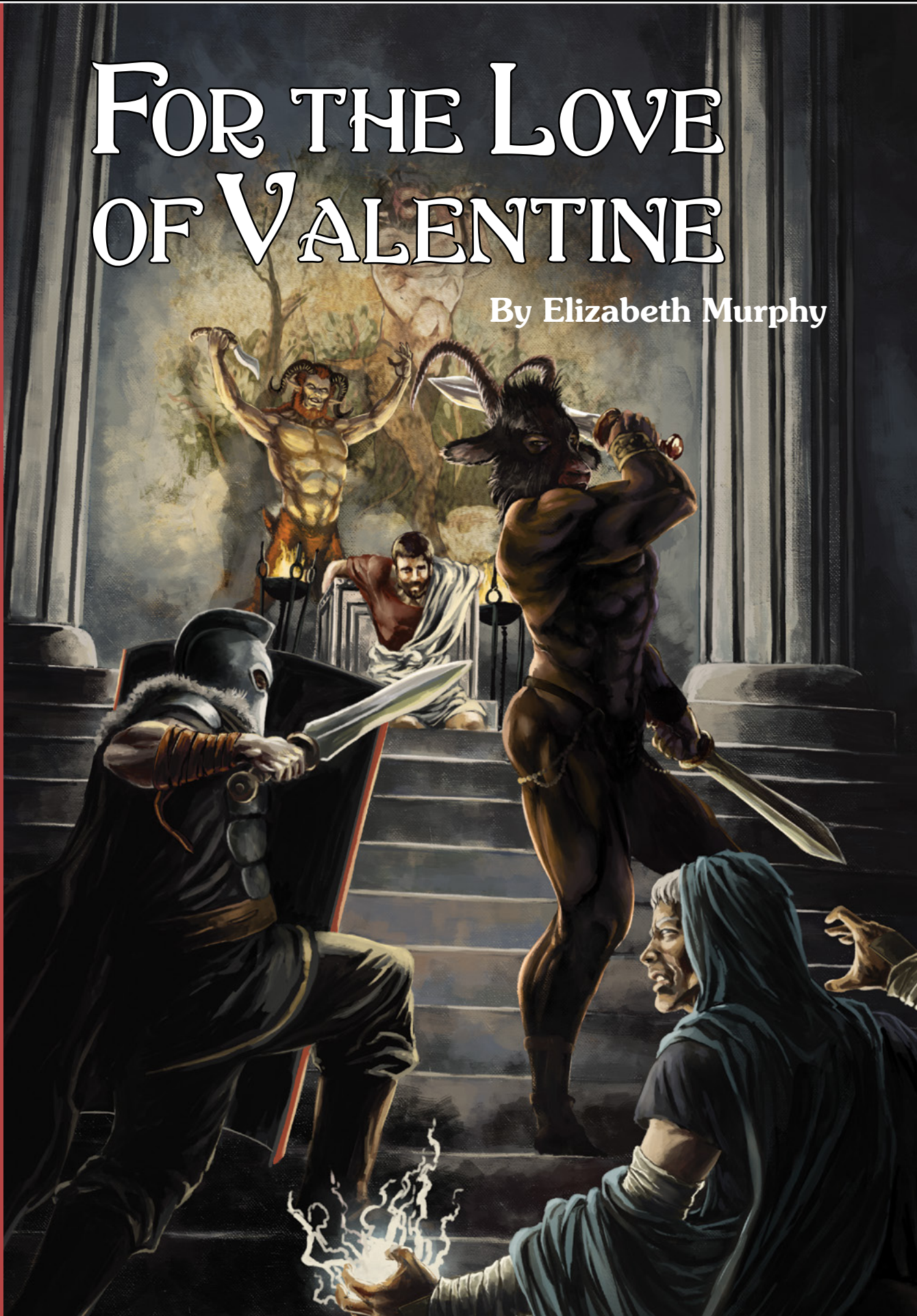




FROG GOD GAMES ADVENTURES

FOR THE LOVE OF VALENTINE

By Elizabeth Murphy



5TH EDITION
COMPATIBLE

FOR THE LOVE OF VALENTINE

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ADVENTURES
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FROG GOD GAMES

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FOR THE LOVE OF VALENTINE

BY ELIZABETH MURPHY

A 5E ADVENTURE DESIGNED FOR 3-5 TIER 1 CHARACTERS

INTRODUCTION

A local official hires the characters to smuggle his prisoner out of the city before the authorities can take him away for execution. This charismatic cleric, who preaches a religion of love, raised the ire of local authorities who find his message inconvenient and his followers disruptive. Their escape takes them through an ancient fertility festival teeming with drunken revelries and odd rituals, then through the countryside by foot or by boat. The festival seems lighthearted, but a sinister undercurrent of danger lurks beneath the revelry.

This adventure is designed for 3–5 Tier 1 characters. However, the nature of the threats presented means that it is relatively easy to scale the encounters to fit the party's composition.

The setting in this scenario drew heavily on the politics and rituals of the Roman Empire for inspiration. Interested readers are encouraged to learn more about the Lupercalia Festival, the legends of St. Valentine, and the god Faunus.

We have placed the adventure in the coastal city of Freegate, an independent city in the Western Akados region of the Lost Lands. Additional information can be found in the *City of Brass* adventure and the *Gazetteer of the Lost Lands*, both by **Frog God Games**. You are, of course, free to place this adventure in a small- to mid-sized city on a river. If you wish a more Roman feel to the adventure, replace Freegate with the city of Terni, the Talamerin river with the Nera, and mention the power and authority of Rome, a mere four-days' march to the south.

Some conservative elements insist that the current misfortunes are happening because people became too lazy in their worship of the gods. The old ways of sacrifice and suffering have given way to more frivolous festivities, inviting the capricious wrath of displeased deities. In particular it is argued that more vigorous worship of Faunus, god of field and herd, might be in order. Faunus is one of the oldest gods, with the torso of a man and the body of a goat. At the beginning of time he brought agriculture to the people and protected their crops and herds. Now he is more of a story used to frighten naughty children. Some argue that the times indicate he is angry and ready to do some serious damage in order to get the worship he deserves.

As if that weren't bad enough, a new cult is spreading, one whose prophets worship one god of love, Zadaatha, and appear to be arguing that everyone should just be nice to each other. Ridiculous, of course. What is that going to do to control the weather, smite enemies, and invite good harvests and good fortune?

FREEGATE

Freegate is a city of about 20,000 at the mouth of the Talamerin River on the Gulf of Akados. It is prosperous in large part because it is a major trade hub for the city of Bard's Gate to the west. Like most Hyperborean towns of the time, it is surrounded by walls, with gates on three sides and a thriving gulf port on the eastern side of the town. Two main roads form the core of the southern district: the *Cardo* forming the outer circuit, and the *Decumanus* forming the inner. The central sector of the town is the seat of political and administrative power, and is where the wealthy live. This section contains the Forum, many of the major shrines, the prison, and a lovely little amphitheater.

Freegate is a bustling merchant town in which the good citizens are generally content with their lives. They are aware that things are not as good as they used to be; the town has experienced a series of disastrous military engagements, higher taxes on goods and services, and government officials increasingly influenced by donations (ok, bribes) when making policy decisions rather than by what is best for the people. And they find the clerics of the old faith tiresome in their endless rants against the new religions that keep popping up (as everyone knows their real issue is how much money goes into the collection plate every week). However, the residents of Freegate love their family and neighbors, welcome strangers, and are always ready for a big celebration.

In terms of game play, the people of the city help those in trouble even if it involves a small risk (although none of them will go to jail unless they are firmly convinced they are righting a wrong), but they turn on anyone who uses excessive violence. For example, if a drunken bar patron is chasing a character, they might step in the way to allow for an escape. And if the drunk and a character get in a fistfight, they cheer a knockout punch (by either side) and hoist the victor to a local pub while helping the loser up. However, if a character pulls a sword and kills the drunk on the street, the crowd certainly turns ugly and calls go out for the local constabulary.

BACKGROUND

POLITICAL

After many years of peace and economic prosperity, the region has been experiencing tumultuous times. Unusual weather patterns reduced crop yields, and livestock seem more vulnerable to disease than they once did. As a result, the economy seems shaky, the price of food is rising, and work is harder to find. Unemployment and poverty have led to a rise in crime. Corrupt and incompetent government officials indulged in a series of poorly-conceived foreign ventures that drained the city of wealth and young men, further gutting the economy. Many people continue to thrive, of course, and most assume that times will get better, perhaps with the next harvest, or if the next foreign venture goes well. Still, the instability at the highest levels of government, business, and society creates a general unease among the populace.

LUPERCALIA

The Lupercalia Festival is a two-day religious festival. In the early, early days of the city, when it was just a village, the citizens worshipped Faunus to ensure good crops, healthy herds, and no more than the usual amount of pestilence. Only blood would purify the town and satisfy the god, so floggings, sacrifices of goats and dogs, and other bloody rituals took place over two days, all of which culminated in human sacrifice before a community of frenzied worshippers.

As the village expanded into a town and then became a thriving trading center, and as times became more enlightened, the old ways faded. Faunus became the monster under the bed, a story used to frighten children. While the festival of Lupercalia continued, its tone shifted from a dark ritual to a lighthearted celebration. The bloody and sometimes fatal whippings of the old days were replaced by bands of little girls with switches cut from yiglis trees swishing at women looking to get pregnant or to deliver their children safely. The town is filled with music, drink, and dance. The young indulge in all manner of normally frowned upon behavior, and their elders look on indulgently, thinking back fondly on their own youthful transgressions. A great many of the marriages and families in the city of Freegate got their start during Lupercalia.



MAJOR NPCs

The chief NPCs are described below, and stats are provided in the back of this book as needed.

VALENTINUS

Valentinus is a cleric for the new religion of love. He is rather ordinary looking at first glance, with his simple tunic and average build, but his eyes are deep and kind, and when he speaks, his voice seems to go straight into your heart and warm it. Most people who spend any time in his vicinity are drawn to him, and those in distress, or those looking for someone to follow, find their hearts opening to his message.

He was arrested for his preaching about his one god of love, Zadaatha, discarding the traditional conservative pantheon of deities, the gods of obedience, patriotism, and the hearth. Ordinarily, city leaders would not become embroiled in a spiritual matter, but the clergy has caught their attention over the issue of marriages. A long-standing law states that a married person cannot be drafted into military service. While this has never been an issue in the past as there were always enough single people around to muster an army, the large number of skirmishes lately has depleted the population of young people. The clerics of the old faith require an extended marriage preparation period, which provided more than enough time for officials to press these people into service, but these new religions are allowing for spur-of-the-moment courtships.

The local constable arrested Valentinus, but after two days in jail he converted everyone — jailors and prisoners alike — and they let him out. They rearrested and jailed him at the more secure Citadel (where soldiers are housed), but it happened again. This raised the ire of Severus Custos, the captain of the guard. The third time he was arrested, he was sent to the home of Sub-Praetor Alkander Coensor with orders to hold him until a contingent from the capital city came to collect him for his “trial” and execution.

While those around him are concerned about his safety, Valentinus is seemingly oblivious to the dangers and has no desire to fully curtail his preaching. He should not be played as a village idiot but rather as a sincere man of faith who firmly believes he simply needs to continue to serve his god in all ways no matter what the personal risk. Otherwise, what is the point of life?

SUB-PRAETOR ALKANDER COENSOR

The sub-praetor is a burly, graying man with fierce blue eyes whose every move commands respect. He is well liked by the high and the low in the city, having earned a reputation for an impartial application of the law regardless of the status or wealth of those before him. Rumors suggest he is being considered for high office in the capital city, although he gently brushes away such idle speculation as his heart is always with Freegate.

He also shares his heart with his niece, the daughter of his favorite sister, who came to live with him when she was a child and who has acted as the lady of the house for many years. Ever since Julianna arrived on his doorstep, orphaned and blind, she brought joy, love, and purpose to his life. His attempts to find a cure for her were unsuccessful and became a source of great frustration. Which is why when Valentinus asked what he could do to prove the power of his god Zadaatha, curing Julianna’s blindness was Alkander’s first thought. Now he is honor bound to help the young couple escape the authorities, even though it means exile and the loss of all he has built for himself.

JULIANNA

Julianna has red-blond hair and green eyes. She dresses in the style of a high-born woman but without an excess of adornment or finery (in fact, she wears one simple necklace that belonged to her mother). She is a lovely and practical woman who did the best to cope with the blindness that resulted from a devastating spell that killed the rest of her immediate family. Taken in by her uncle, she thrived under his love and protection. She now manages his household. She has developed extraordinary hearing and is quite perceptive. She is still getting used to the return of her sight. She is smart and carries herself with a quiet confidence.

It is clear to anyone in their presence that she and Valentinus share a deep love. However, her love is not based on his commanding voice or out of gratitude for his gift of sight. He, like her uncle, is an honorable and kind man and therefore worthy of her love. She is concerned for Valentinus' safety, as she knows that the city authorities are smarting from his previous escapes. But she also fully supports him in his mission; any attempt by the characters to bind or otherwise constrain Valentinus is met with her strenuous objections.

MATTIAS CALLIDUS

Mattias is a thin man whose brown eyes shine with the light of a true believer. He wears simple clothing but still carries himself like the upper-class scion he once was. His devotion has earned him a place of trust at the right hand of Valentinus. However, he and Valentinus clashed when Mattias urged using the new religion to start an uprising against the empire. Driven by chaotic passion, his frustrated ambition sent him into the arms of another religious group, the Lupercal, who want to revive the dark old gods, particularly Faunus, and thereby assert control over the government. Unbeknownst to anyone in the party, Mattias betrayed Valentinus. He used his connections to hire the characters to get Valentinus out of the city, but as part of a larger plan to sacrifice Valentinus to Faunus, the wrathful old god of crops and flocks. He believes he can bring about a return to a time when Faunus ruled the land, and he plans to be there at his right hand, or hoof, or whatever, when that happens.

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Characters may simply be passing through Freegate, which is located on a major thoroughfare, and stumble into the problem of escorting Valentinus. They may also have come because they are low on funds, and cities are often a place where one can find more ... irregular jobs. They may seek to enjoy the festival itself, as the city has a well-earned reputation for throwing a rowdy and boisterous celebration.

The characters should probably not be residents of Freegate or have connections to any of its citizens. The temptation to take advantage of this character background so as to avoid encounters within the city could prove too great for a player to resist. However, if a player insists, it is reasonable to limit these types of shenanigans by suggesting that their relatives have left town to avoid the fuss (as do many residents of New Orleans during Mardi Gras) or are too busy celebrating to get involved in any local intrigue.



RUNNING THE GAME

It is expected that the characters begin at the Caupona Inn, where they are told of a discreet job opportunity at the sub-praetor's house. After being briefed on their charge in Part 2, the scenario becomes a sandbox of sorts in Part 3 as they make their way out of a city full of obstacles. In Part 4, they must take an overland or water route to the drop-off location where they safely deliver their charges to Julianna's relatives. Or so they think. However, in Part 5 they learn that Mattias betrayed his former leader and now they must rush to save the captives.

A note on Valentinus' voice: Valentinus initially acts as if he is unaware of the effect his voice has on others. If pointed out to him, he shrugs and simply says Zadaatha is powerful, and he is grateful that others are helping him spread the word. Under no circumstances does he use his gift to help himself, for example by commanding a crowd to help him or by manipulating soldiers to leave him alone. His previous captors released him because they came to accept his faith, not because he asked them to do so. If asked why, he explains that when he once used his voice for selfish reasons, Zadaatha left him for many days and he never wants to feel that alone in the world again. Valentinus only willingly uses his gift to save Julianna, after which he is unable to call upon his god for some time.

- PART ONE: THE ARRIVAL
- PART TWO: THE SUB-PRAETOR'S HOUSE
- PART THREE: ESCAPE FROM FREEGATE
- PART FOUR: TRAVELING TO THE VILLAGE OF PLEISCO
- PART FIVE: RESCUING VALENTINUS

PART ONE: THE ARRIVAL

Whatever brought the characters to Freegate, here they are. It is early spring in a temperate climate, during what we would think of as mid-February.

Read or paraphrase the following:

As you enter the city of Freegate in the late morning, there is a palpable energy in the air. Children are running through the streets carrying small branches and laughing as they swish them at each other. Shops have brightly colored banners in their windows advertising their wares and the excellent prices they are offering. Homes are decorated with flags and streamers or, in the poorer areas, cut up strips of cloth that wave in the wind.

If the characters ask any passersby, they are told that the celebration of Lupercalia begins this very day. The patient resident is happy to explain that, “Lupercalia is a deeply religious event celebrating . . . ah, actually it is just a chance to get drunk and maybe have a bit of fun if you know what I mean,” offering a knowing wink. If asked about lodging or work, the resident pauses to consider and then recommends the Caupona as a respectable working-class inn where one might find food, lodging, and perhaps make a connection.

THE CAUPONA

Read or paraphrase the following:

Like the other buildings you have seen, the Caupona is of wooden construction and tightly pressed to its neighbors. It appears to be on the low end of lodging — respectable enough that you don’t need to barricade your room door at night but cheap enough that sleeping with your coin purse under your pillow isn’t the worst idea. Next to the door is a notice that reads: “Per order of city elders, the use of weapons is strictly forbidden.”

Inside, the low-vaulted ceiling is black from the smoke of lamps, candles, and the hearth. A young woman stands behind a bar with large urns of ale and baskets of bread, platters of roasted meat and vegetables, and a tray of succulent figs. A burly older man circulates among the crowd and provides table service. The clientele appears to be a mix of working-class sorts with varying levels of clothing, manners, and personal hygiene. Most of the patrons exude that giddy sense of anticipation that presages a major festival.



THE PATRONS

The young woman behind the bar is Marilla (**commoner**), the daughter of the owner. She is despondent because the young man she loves, Darius, has been conscripted into the army and she does not know when — or if — she will see him again. They wanted to get married but were unable to find anyone to perform the ceremony. The army has had trouble recruiting, and married men cannot be conscripted, so the local authorities have forbidden young men from getting married until the legion has met its quota of new “recruits.”

The burly man working the tables is the owner and Marilla’s father, Marcus (**commoner**). He moves quickly around the room fetching new urns of ale, stoking the fire, joking with the customers, and otherwise keeping the place going. He keeps a concerned eye on his heartbroken daughter and can confirm her story. He is anticipating a busy couple of days because today is the first day of the two-day festival of Lupercalia. Business may be very good indeed, or the place could be completely destroyed in revelries run amok. Hard to tell. If asked about work, he notes that times are hard and the city has a sense of unrest. He warns that lots of suspicious characters are in town for the festival.

Marilla and Marcus are happy to talk about Lupercalia. They describe it as a festival where the streets are filled with libidinous young people looking for love, desperate young wives who want to conceive, and people just enjoying a party. If pressed, they explain that the festival began as a ceremony to honor Faunus, the powerful and capricious god who protected crops and herds, but was believed to require blood: floggings, sacrifices of goats and dogs, and ultimately human sacrifices in exchange. But those were the old days, long ago. As the city grew and moved from those primitive ways, Lupercalia became a lighthearted celebration of fertility, and floggings were replaced by little girls running around hitting people with switches. It’s all just good fun now.

Among the inn’s patrons, a few stand out. Read or paraphrase each of the following textboxes as the characters note the individual described.

CRISPUS AND CALVIA

An older woman is engaged in an animated but friendly discussion with a young man. Both are dressed in elegant clothing, and a religious symbol hangs prominently from around her neck.

With a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Religion) check, an adventurer recognizes the symbol as the icon of Zeus, one of the established religions in the region. They are not hiding their conversation so it does not require a check to overhear them. However, it does require a successful DC 8 Dexterity (Stealth) check to hide this eavesdropping for an extended period.

The young man, whom the woman calls Crispus (**cultist**), is arguing with the passion of youth for the return to the old ways when the Lupercalia Festival featured lashings, blood, and sacrifice as a way to purify the town and protect it from pestilence. The older of the two, Calvia (**priest**), smiles indulgently and reminds her friend that people are more likely to make donations when they are happy, and besides, it is always cute when little girls whack someone with their switches of yiglis branches. The younger one, exasperated, declares that this sort of lax approach to things is what led to the rise of the new “Love” religion, and the only way to protect the people from pestilence, disaster, and starvation is to return to the strength of the old ways. He rises up and, after briefly catching himself on the table, stumbles out in a huff. Calvia rolls her eyes and returns to her ale.

If approached, the cleric politely engages in talk about the upcoming

festival. If asked about Crispus, she is indulgent but dismissive — the young man is simply overreacting to a perceived threat from these new religions. If pressed, she simply smiles and says, “The young are passionate. I must take my leave, but perhaps if you are here this evening we can talk more.” A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Insight) check indicates she has no interest in discussing such matters with strangers.

GALLUS AND TAPIS

A large man is comfortably ensconced in a corner table with several plates of food in front of him. A steely-eyed guard stands to one side, his eyes darting around the room.

The large man is Gallus (as **noble**), a prosperous merchant who is watched over by Tapis (**veteran**), his bodyguard. Tapis stands at attention with his hand on his sword if anyone approaches, but Gallus waves through any adventurer who asks to speak with him. He has recently delivered goods to Freegate via the river port and is staying for Lupercalia, which by all accounts is quite a party in this town. If asked, he has no information on any work other than to suggest that the characters ask around the port, as that is often a good place to pick up odd jobs.

TITUS

One man sits alone against a wall, apparently nursing a drink. The hood of his cloak shadows his face but from the movement of his head he is watching all that transpires in the room.

This is Titus (**commoner**), a follower of Valentinus, although he has taken great pains to hide that fact. He is dressed in nondescript clothing that has seen better days, and a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check indicates that he is wary but not nervous. If anyone approaches him and sits down, he engages in enough conversation to be polite without offering any meaningful information (“Yes, I was born here.” “No, I can’t say I know anything about that.” “Oh, I do odd jobs here and there.”)

THE INCIDENT

At some point, a group of six young men (**commoners**) rises from their table and gathers around the table of the cleric Calvia. It takes no effort to hear them grumbling phrases such as “exploiting your power,” “your time is coming,” and “the people will take back what is theirs.” Their words are disgruntled, but they are not espousing a particularly well-reasoned political argument. One of the men grasps at Calvia, fumbling with the strings on the cleric’s purse, trying in his drunken state to untie it from her belt.

The young men are clearly drunk and in no mood for any soothing words to distract them from berating and robbing Calvia. On a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check, an adventurer notices that each man has a tattoo on his arm of a set of horns, like one might see on a deer or elk, ending in a knife blade with drops of blood.

If the characters intercede, the leader of these men asks them pointedly if they are followers of this worthless cleric. Unless offered money (no other bribes will work), the leader eventually throws a powerful if somewhat wobbly fist at the adventurer closest to him or who is doing the most talking. Combat should proceed per the standard rules. The leader tries to flee if he loses half his hit points. Otherwise, after two punches, he asks the adventurer to yield.

If any other character intercedes, the other members of the group start a bar fight. While Marcus does his best to calm his patrons down, he is only one guy, and they are a group of drunken young men determined to cause trouble. Neither Titus nor Gallus joins the fight, although Tapis pushes away anyone who gets too close to his boss's table. Anyone who asks or makes a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check sees Calvia, looking pretty badly roughed up, duck behind the bar with Marilla. This rumble continues for six rounds before the sound of whistles is heard, indicating the imminent arrival of constables (**hoplites**, see **Appendix B**). The young men with the tattoos immediately flee. The constables presumably see them running away and pursue without ever entering the inn.

After the fight, Calvia thanks her rescuers profusely. Marilla does her best to clean her bloody face. Calvia doesn't know the men who harassed her, and she is not familiar with what the horn and knife tattoo might mean. Times are hard, young men are frustrated and looking for answers, and she hopes everything calms down eventually. She then apologizes and takes her leave.

THE INVITATION

Once things settle down and the characters are alone (either inside or outside the inn), the wary man with the cloak approaches and, if he has not already done so, introduces himself as Titus (**commoner**). If the characters joined in the fighting, he expresses admiration for the way they handled themselves and say that he knows of a job for a courageous gang that knows how to get things done in trying circumstances. If the characters did not join in the fighting, Titus commends them for their poise and willingness to not engage in violence. He asks if they need work, as he has a client who needs a group with cool heads on their shoulders.

Titus explains that the client, the sub-praetor Alkander Coensor, needs a delivery discreetly made to a location outside of town. He describes in some detail the location of the sub-praetor's villa in a posh neighborhood near the center of town. The characters should mention that they heard of this opportunity from Titus if they want to get in the door.

Titus is not lying about the client or the nature of the work. A successful DC 12 Wisdom (Insight) check suggests he is holding something back. If confronted, he admits that he was asked to locate any competent-looking people from out of town, as his client wants to avoid engaging anyone with ties to the community or strong feelings on the local disputes about religion. If further pressed, he may admit that the job is potentially somewhat dangerous and will pit the group against the authorities of the empire. What he does not share is that he is conspiring with Mattias, Valentinus' disloyal disciple, to make sure that the mission ends in disaster.

PART TWO: THE SUB-PRAETOR'S HOUSE

Read or paraphrase the following:

The streets are starting to fill up with happy families and couples. On every corner, food vendors ply their wares, and the sound of festive music fills the streets. The sub-praetor's home is tucked in a collection of well-to-do houses with finely-crafted exteriors. As with the other buildings in this sector, there is an imposing and sturdy gate at the front door.

An elderly man named Renus (**commoner** with Wisdom 14 and Perception +4) sits just inside the gate. He has been in the sub-praetor's employ for many years — watching this gate is a mark of honor as he is the first person that visitors meet. He questions the characters as to their business with the sub-praetor — that is his job after all — but apparently has been expecting someone to arrive. Once the group mentions the name Titus, he wraps up his inquisition and calls over a young woman (**commoner**) to lead them into the house.



Read or paraphrase the following:

The passage from the gate leads into a spacious courtyard with a mosaic floor, a fountain, tables and lounges, and doors opening off of the courtyard into the rest of the house. A series of empty alcoves are set into the walls.

A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals pieces of what looks to be small pottery objects scattered along the walls. If a character stops to examine one, a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check suggests that they were once figurines.

With a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Religion) check, the character realizes that the alcoves would traditionally house small statues of the household gods. If the group also notices the broken pottery nearby, the character realizes someone has smashed these figures.

A household servant (**commoner**) leads the party through the courtyard to a smaller receiving room. It is lavishly and comfortably furnished. An elegantly-dressed older man whose clothing and bearing marks him as the sub-praetor awaits, seated on a low bench. He is clearly agitated. A poised and well-dressed young woman is beside him. She frequently glances at the young man next to her, who is dressed in simple clothes with a symbol hanging from his neck. Standing behind the group is a thin young man wearing the same symbol. Three young men and a young woman all dressed in servants' clothes recline on the floor.

A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals an air of activity around the house and the muffled sounds of frantic preparations.

A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check reveals that the group has varied emotional states. The sub-praetor is agitated. The seated young woman (Julianna) is concerned for the young man next to her (Valentinus), as is the man standing behind them (Mattias). The four young people are anxious about what will happen next. Only the seated young man (Valentinus) seems serene and unaffected by the mood around him.

Sub-Praetor Alkander Coensor (**noble**) welcomes the group to his home and introduces the sitting young woman as his niece, Julianna (**commoner** with Wisdom 16 and Perception +5), the sitting young man as **Valentinus** (see **Appendix B**), and the standing young man as Valentinus' compatriot Mattias Callidus (**noble**). He does not mention the four young people on the floor (**commoners**); if asked, he dismissively refers to them as servants.

He explains that Valentinus is a local cleric who has gotten himself on the wrong side of the local churches and government authorities for preaching his faith of Zadaatha, the one god of love. Alkander would like to hire the party to escort Valentinus, Julianna, and their servants out of the city to a safe place where they will be transported outside the reach of the local government. The characters will be paid handsomely for this effort, but they must leave this very day, as law enforcement is due at any minute to bring Valentinus to the governor's villa for trial and execution.

He happily takes any questions the characters might have. Typical questions and responses might be:

What is the plan? Valentinus and Julianna are to be smuggled out of Freegate and brought to the hills northeast of the town, specifically the village of Pleisco on the Talamerin river. A boundary stone believed to be dedicated to Terminus, the god of boundaries, is just outside the village to the north. Collis Mangone, a distant cousin of Julianna, will be waiting there to meet the party. He operates on the fringes of the law and has stayed far from Freegate. But Julianna is his family and under their code he would give his life to protect her.

Why is Valentinus in trouble with the local churches? Valentinus is a cleric of Zadaatha, the god of love. He caused a great deal of trouble in these parts by preaching about people being nice to each other and worshipping Zadaatha alone, rather than the traditional conservative pantheon of deities. Obviously, the local clerics would prefer not to have the competition.

Why is Valentinus in trouble with the authorities? Under the laws of the land, a married person cannot be drafted into military service. Due to some unfortunate military blunders, the army needs all the young people it can get to fill its ranks. The clerics of the old faith require an extended marriage preparation period (more than enough time for officials to press these people into service), but Valentinus preaches that Zadaatha believes that people in love should be able to marry whenever they like. He has been performing that ceremony whenever asked. The authorities felt they needed to put an end to his disruptive preaching.

Why is he here at the sub-praetor's house? The local guard arrested him several days ago. But after two days in jail, Valentinus converted everyone there — jailors and prisoners alike — and they let him out. The city guard took him prisoner again and locked him at the citadel where soldiers are housed. This time it took only one day for his captors to convert en masse and escort him to the front gate of the citadel. They sent him away with flowers and gifts of food (which Valentinus promptly gave away to the people he met on his way through town). This greatly embarrassed Severus Custos, the captain of the guard, who is mad with power at the best of times. Severus captured Valentinus for a third time and was ordered to deliver him to Alkander Coensor, a man renowned for honor, wisdom, and devotion to duty. Uncontaminated soldiers returning from exterior service are on their way to collect Valentinus to bring him to "trial" and, if Severus' gleeful proclamations are to be believed, his execution.

Why is Alkander Coensor trying to help him escape? The sub-praetor engaged Valentinus in a debate, hoping to show the young cleric the error of his ways. Valentinus asked how he could prove the power of Zadaatha's love. Alkander named something he believed to be impossible, something he had been trying to do for years: restore sight to his niece Julianna, who had been blind since she was a little girl.

"In my hubris, I said if his god of love could restore Julianna's sight, I would smuggle him to safety and destroy all of my household gods." He takes a slug of wine, and gestures. "He walked over to the poor girl, took her head in his hands and kissed each of her eyes. As you can see, her sight is restored, even as her heart has been lost to him and his cause."

What is the best way out of the city? There are three ways out of the city.

- Head to the river gate and hire a boat to go upriver to the village. Soldiers are always at the wharf, but they are probably not expecting trouble tonight.
- Go to the western gate near the Forum and try to walk out of the city in the hopes that the guards there don't yet know that Valentinus has escaped.
- Both of these routes take the party through the throngs celebrating Lupercalia.
- Going to the southern gate avoids the mayhem of the city center, but that route leads to the citadel where Valentinus was held. This risks bumping right into soldiers who recognize him. Also, soldiers from the capital will likely enter through the southern gate, if they have not done so already.



River Talamerin

Freegate City

800 ft.

- ① Alkander Coensor's Villa
- ② Caupona Inn
- ③ Citadel
- ④ River Gate
- ⑤ West Gate
- ⑥ South Gate

Time is of the essence. Severus Custos, the local captain of the guard, feels personally insulted by the number of his men who abetted Valentinus' multiple escapes. If he hears of the escape (and news travels fast), he enthusiastically searches for Valentinus. In addition, fresh soldiers are on the march and may arrive in Freegate at any time to take custody of the prisoner. They will not want to face the governor without their prisoner and likely pursue the party.

What is this festival? Lupercalia is an old celebration of fertility. Once dedicated to the god Faunus, people were whipped and even sacrificed to ensure good harvests and healthy animals. In these modern times, the festivities give a nod to the old ways, but it is more of a carnal party. The old tales suggest that other forces still stalk the night as well in search of blood sacrifices.

Do you know anything about tattoos of an antler and knife? Antlers used to be the symbol of the old god Faunus, in whose honor Lupercalia was originally held. Only back then, Faunus demanded whippings and blood sacrifices — both animal and human — if the people wanted their crops not to wither in the fields. It's a mystery why anyone would want to be associated with such bloodthirsty traditions in these enlightened times. The city is full of frustrated young men, however, who want things to change.

How does Valentinus keep escaping? When Valentinus speaks, his voice seems to go deep into the heart and fills it with love. The people around him, particularly people who are vulnerable or looking for someone to follow find themselves filled with feelings of compassion and joy to the exclusion of all other rational thought. Apparently, this happened to his previous captors who then willingly let him go — some of them gave him an offering as well. Julianna is of strong character, and while she loves him and chooses to follow him, she does not appear to be affected in that way.

Other than your generous payment, is there anything else you can give us to help on our journey? Alkander regretfully says that by helping Valentinus escape, his career in Freegate is finished and he is packing up to leave before his presence is requested for helping a prisoner escape. He intends to go into hiding and hopes to live out his days in some obscure country villa until all this excitement blows over. When he says that, Julianna looks at him with tears in her eyes and reaches over to squeeze his hand.

As the group prepares to leave with Julianna and Valentinus, the following things happen:

- The servants insist on accompanying the party. Julianna's maidservant will not leave her side, and the three young men have pledged their lives to Valentinus.
- Julianna and Alkander have a tearful and loving farewell, knowing they likely will never see each other again.
- Alkander asks Valentinus to take good care of Julianna, and Valentinus gives his assurance. He shakes Alkander's hand and says "Remember, sir, with love, all journeys are safer."
- Mattias and Valentinus speak briefly about Mattias continuing to preach love, with Valentinus noting that their movement is not about political upheaval, but about what is in people's hearts. Mattias is a little annoyed by this but agrees and bids Valentinus luck in his escape. He also thanks the characters for taking on such an important charge.

Note: Through the course of the adventure, Valentinus offers words of encouragement to the party such as "Love shoots the truest arrow" or "Love is the best guide to safety." This is obviously going to be somewhat annoying to the characters, and it should not be taken to an extreme where it becomes too much of a recurring joke. However, it is a clue that actions motivated by love in this game (as opposed to being motivated by fear or desire for commercial gain, for example) get an advantage. This should not be made obvious to the players. It is important to surviving and succeeding in the final scene.

IF THE FISH DON'T BITE

There is of course a chance that the characters elect not to take on this task. Having made that extremely sensible decision, they can enjoy walking around the festival while taking in the sights. At some point, however, men wearing Faunus masks (**cultists**) accost them and demand information on where Valentinus has gone. Titus was persuaded to give them up, not knowing that they had declined the job. Protestations that they do not know his whereabouts fall on deaf ears, and they begin to be roughly escorted away from the crowd toward a dark section of the street. You are encouraged to improvise based on how the characters react, with the proviso that any bloodshed brings the authorities and other members of the Faunus sect in pursuit.

The characters may also elect to decline the job offer, then go to the authorities to turn Valentinus over, perhaps in hope of some reward. Severus Custos, the captain of the guard, insists — at sword point, if necessary — that the characters accompany him to the sub-praetor's house where members of his squad enthusiastically break down the gate and rush inside. Valentinus comes quietly until he sees some of the guards deal roughly with Julianna, whereupon he cries out loudly, "Help, help." A mob quickly converges, and in the midst of the rioting, the characters see Severus Custos staring at them with hate in his eyes. The characters may at this point elect to help Valentinus escape the city or go at it alone. In either case, they should realize that their general health and well-being depends on not falling into Custos' grasp.

PART THREE: ESCAPE FROM FREEGATE

As the party leaves the sub-praetor's house, they may be struck by how quickly the aspect of the city has changed in the time they were with the sub-praetor. The streets are now filled with throngs of giddy revelers. (Imagine Mardi Gras, Times Square on New Year's Eve, or any city after their favorite sports team won an important game.) Young women are chasing young men; young men are chasing young women. Vendors are selling meat pies, sweet cakes, and wine. Pickpockets are zipping in and out of the crowd, and prostitutes are offering the comfort of their trade. Strolling minstrels add to the unholy din. Soldiers are scattered through the crowd. Some attempt to patrol the streets, intervening in the worst of the altercations but otherwise just enjoying the spectacle. Some are out conscripting unsuspecting drunken young men who will wake up tomorrow morning extremely hung over. In the citadel. In uniform.

It should be immediately clear to the characters that that they are not going to be able to sneak quickly and easily out of the city. The streets are wall to wall with revelers, and every alley seems to end at the door of a home or business. The crowds leave no room for a cart or other conveyance. They also need to herd their traveling group, which in addition to Valentinus and Julianna includes the four servants (think "herding cats"). While Julianna seems to understand the need for

alacrity, Valentinus is immune to all entreaties to move quickly through the streets and in fact seems to want to do nothing more than join the fun. If the characters try to manhandle him or otherwise physically incapacitate him, Julianna immediately comes to his defense followed shortly afterward by the servants. Julianna is fiercely protective. The servants are largely ineffective in any melee situation but do run about and get in the way. They certainly draw the attention of the crowd, who will be moved to assist Valentinus even if he is in an unconscious state.

If the characters ask, it is clear that all six of their charges view the sub-praetor as a great man and they are sorrowful that he needs to flee from his long-time home because of this situation. They are also generally positive about Mattias, although Julianna is concerned his preaching is too closely linked to his political beliefs, which include a desire to overthrow the current rulers. All of them feel he will do a good job tending to his parishioners, although he does not have the same divine spark that Valentinus exudes.

A WORD ABOUT SEVERUS CUSTOS

Severus Custos and the soldiers serve three roles throughout this game:

1. They are a means of keeping the action moving — there can be no hiding out somewhere until the coast is clear or lingering to enjoy Lupercalia, because Severus and the soldiers are due to arrive at any time in the home of Alkander Coensor to take Valentinus away. When the soldiers get to Alkander's villa and find Valentinus gone (and hopefully Alkander as well), the hunt will be on to track down and apprehend Valentinus. Remember, Severus Custos takes this all very personally.

2. They are a means of heightening tension. At any point when things seem a little bit too comfortable, one of the characters or NPCs catches sight of Severus Custos on his horse barreling through the crowds or the pennant of the governor's own soldiers making their way toward them. Or they may hear a rumor that the governor's soldiers were seen a few blocks away. You get the idea.

3. They can be deployed as an encounter at your discretion if the party seems to be rolling particularly well and are just having too easy a time of things. The number of soldiers can be adjusted to be a challenging yet winnable encounter. The soldiers have marched for several days and are not expecting trouble. On the other hand, they are well-armed professional soldiers, and their careers will not be aided by losing one troublesome cleric who seems to be spouting aphorisms of love. Severus Custos is a human with strong fighting skills and leadership who is highly motivated to be done with Valentinus once and for all so he can hopefully redeem his tarnished reputation.

PLANNED ENCOUNTERS

Three encounters occur as some point as the party makes its way toward the edge of the city. Additional encounters are described below that may or may not happen based on how quickly the characters make their way through the city. Feel free to use some or all of these according to your tastes and those of your players.

THE PUELLAE YIGLIS

Read or paraphrase the following:

Pairs of little girls (**commoners**) in red robes carrying switches dance through the crowd. Suddenly, a respectable-looking lady crouches down on the ground near the children, who enthusiastically give her whacks on the back. Nearby, a young man similarly prostrates himself and receives a mild whipping by another set of giggling girls.

It is unlikely that the characters intercede, but if they do, they quickly find the mob threatening them and telling them to leave the children alone. This activity likely draws at least one member of the city guard (see **Random Encounters** below).

Any nearby citizen can explain that the girls are carrying switches prepared from the yiglis tree, which grows only on a mountain by a waterfall a day's journey outside the city. The people of Freegate believe that receiving a light lashing from these branches causes young matrons to conceive and deliver a healthy child. Unmarried young men and women believe that being whipped by the little girls brings them luck in love, so they do the same. The girls enjoy the chance to whack their elders, as well as the sweets that they are supposed to be given by anyone receiving their "divine" blessing.

If the characters engage with Valentinus about the tradition, he says that he does not support violence having any part in bringing couples together or bringing new life to the world. "Love," he says, "brings the healthiest children." Julianna shudders and says it reminds her too much of the dark rituals that used to be associated with the festival. If pressed, she says that the children of the household servants used to scare her with stories of Faunus, who would steal household dogs and other animals, and might appear on a gust of wind to frighten you or even whip you to death if you were not a good girl.

ENCOUNTER WITH THE LUPERCAI

On a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check, read or paraphrase the following:

Your eye catches a strange sight coming toward you. Three men wearing masks with antlers attached to them are obviously scanning the crowd as they move forward. There are dark red streaks on their arms and exposed areas, and at least some of them have that tattoo of the antlers with the knife. Each of them is also carrying what looks to be a leather strap. Their appearance exudes an air of malevolence.

These young men (**cultists** with *Faunus whips* — see **Side Box**) are part of the Lupercai, the religious order that follows Faunus. They may just be out to cause trouble, or they may have heard rumors of Valentinus' escape (it's a small city, after all) and decided to capture Valentinus and bring him to their leaders, who have spoken out against this love cleric on many occasions. Yes, it is a poor plan and frankly contrary to the plans set in motion by their own clerics. But fanatical young men are not known for their critical planning skills, particularly after an afternoon of quaffing ale.

FAUNUS WHIP

Weapon (whip), uncommon (requires attunement by a worshipper of Faunus)

Once per day you can use your action to call upon the power of Faunus as you crack the bloody whip. A creature of your choice within 10 feet must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened. A creature frightened in this way must use its action to move as far as possible from you. The frightened creature can repeat the saving throw on the end of its turn, ending the effect on itself on a success.

If the characters spot them and elect to hide in the crowd or down an alley, they should each make DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) checks. If at least half the party succeeds, consider them hidden from the Lupercal. With a successful DC 14 Charisma (Persuasion) check, a character also manages to get Valentinus, Julianna, and their entourage to follow the plan.

On a failure, or if the Perception check fails, one of the young men spots the party and they begin to move purposefully through the crowd toward the characters, unclipping their strips of still bloody leather. The characters spot them at roughly the same time. A determination should be made (either by consensus or by you) as to how much room is available to maneuver. If the party elected to try to sneak by the masked men, presumably the crowd is densely packed. If, however, the plan had been to hide in an alleyway, then there may be more space in which to take action. Alternatively, the crowd might sense the malevolent intent of the young men and shrink away, providing more room for melee.

The Lupercal initiate their attack by flicking their bloodied leather straps at any character between themselves and Valentinus. The Lupercal then engage in one round of fisticuffs, at which point they draw the attention of the crowd. At this point, the young men somewhat belatedly realize why their plan was not a good one and attempt to slip into the crowd. If any of them is captured, they simply say that they believe that Valentinus' message is responsible for the recent military failures, the corruption in the government, and any other ill they can think of. If one of them is unmasked, he is revealed as Crispus, the young man who loudly berated the cleric back at the Caupona. Valentinus at some point says to the captured Lupercal (or to the gathered crowd, if that's how it goes), "Love brings the best enlightenment."

THE RUNNING OF THE ESTERIES

The characters should make a DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check. A successful character hears a rumbling coming from the street ahead of them and notices that some of the crowd is moving to the sides of the street. One round later, read or paraphrase the following:

Coming down the street toward you is a group of young men running at top speed. They appear to be having fun displaying their excellent speed, although it could be argued they are also displaying poor decision-making skills. Bearing down on them is a herd of eight large beasts with four sets of horns. (Imagine the running of the bulls in Pamplona, for example.) A man dressed as Faunus runs behind the frantic and somewhat confused esteries and appears to be egging them on while pretending to try to catch them. (Note: This man is not actually a follower of Faunus; he is more like a rodeo clown just trying to keep the fun going.)

Characters who heard the rumble or who were immediately warned need to pass a DC 8 Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Strength (Athletics) check to push their way into the crowd on the side of the street. For those caught unaware, the DC is set at 10. For a failed check, the crowd good-naturedly pushes the character back into the street, directly into the path of the beasts.

At this point, the character must pass a DC 12 Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Strength (Athletics) check to ensconce themselves into the crowd or risk being trampled by the esteries (use **elk**) (who are not looking for a fight but will not let anything slow them down). Roll 1d4 to see how many esteries attack the character.

If he is caught up in the action or if he is simply trying to be helpful and encouraging from the sidelines, Valentinus calls out, "Love has the fleetest feet!"

Alternatively, the character may elect to run ahead of the esteries, who have a Speed of 35 feet. Characters must make a DC 10 Constitution check every turn that they are running or take one level of exhaustion, collapsing once they reach five levels. A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that runners are diving into the crowd after about 100 feet of running, with other revelers taking their place. It requires a successful DC 12 Dexterity (Acrobatics) or Strength (Athletics) check to hurtle into the crowd, resulting in 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage unless the character makes the check by 5 or more.

If the check is not made, the esteries may trample the character.

POTENTIAL ENCOUNTERS

The following encounters are offered as potential consequences for characters who spend too much time discussing strategy or concocting wild schemes to escape attention. They may also be used if you would like to extend the characters' time in the city.

BELLIGERENT STRANGERS

Any street festival of this size has people who overindulge in their recreational enhancer of choice. A party of characters, even a low-level one, could certainly present a prime target for someone whose risk assessment skills are thus impaired. While they are unlikely to draw weapons (knowing that the penalties for such an action are severe), they certainly would think nothing of wearing a pair of brass knuckles or securing a small pouch of coins in their punching fist. If you choose this encounter, 1d4 + 1 **commoners** interfere with the party, looking for a fistfight. Treat any who has brass knuckles or similar as doing +1 damage on a successful hit.

THE WEDDING

Someone in the crowd recognizes Valentinus and asks him to marry them. At your discretion, this might be Marilla from the Caupona who has been reunited with Darius for the evening. If that seems like too cute a coincidence, feel free to invent a new NPC. Valentinus' personality is such that he would never let concerns about his personal safety get in the way of bringing two people together under the blessing of his deity. If the characters convincingly roleplay why he should continue his exodus from the city, you might allow for a DC 12 Charisma (Persuasion) check. However, Julianna rebuffs any attempt to draw her into this discussion as she believes Valentinus should have the final say in all matters of his faith.

If Valentinus prevails and the marriage is to be performed, the characters need to minimize Valentinus' public exposure. Strategies might include holding the ceremony inside a building or down an alleyway, convincing the couple that they should sit down with Valentinus while well-wishers crowd around them, or ... well, the

players will undoubtedly have their own plans. If given the opportunity, Valentinus no doubt speaks a few words about how two lives joined by love are the soundest foundation for a family, a community, and a religion. If no convincing effort is made to keep the event out of the public's eyes, an excited and cheering crowd forms and the authorities arrive in short order (see next entry).

CITY GUARD

The city guard are out in force during the festival in the hope that their mere presence might be enough to dissuade anyone from getting out of hand. Most of the guards (**hoplites**, see **Appendix B**) are willing to overlook a certain amount of revelry (and might even accept an alcoholic beverage from a vendor) but they crack down if it looks as if people will get hurt. Each guard has a partner who is within earshot, and they each carry a small flute-like whistle.

How the party responds to encountering a city guardsman determines what happens next. If they are generally minding their own business, a low DC check on a relevant skill (e.g. Deception, Persuasion, Stealth) would be appropriate. If, however, the guard arrives in the middle of some public event such as a fight or a wedding, the DC should be higher.

PICKPOCKETS

If the party stays in the same place for more than 10 minutes, there is a 25% chance that a pickpocket (**spy**) randomly strikes one of the characters or Julianna (the rest of the entourage does not look like they would be carrying money). To see if an unsuspecting would-be victim gets fleeced, compare the target's passive Perception against the pickpocket's Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check. Failure means an adventurer loses one random item on their person that is not secreted away, while success means they catch the person in the act.

Julianna can lose only one thing, her necklace, and she quickly notices if it goes missing. A successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check spots the culprit moving through the crowd. She is extremely distressed and implores the party to retrieve her necklace, as it belonged to her mother and it's all she has from that time in her life. Valentinus also insists they follow the perpetrator, as clearly anyone driven to a life of crime would benefit from the teachings of Zadastha.

CAPITAL SOLDIERS

Six capital soldiers (**footmen**, see **Appendix B**) are bustling up and down the streets, accompanied by a sergeant (**captain**, see **Appendix B**). If more than two hours of game time have passed since Alkander Coensor's villa, they may carry a parchment with an illustration that looks not entirely unlike Valentinus, but it was hastily drawn and replicated many times. They are also hampered because they each have puffs of wool in their ears, a precaution against finding themselves swayed by Valentinus' honeyed words. They are serious, battle-tested, and certainly intervene if drawn to the scene by the whistle of a guard or a giant wedding celebration, for example. A normal unit of city guards is an inconvenience, to be sure, but far less dangerous than Severus Custos and the capital soldiers. If melee begins, Valentinus may be heard to say, "Fear not, my friends, Love wields the sharpest sword."

LEAVING THE CITY

Three ways exist to exit the city: secure a boat to go up the River Talamerin or by walking out one of the two gateways in the city's walls.

RIVER GATE

Read or paraphrase the following:

As you reach the waterfront along the edge of the River Talamerin, the sounds of revelry fade into the background. The smells of wine and sweaty people give way to cool breezes with undertones of fish, damp, and rot. Along the river's edge, you see a variety of small boats bobbing in the water next to a series of six docks.

Most vessels are either small personal fishing boats seating four to five people or slightly larger barges designed to transport small amounts of cargo or 10 to 12 people. Clustered around three small fire pits are 4 rough looking sailors (as **bandits**) playing dice, drinking, and chatting. A fourth fire has 4 soldiers (**hoplites**, see **Appendix B**) lounging next to it. If the characters approach the fire pit with the soldiers, the conversations stops and heads turn toward them. With a successful DC 8 Wisdom (Perception) check, it is clear that the soldiers have been imbibing local wines. For the other fire pits, a successful DC 10 Charisma check has the sailors bidding the party to gather around the fire. Otherwise, they simply stare and wait to see what the party has to say for itself. No check is necessary to realize that these men and women have been heavily drinking the local swill.

The group needs to hire either one larger cargo boat (with four crewmembers) or three smaller ones (each with one crewmember). The men clustered around the fire express some confusion about the request. After all, who *leaves* Freegate in the middle of Lupercalia? If the party does not attempt to encourage discretion (and pass a DC 10 check based on how they chose to make this happen), one of the soldiers from the fire wanders over. As luck would have it, they are not aware of Valentinus' escape, but they are suspicious in general of the situation. A successful DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) or (Deception) check or a sufficient bribe are necessary to get them to walk away. You might have one of the sailors mimic holding a gold piece to suggest the latter option if the players don't think of it themselves.

At some point, the party is directed to Mansum Dux (as **bandit captain**, with a gladius as a scimitar), who apparently manages the sorts of boats that would leave at a moment's notice in the middle of the night for a cash payment. He is a small stocky man with broad shoulders and a knife strapped to his belt. His face has more scars than there are teeth in his mouth. He asks what business travelers have on the wharf at this hour. He is suspicious, but he can smell a potentially lucrative business opportunity. He asks if they need guards as well as sailors, although he seems to view these as an add-on rather than a necessary expense.

When the party specifies that they need to go upriver to the village of Pleisco, Mansum Dux says he knows the place well, and that it would probably be best if he dropped the group off a short distance downriver. He suggests it is to avoid going through the customs process, which a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Insight) check suggests is only part of the story. If further pressed, he admits that some unscrupulous competitors in the village had the audacity to suggest that he and his boats might be smugglers and he has been banned.

Use your discretion at this point to evaluate whether the party is making reasonable progress to get to the harbor area. If not, it would be appropriate to have capital soldiers (**footmen**, see **Appendix B**) arrive looking for Valentinus. The soldiers on the beach clumsily join in on the action but make all saving throws, attack rolls, and ability checks with disadvantage. If pressed for time, Mansum Dux ushers the party onto a barge and urges them to grab the poles lying on the deck to push away from the shore with all due haste.

SOUTH GATE

The city walls have gateways in the south and west, connected by Cardo Street. The citadel, where the city guard is housed, is next to the southern gate and is used for official business as the archway over this entrance is magnificently carved with scenes from Freegate's history. Merchants looking to connect to trading partners to the west primarily use the western entrance.

If the party elects to head out the southern gate, despite the obvious risks, read or paraphrase the following:

As you move farther from the city center, the density and energy of revelers begins to diminish. Once the gate is in sight, you see dozens of city guards milling around, all looking bored and impatient.

If the characters elect to sneak through the gate, they should each make DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) checks. Failure means one of the guards (**hoplites**, see **Appendix B**) notices Valentinus and begins to wave wildly with shouts to "Stop!" A character may try to individually run back up the road or push through the gate with a successful DC 12 Strength check. However, Valentinus is almost certainly captured and that likely signals the end of this assignment. And probably the party. It's not like they weren't warned.

WEST GATE

If the party heads to the western gate, read or paraphrase the following as they arrive:

The sounds of revelry fade into the distance as you approach the city's western gate. The gate itself is a large stone arch set into the city's walls. It is flanked on either side by pillars, a very nice touch for such a small city. A guard stands in front of each pillar. A small guard shelter is about 10 yards to the east of the gate. Three more guards sit next to a fire there. A wooden board propped up against the wall of the guard shelter has the face of a man sketched on it. The face is not entirely unlike that of Valentinus.

Only one guard (**hoplite**, see **Appendix B**) approaches the party — the others are passing around a jug of some sort. The characters have multiple options as to how they handle this situation: bluff? bribe? attack? sneak? magic? If they attempt some sort of personality check or bribe, it requires a successful DC 12 check on this skill to pass without closer inspection. If they attack or otherwise draw attention to themselves, the three guards by the fire rush over. In addition, 1d4 + 1 soldiers (**hoplites**, see **Appendix B**) are inside the shelter. If the characters kill any of the guards, this increases the likelihood of being followed and set upon by Severus Custos and the capital soldiers.

PART FOUR: TRAVELING TO THE VILLAGE OF PLEISCO

The party has two ways of making it to the village of Pleisco — via water transportation or by foot. Because of the sinuous pathway of the river and the need to travel against the current, the travel time between the two routes is roughly equal. Once they arrive to their destination, they are greeted by someone who is aware of their plans and who offers to take their charges away to safety. But all is not as it seems.

UP THE RIVER TALAMERIN

Read or paraphrase the following:

You glide away from the noise of Freegate. The moon is up, the countryside is filled with the soft night noises of creatures in the wood, the lap of the water, the swish of the boats. Every whispered comment seems very loud in the stillness of the night.

If light shines on the water, the bottom glows a ghostly white. Any of the sailors can explain that the riverbed is covered with these odd white stones. Some say they are the skeletal remains of an ancient creature that drowned in the river; others say the river has worn away the top of an ancient underground city.

The journey to the village is against the current and so the characters are asked to assist by paddling the small boats or pushing off the riverbed using the long poles found lying on the deck. Because the river meanders, the flow velocity is diminished (although during the flooding season the top of the river is whitecapped with waves). Julianna and her servant may curl up for a quick nap. This has been a lot of excitement for a well-born and previously-sheltered young lady. Valentinus may take some time to pray to Zadaatha, but he eventually takes his turn at the oars or poles, perhaps cheerfully noting that, "Love brings calm waters"

It is a six-hour journey by boat to the village. After each hour of paddling or poling, a character should make a DC 10 Constitution check or suffer one level of exhaustion. The NPCs do not suffer from this condition as they enjoy the strength proffered by undertaking all their actions motivated by love. If two or more characters suffer from two or more levels of exhaustion, the total travel time increases to seven hours.

For every hour that the group travels, there is a 50% chance of encountering another vessel headed downriver toward them. With a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check, it is possible to hear the other vessel with sufficient time to hide in the shadows of one of the shorelines. Otherwise, there is a 75% chance that the other vessel is engaged in trade (**commoners**) and another 25% chance that it is carrying 1d6 + 2 river pirates (**bandits**).

When there is one hour left before the village, the boats or barge suddenly jerks in the water. All passengers must make a DC 6 Dexterity saving throw to stay in the boat while anyone poling must make a DC 10 saving throw to avoid splashing into the water.



Read or paraphrase the following:

Peering up from the water is a creature that appears to have goat horns, a dog's head, a man's torso, crab-like hands, and the lower body of a fish. It is clearly reaching out to pull travelers to a watery death below.

There are as many **ulisses** (see **Appendix B**) as there are party members plus two. The ulisses either attempt to damage weak-looking humanoids or attempt to grapple travelers with their bite in order to drag them into the water on their next turn. If all the travelers stay to the center of the barge, the ulisses push up and down on one end of the vessel. All passengers and crew must succeed on a DC 10 Dexterity or Strength saving throw to avoid sliding to the side of the vessel (with advantage if they were lying prone). The ulisses eventually swim away if enough of them are killed.

After fighting off the creatures, the party travels upriver for another hour before Mansum Dux gestures to a small pier on the northern side of the river. The sound of falling water can be heard in the distance.

Mansum speaks to the group. "You see that path there? If you follow it, you should arrive in the village in about a half-hour. We will be on our way now, before any additional misadventures befall us. Good luck."

Unless they object, the party is unceremoniously ushered off the boat or boats and Mansum heads downstream with alacrity. It should be beyond the means or ability of any of the characters to hire, bribe,

extort, or use magic to keep the boat crew with them, and Valentinus does not see the point in doing so. "Love brings the truest path. We will soon be safe with Julianna's cousin." If the players insist, you might allow the crew to be persuaded with a successful DC 18 Charisma (Persuasion) check. But at the first sign of trouble (such as hearing that Valentinus and Julianna have been kidnapped), they turn tail and rush back to their vessel(s).

THE ULISSE

The ulisse is named after the 16th-century Italian naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi. He is best known today as the creator of the oldest botanical gardens (and maybe the first public one). In his time, he was considered one of the leading authorities on natural history due to his extensive collection of plant and animal specimens as well as his cataloging and classification of animal, insect, and plant species.

In addition to his scientific work, he also authored two works of potential interests to GMs. The *Serpentum, et Draconum Historiae*, published in 1640, provides descriptions and illustrations of various snake species and their mythical dragon cousins. And his *Monstrorum Historia cum Paralipomenis Historiae Omnium Animalium* provides a wealth of fantastical creatures such as the marine monster upon which the ulisse is based.

HEADING NORTHWEST OF FREEGATE ON FOOT

Read or paraphrase the following:

With the sounds of drunken carousing fading in the distance as you travel out of the gate, you can now hear your own footfalls on the road, the clink of your equipment, the whispers of the party. It all suddenly seems very loud. The moon is up, lighting the road in front of you.

The roadway out of Freegate is bordered by long patches of forest, followed by cultivated fields. The terrain is initially flat but there is a slow incline as one travels farther from the city.

It is a six-hour journey by foot to the village under normal circumstances. Assuming the party members have not slept since they first entered Freegate, each character must make a Constitution saving throw at the end of each hour of walking. The DC is 10 + 1 for each hour. On a failed saving throw, a character suffers a level of exhaustion. The NPCs do not suffer from this condition, as they are strengthened by their faith in Zadastra. Recall that speed is halved for any creature that has two or more levels of exhaustion.

For every hour that the group travels, there is a 50% chance of encountering a group of travelers headed toward the city. With a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check, it is possible to hear the other party with sufficient time to hide in the shadows off the trail. Otherwise, there is a 75% chance that the other group of **commoners** is engaged in trade and a 25% chance that they are 1d6 + 2 **bandits**.

When one hour is left before the characters enter the village, the landscape around the road transitions from fields to forested marsh. After another half-hour, the two characters leading the party are attacked by the **Terni dragon**, as it attempts to grapple them with its tail.

Read or paraphrase the following:

Gazing down, you see a long sinewy tail sliding into the woods as a greenish-tinged lizard creature emerges. A forked tongue flickers from the rounded snout on its long flat head as its muscular legs propel it forward.

The Terni dragon immediately uses its breath weapon in hopes of incapacitating the entire party (as is often the case with the normal travelers along this road). The smell is excruciating even for those who pass their Constitution saving throw. Imagine the spray from a skunk, but so much worse. On its next turn, it attacks whichever non-gasping member of the party appears to be the easiest prey.

After fighting off the creature, the party continues traveling along the road until they reach the village of Pleisco.

THYRUS, THE DRAGON OF TERNI

According to Italian folklore, Thyrus, the Dragon of Terni, once terrified the area around the city. Not only did it have sharp teeth and claws but the stench of its breath could cause people to suffocate and die. The city's leaders tried to recruit their best hunters, but they all found some reason to delay facing the creature. Finally, a young knight from a prominent family promised to rid the city of this menace. He journeyed to the marshes where the terrible beast lived and chanced upon Thyrus while it slept. The knight rushed to attack, but the dragon woke up ready to exhale its deadly gases. All would have been lost, but at that moment the sun shone off the young knight's shield, temporarily blinding Thyrus. Taking advantage of the confusion, the knight cut off the dragon's head. The joyous city adopted a picture of the dead dragon on its coat-of-arms to forever remind the people of their salvation (Thyrus il drago di Terni [statua di età comunale, 1300–1400] by Author Unknown). The creature presented here is based on the Terni dragon, scaled down to match the experience Tier of the party.

THE MEETING POINT

The level of activity in the village depends on the time of day that the party arrives. The village begins to hum in the early morning, but most residents take siestas when the sun is high in the sky. Activity begins again by midafternoon and continues until the last beams of sunlight disappear over the horizon. While small groups of villagers are gathered around communal fires in the evening, participants disperse after a couple of hours.

Those with a passive Perception of greater than 13 hear the sound of a waterfall off in the distance. If they are actively listening, they locate the noise with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check. Whether or not they pass this check, Julianna certainly notices it with her extraordinary hearing. A search of the northern portion of the village uncovers a pathway into the woods.

Read or paraphrase the following as the characters follow the path:

The pathway winds through the woods up an increasingly steep slope. The thick tree growth and dense overhead canopy block outside light. The woods are alive with the sounds of creatures chittering and chirping. Some sound as if they are irritated at your intrusion while others have a more menacing tone.

If the party is traveling at night, a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Survival) check is necessary to not lose track of the path, which forces the party to double back to find it. At any time of day, the party should see a large form with some type of horns moving through the woods, only to disappear without a sound.

As the party comes around a bend in the path, the characters see a small group of men (1 **bandit captain** [Brim Nigug], 2 **acolytes** with Strength 12 and replace *bless* and *cure wounds* with *bane* and *inflict wounds*, 2 **bandits**, and 2 **cultists** with shortbows as well as gladii [as scimitars]) standing in a clearing that has a stone pillar in its center. A tall, rough-looking gentleman approaches the group. "Julianna, it must

be you! I can see your mother's face in yours. Welcome!" Turning to the party, he hands over a large sack that makes a happy clinking noise. "I am Collis Mangone. Sub-Praetor Alkander Coensor sends his thanks and his payment in full. As his kinsmen, we are grateful for your efforts and wish you good luck in the days to come."

Collis explains that their plan is to escort Julianna and Valentinus into the hills using ancient smugglers' trails to help them escape to safety. He does not know where they will end up. "We have safehouses in many parts of the country," he says, and he will — with some discomfort — admit it is better for all concerned if the characters can truly say they do not know where the couple is going. He does not allow the party to accompany them as the pathways are family secrets and need to stay that way.

At some point he notices the servants and, with a look of chagrin on his face, explains that he is able to bring only Julianna and Valentinus. He beseeches the characters to bring the servants back to the city with the promise that he will send word at some later date when the coast is clear as to where the servants should go to be reunited. He asks the servants to identify who would be the best person to contact and, after conferring, they agree that Collis should send word in care of Mattias Callidus.

The leader of this group is not, in fact, Collis Mangone, but is instead Brim Nigug (**bandit captain** with Wisdom 14 and spellcasting as an **acolyte**), a disciple of Faunus. He is working with Mattias to ensure that Valentinus is brought to a nearby temple to be sacrificed. He has been well-briefed by Mattias, who has spent time with Julianna and the sub-praetor, so Julianna will not notice any factual errors regarding her family history. He also tries to stick to facts that are true, such as:

- I am charged with delivering Valentinus and Julianna from the city's guards.
- I will take them on paths known only to my kinsmen.
- I will not cause them harm (as it will be Mattias performing the ceremony).

If the characters keep asking questions, Collis says that time is a scarce commodity (also true) and that he needs to get Julianna and Valentinus away from here (also true from his perspective).

Any character questioning his motives should make a DC 18 Wisdom (Insight) check. Remember, the normally insightful Julianna is exhausted and has not encountered any of these relatives since she was a little girl, if at all. If they fail, they do not have any sense that he is deceiving them. If they succeed, they should be told that he appears to be hiding something. If they directly question him, he responds that he is nervous about their ability to bring Julianna to safety given the dangers ahead (of which he is one, he thinks to himself). He then suggests it would greatly ease his mind if the characters went back to the village to defend their rear flank from any soldiers who appear (also a true statement).

Julianna and Valentinus say goodbye to their faithful servants (assuming any of them have survived this long) and thank the characters warmly for their service. Valentinus says, "Good luck in your next adventures. Remember, love plots the truest course." The party has resisted the pull of Valentinus thus far, but his words of thanks and farewell leave everyone in the party with a (perhaps uncharacteristic) warm feeling in their heart.

The players may remember a reference to the switches wielded by the Puellae Yiglis back in Freegate coming from a particular tree that grows next to a waterfall. If they ask, then yes, they do in fact see a tree with leaves that match those of the switches. If the party needs the help, you might grant the tree some aspect of luck or bonus protection if they carry a sprig as a good luck charm.

PART FIVE: RESCUING VALENTINUS

The party likely considers two options at this time: heading back to the village for a celebratory drink and meal or following Valentinus and Julianna due to some suspicion (or meta-gaming). Both paths lead to the Temple of Faunus although one might yield more tragic results.

RETURN TO THE VILLAGE OF PLEISCO

The party likely takes a moment to plan what to do with the servants and what to do if they encounter the soldiers. They may engage with the villagers, who have had a couple of poor agricultural years, sure, but are happily removed from the political strife in the city. If an adventurer thinks to ask, there is a 50% chance that any villager knows that the boundary stone is not in fact a shrine to Terminus but instead is something much older and darker. Further inquiries with village elders indicate that it once served as a warning to travelers to go no farther or risk the wrath of the followers of Faunus.

After an hour or so of game time or at a place that you consider appropriate, read or paraphrase the following:

A severely wounded man approaching you looks as if he was on the wrong end of a fight. He calls out, "Hail strangers! Are you recently from Freegate?"

He explains that he is Collis Mangone (**commoner** with 1 hit point) and that he was supposed to meet a young woman and her companion here at the village, but he and his family members were ambushed by strangers wielding strong weapons and stronger magic. All of these combatants wore antlers on their heads, and their leader bore a large golden medallion with a strange half-man, half-goat figure. His description of this leader (except for the antlers and medallion) sounds a lot like the man who previously introduced himself as Collis Mangone.

The real Collis is badly wounded and emotionally devastated, as he just lost his closest relatives. He escaped death himself only because he was the last to fall and with no one left to protect he feigned death. He heard them talking as he lay unmoving something about a sacrifice to Faunus, which sounds crazy because no one does that anymore, but he's pretty sure that's what they said. He asks about his cousin Julianna.

He listens to the characters try to explain the situation, but he's had a really bad day, and at some point he gives them a hardened look. Read or paraphrase the following:

"You accepted the charge of protecting our cousin, and you failed her. Everyone in our family knows she was in your care and although my brothers and closest cousins are dead, the reach of our extended family is long and relentless. I assure you that you will not make it out of this region alive until you rescue her and deliver her to me here safe and sound."

The party may be tempted to kill him in hopes that his silence buys them their lives. He warns them that their identities are already well known to his network of relatives, and his death would only add to their fury and thirst for revenge.

If they elect to rescue Julianna and Valentinus, proceed to **Finding the Cave**. If they prefer to scuttle out of the area without completing the mission, Julianna's relatives track them down and harass them until completing the mission starts to look like the better option.

FOLLOWING VALENTINUS AND JULIANNA

A character can follow the abductors' tracks with a successful DC 8 Wisdom (Survival) check for about a quarter hour, but they abruptly disappear. A successful DC 16 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that a group spent some time eating hardtack in this area, and the remnants of a used spell scroll are found under a log. Brim Nigug discreetly cast pass without trace while the group was taking a short rest. Proceed to Finding the Cave.

If the characters follow relatively closely on the heels of Brim Nigug, they should declare whether they are moving stealthily (which takes more time) or at an accelerated pace. If they are trying to be quiet, they are likely unable to catch up to Brim Nigug before the *pass without a trace* spell is cast (proceed to **Finding the Cave**).

If they are actively trying to catch up, a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check allows them to not be surprised when two of the men (**cultists**, with shortbows) they saw earlier pop up out of the woods with bows cocked. These men are obviously outnumbered but fight fanatically to the death, their job being mainly to delay the party. If the characters do non-lethal damage to capture one or both, they initially refuse to say anything. However, with the right kind of convincing and a successful DC 12 Charisma (Intimidation) or (Persuasion) check, they reveal (perhaps even brag) that Valentinus and Julianna are being taken to an ancient temple where Valentinus will be the blood sacrifice necessary to bring Faunus incarnate back to earth and allow him to stay as a god on earth to usher in a new age for the reign of the old gods. They do not under any circumstances reveal the location of the temple, saying that they fear their leader's wrath more than death. Characters who assume they are referring to Brim Nigug are quickly corrected that their leader is Mattias Callidus. Proceed to **Finding the Cave**.

If the characters immediately pursue, they overtake the party, but quickly find themselves in a standoff with Brim Nigug's men as they draw swords and advance (2 **acolytes** with Strength 12 and replace *bless* and *cure wounds* with *bane* and *inflict wounds*, 2 **bandits**, and 2 **cultists** with shortbows as well as gladii [as scimitars]). This is the first signal to Julianna and Valentinus that something is amiss. Once the first of Brim Nigug's men is badly wounded, Brim (**bandit captain**) draws a knife and puts it to Julianna's throat. He yells, "I will kill her if anyone moves!" It's pretty clear he absolutely means it. Valentinus steps forward with his arms raised and a desperate look on his face, saying, "No, no. We surrender."

If the characters cease fighting, Brim Nigug tells them he wants them to head back to the village right now. Valentinus implores them with his eyes to agree. If any of the characters starts to act, however, an ash-faced Valentinus immediately yells "STOP!", using his Command Obedience feature. If all of the characters are under Valentinus' sway or stop fighting, Brim Nigug nods and his group turns to head up the pathway. After 15 minutes, the characters are able to move again of their own free will but the trail is gone (proceed to **Finding the Cave**).

If a character or characters do not fall under Valentinus' influence and continue fighting, Brim Nigug's men press on with their attack. If they gain the upper hand, before they strike a death blow Julianna calls out, "No, please don't! Spare them and we will come with you peacefully." She does not want to be responsible for anyone's death. With a nod from their leader, the men sheath their weapons. As the group heads up the path, Julianna turns her head and calls out, "Love lives to fight another day."

If the characters gain the upper hand and Brim Nigug realizes all is lost, he fatally stabs Julianna and, if given the chance, himself. Yes, I know. But sometimes bad things happen to good NPCs, particularly if there is a lot of slashing and hacking and characters making bad decisions. Valentinus — beside himself in grief — begs the characters to do whatever is necessary to prevent the rise of a god who would

inspire such evil and bloodshed. Importantly, it's not about revenge for Julianna; instead, it's about protecting the people from a cruel and vengeful deity. The characters are welcome to simply walk away, although members of Julianna's family who quite reasonably blame them for her death and for not avenging her murder absolutely harass them in the future. Otherwise, let's tearfully go to the next section.

FINDING THE CAVE

At some point on the trail, the characters realize that something is in the brush nearby. It appears to be relatively small and is trying unsuccessfully to be stealthy. If they choose to not engage, they realize that the noise is either following them or headed in the same direction, and is not very good at being quiet (which is eventually going to be a problem). If they investigate, read or paraphrase the following:

You see a very dirty young boy who is slight of build. He is armed with a small knife and a walking stick. He is dressed in traditional village clothes that are threadbare with multiple patches.

The boy's name is Gregorius (**commoner** with disadvantage on attack rolls), and he lives in Pleisco where his job is tending a small flock of sheep and goats. He does his best to look fierce as he waves his very small knife around, but his clear lack of skill makes the entire display almost adorable.

Once he calms down and stops threatening to stab people, he explains that he has a puppy who is his constant companion and dearest friend. Fidus was puppy-napped by several men last night, and since this is Lupercalia, Gregorius (who is familiar with the old stories) is sure that the men intend to sacrifice Fidus to the gods along with a goat who also seems to have gone missing from his flock.

"But I am going to stop them," he declares. "I am going to save my dog. And maybe the goat, but *definitely* my dog. I just need to sneak into their stupid cave and steal Fidus and get out before they know what happened."

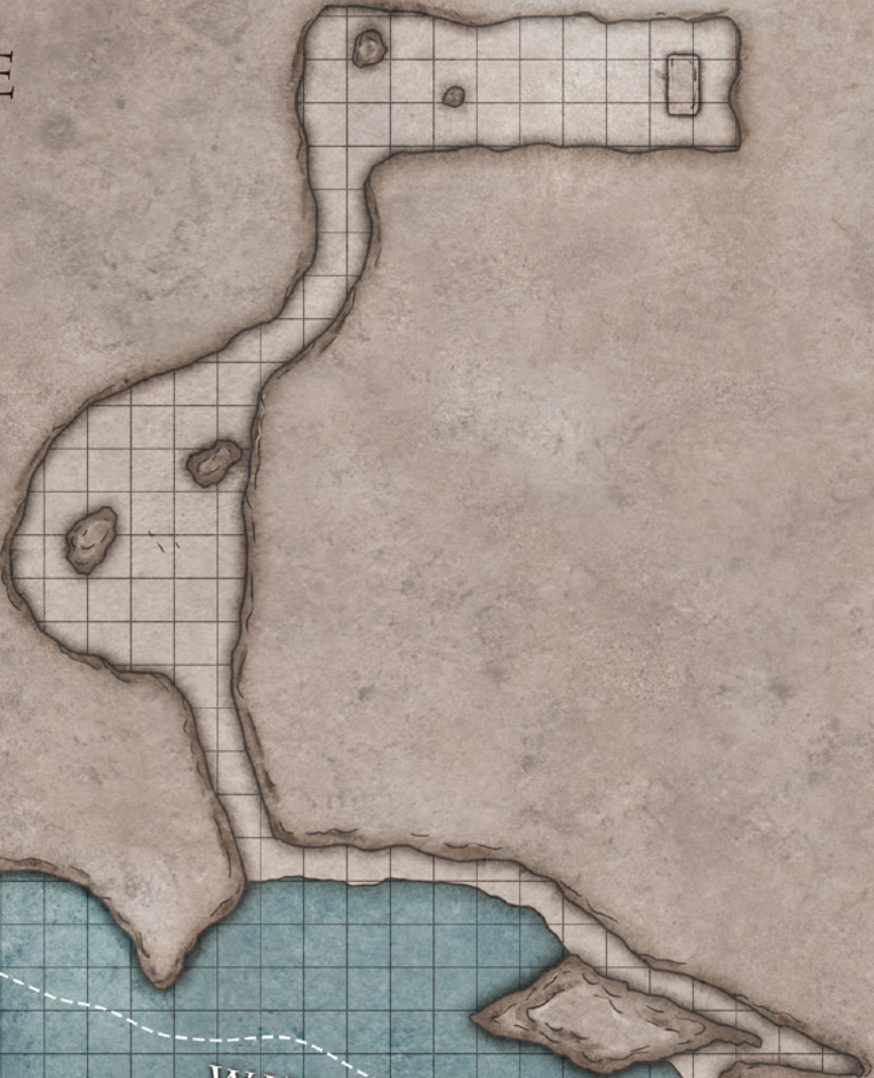
If asked how to get to the temple, he initially looks worried by the question. He then squares his shoulders defiantly and says, "Yeah, I know I am not supposed to ever, ever go near those caves but Nol dared me to go. So I did." He readily volunteers to bring them to the caves in exchange for "help" saving his dog. Not that he needs it, but sure, they can come along.

He leads them up the steep path through the woods until the group reaches a large white boulder, at which point he turns into the woods toward the sound of the waterfall. The sound is almost overwhelming when the party emerges from the woods, as the water falls over three tiers or steps before plunging down to the same elevation as the village. The party is immediately soaked by the spray, and must shout to be heard by each other, even when close together. Gregorius points to a section of the second stage of the waterfall and, with a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check, characters see a dark spot behind the water that might be an opening. Everyone who passes their check also realizes that without Gregorius it would be extremely unlikely that the group would have found the cave.

As the party moves toward the cave, Gregorius continues to move confidentially with the group. If anyone insists that this is too dangerous for him, his bravado slips a little before he says with a small quivering voice, "I have to save Fidus. He's counting on me." Gregorius agrees to stay behind only after a successful DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) or (Intimidation) check. If the characters offer a compelling reason for him to stay behind (e.g. to watch for danger or alert the village), the check is made with advantage.

LUPERCAI CAVE

1 SQUARE - 5 FEET



WATERFALL

As they get closer to the second tier, the characters see the cave opening behind the falls more clearly. A narrow rock ledge from the shoreline leads into this opening. It is wet and slippery. Characters crossing this ledge must make a successful DC 10 Dexterity check or fall prone. If they fail a second DC 10 check while trying to walk (Dexterity [Acrobatics]) or crawl (Strength [Athletics]) across the ledge, the force of the water causes them to slip and pushes them to the edge. Without assistance, it requires a successful DC 10 Dexterity or Strength saving throw to avoid plummeting 20 feet to the third tier and receiving 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage. Assign checks at an appropriate difficulty for anyone attempting to render assistance.

THE TEMPLE OF FAUNUS

Read or paraphrase the following:

You enter the cave through the crack, and find yourself in a tunnel that stretches back into the mountain. Ahead, you see what looks to be an opening to a chamber that has some sort of light flickering out of it. Looking at the walls, at one moment you are sure you see the face of a bearded man with dark eyes looking at you, but then it is simply a rocky wall.

The passageway extends for 20 feet. With a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) check, a character hears the crackle of a small fire and with a DC 12 the sound of a woman softly crying can be heard.

Read or paraphrase the following:

The chamber is rounded with a diameter of 20 feet. A campfire burns in the center of the room, and two torches are on the walls. Julianna sits along the left wall, her feet bound together with rope. Her hands, also tied together, cover her face as she clearly sobs. On the nearby wall, a brown puppy leashed to a rock is straining at the edge of his tether. He can just barely get close enough to anxiously lick the side of Julianna's face. A small white goat attached to the same rock sleeps obliviously nearby. Another passageway is on the other side of the room.

Julianna (**commoner** with Wisdom 16 and Perception +5) looks at the characters with heart-wrenching gratitude when she sees them. She relates that her captors dragged Valentinus and her to this cavern and bound them. They thought they were saved when Mattias entered the room a short time ago but then they saw the madness in his eyes. He told them that he is going to perform an ancient rite to summon Faunus to the realm of mortals. Then, once he is there in mortal form, their blood sacrifice will provide Faunus the power he needs to regain his kingdom as a god among humankind so he can exert his power once again. Mattias leaned over Valentinus and said, "I want you to know that your death, the death of love, is key to my victory." The men picked up Valentinus and dragged him to the other room.

Julianna is desperate to rescue Valentinus and insists that she is going to confront Mattias and his followers herself, with or without the rest of the party. She may agree to leave on her own (or perhaps with Gregorius and Fidus) but only if the characters convince her that they will free Valentinus. She fights to the best of her abilities against any attempt to spirit her away and leave Valentinus to his fate. To rescue Valentinus, she would even resort to calling out to alert Mattias and thereby force the inevitable confrontation.

After a few minutes of game time, the characters hear someone starting to chant in the other room and see Fidus' hackles rise as he stares at the doorway. After another minute in game or real time, Fidus starts to growl and soon after begins to bark.

If the characters look into the other chamber, read or paraphrase the following:

You see a series of carvings along the wall of the cavern. In one scene, a creature with the upper body of a man and lower body of a ram lies in a forest scene with food, wine, and happy picnickers. In the next, the man-ram figure is clearly displeased with the people, pointing angrily at them as they run from his wrath with their hands protecting their heads. In the last scene, the man-ram sits on a throne while supplicants place offerings in front of him. A dead man lies on an altar, a long-bladed knife sticking out of his chest.



Inside the room are the men-at-arms (2 **acolytes** with Strength 12 and replace *bleed* and *cure wounds* with *bane* and *inflict wounds*, 2 **bandits**, and 2 **cultists** with shortbows as well as gladii [as scimitars]) the characters encountered earlier, still carrying their weapons. They are now wearing loincloths and antlers and have long red stripes marked along their bodies. **Valentinus** (see **Appendix B**) is bound to a long flat table in the back of the room. Behind him, a tall man wearing a crude ram's head mask stands chanting. A knife on the table next to Valentinus looks to be either the same or an exact duplicate of the one shown in the mural. Valentinus is conscious and is very glad to see the party.

The armed men rush to attack once the characters make their presence known, trying to act as a wall between the characters and the altar. **Mattias (noble)** is in a divinely-fueled frenzy as he hurries to complete the ritual and pays no mind to the characters or any attacks they make on him. He ignores Valentinus' appeals to his better nature. Due to his frenzy, he has advantage on saving throws against spells such as *charm person*, *command*, and *fear*, and is immune to *calm emotions*.

After one round of combat (or whenever you think it would be dramatically interesting if that is the style of play at the table), read or paraphrase the following:

Behind the altar, **Mattias** suddenly lets out an unearthly roar of pain. His upper body expands as thick muscles seemingly grow beneath his skin. Coarse black hair erupts to create a thick matting. Most unnervingly, the mask on his face transforms from artificial to flesh, so that in seconds his head has been replaced with that of a beast with curved horns.

Mattias has essentially been transformed into a mortal version of **Faunus incarnate** (see **Appendix B**). The men-at-arms are as shocked by this transformation as anyone else in the room, but they resume fighting after a moment's pause. The creature spends one round of combat adjusting to its new circumstances before entering the fray. It is a very powerful creature, but it is still mortal. In addition to his other abilities, the Faunus creature can deploy its **Frightful Presence** to ward off attacking characters.

Valentinus watches helplessly as the combat takes place around him, but cheers on the characters by shouting "Love wields the sharpest sword! Love lands the truest blow!" This is not just an aphorism, it's a clue. Any character expressing that they are motivated by love (including friendship or loyalty) to engage in this battle is automatically immune to Faunus' **Frightful Presence** and has advantage on skill checks to rescuing Valentinus and attack rolls against the Faunus creature.

The next step in the ritual requires the blood sacrifice to transform the mortal Faunus into **Faunus the god**, with all his powers. This brings about his reign over earth, his power over fields and flocks. Trust me, there's going to be a whole lot more blood sacrifices and no more of this nonsense with little girls and switches. Success in this battle requires battling through the defensive wall of Lupercai and taking out Faunus/Mattias before he kills Valentinus and completes the ritual to assume his god form.

It is possible one or more characters focus on rescuing Valentinus. **Mattias** does not react to any such activity while performing the ritual until the moment Valentinus is successfully dragged from the altar, at which point the monster previously known as **Mattias** joins in the melee with gusto. Given the opportunity, the Lupercai seek to return Valentinus to the altar to complete the sacrifice to Faunus.

The party presumably wants to rescue Valentinus because he's a nice guy. If he dies in the battle and they still are able to kill the

Faunus creature before he completes the ritual, they prevent his rise to power. Once Faunus is dead, any remaining Lupercai continue to fight, because what else can they do? But they make attack rolls at disadvantage as they have lost their unholy support. The party can disengage or kill them as they wish. Valentinus urges mercy, naturally, assuming he's still alive.

If the characters are not successful in preventing the blood sacrifice of Valentinus, Faunus assumes his immortal god form, and the party either dies in battle or retreats out of the cave. But at that point, if Julianna doesn't kill them, or her relatives, or the capital soldiers, they still have a pretty hard time getting away from the Lupercai. Really, their days are probably numbered.

THE END

With a little luck, the party will be victorious over the incarnation of Faunus and his followers and avert **Mattias'** plot to assert Faunus' dominance over the world. They exit the cave, probably pretty roughed-up but victorious. If Julianna or Gregorius were persuaded to leave before the fighting began, then an emotional reunion occurs on the shore of the river where they were hiding in the bushes. **Fidus** trots along next to Gregorius, and Valentinus and Julianna cling to each other as they scramble across the slippery rocks to safety. They make their way back to the village without incident.

On the outskirts of the village, a frantic-looking peasant couple (**commoners**) calls out Gregorius' name and rush over to him. They thank the party profusely for finding and returning their son. Naturally, Gregorius is embarrassed by his mother's kisses and adds his thanks before being led away. **Fidus** dancing along merrily at his feet. A quick word with Gregorius' father confirms that there are no soldiers newly arrived in the village.

Julianna states that she and Valentinus will find her remaining relatives and make a new plan to get out of town, as the soldiers are undoubtedly still on their trail. She and Valentinus offer their profound gratitude to the party. "You saved our lives," Julianna says, "at great peril to your own." Valentinus adds, "You averted a great evil. Now at least people have the freedom to choose what gods they worship. And that is all that is needed for love to thrive, I'm sure. Love makes the best choices." Hand in hand, Julianna and Valentinus walk off to the village.

The party may or may not be convinced that a religion based on something as ephemeral as love has any hope of success. But they have saved a cleric, delivered a man's beloved niece to safety, prevented the rise of a cruel and vengeful god, and reunited a boy with his dog. It is a job well done, indeed.

Of course, it's possible that the worst happened. The rescue mission failed, and Faunus and his Lupercai succeeded in dragging Valentinus (or perhaps one of the party) back onto the altar and stabbing him to death with the knife. In this case, congratulations, they unleashed Faunus into the world. There is going to be a lot more whipping.

APPENDIX A: PRIMARY NPCs

Alkander Coensor — a sub-praetor who devoted his life to a strict interpretation of the law, forswearing all other distractions until his orphaned injured niece was carried to his doorstep. He is clearly a man used to commanding great authority and respect. He has big bushy eyebrows and a perpetual scowl that goes away only when he is speaking with his niece.

Alkander Coensor uses the statistics of a **noble**.

Calvia — an experienced cleric of the old religion who argued in the Caupona that nothing was wrong with the new, more benign way of celebrating Lupercalia, and whose evening went rather badly downhill after that.

Calvia uses the statistics of a **priest**.

Collis Mangone — a purveyor of goods that might or might not have been thoroughly reviewed by taxation officials, much to the chagrin of his wife's cousin, Alkander Coensor.

Collis Mangone uses the statistics of a **commoner**.

Crispus — a younger cleric who argued for a return to the old ways and the more bloodthirsty celebration of Lupercalia, and who coincidentally left the Caupona just before the attack.

Crispus uses the statistics of a **cultist**.

Darius — the unfortunate conscript who is unable to marry **Marilla** the server at the Caupona.

Darius uses the statistics of a **guard**.

Faunus — an old god with the torso of a man and the body of a goat, once worshipped with blood sacrifices thought to bring good harvests and healthy livestock. When times get hard, some wonder if it is a sign to return to the old ways.

Faunus uses the statistics of **Faunus incarnate**, or, if all goes wrong, **Faunus the god** (see **Appendix B**).

Fidus — a puppy whose bad luck was in being dognapped, but whose good luck is belonging to the stouthearted Gregorius.

Fidus doesn't have statistics. Don't let Fidus get involved in combat.

Gallus — a merchant dining at the Caupona, recently arrived in Freegate, staying for the festivities.

Gallus uses the statistics of a **noble**.

Gregorius — a determined young shepherd who lost his dog and knows how to find the caves behind the waterfall.

Gregorius uses the statistics of a **commoner** who has disadvantage on all attack rolls.

Julianna Acutulus — a lovely and practical girl of marrying age who was blind most of her life until she met Valentinus. She has extraordinary hearing and is quite perceptive.

Julianna uses the statistics of a **commoner** with Wisdom 16 and Perception +5.

Lupercal — followers of Faunus, these frustrated young men are looking for power and good fortune, and are willing to return to some dark old ways to get it.

The Lupercal use the statistics of a **cultist** with a *Faunus whip*.

Marilla — serves food and drink at the Caupona (Inn/Tavern), daughter of **Marcus**, the owner of the inn. Heartbroken because she was unable to marry **Darius** and save him from conscription.

Marilla uses the statistics of a **commoner**.

Mansum Dux — the captain of Freegate's river wharf knows when not to ask questions of potential clients.

Mansum Dux uses the statistics of a **bandit captain**.

The Disciple Mattias Callidus — an ambitious young noble who disgraced his family name by following Valentinus.

Mattias Callidus uses the statistics of a **noble**.

Puella Yiglis — pairs of little girls wearing red robes who are chosen to run around whipping people with their switches. This is believed to bring luck in love, fertility, and childbirth.

The Puella Yiglis use the statistics of a **commoner**.

Captain Severus Custos — local captain of the guard who is embarrassed by the defections of his men and is determined to restore his good name as a ruthless soldier.

Severus Custos uses the statistics of a **captain** (see **Appendix B**).

Titus — a mysterious and raggedy character encountered in the Caupona who knows of a job and who may or may not be a disciple of Valentinus.

Titus uses the statistics of a **commoner**.

Valentinus — a physician and evangelizer for the new religion of love. It seems that anyone who listens to him ends up as a convert. He is technically a criminal, but he is also a member of an old and powerful family, so he cannot be simply gotten rid of. He has been placed under house arrest with a curmudgeonly retired sub-praetor.

Valentinus has his own stat block.

APPENDIX B: NEW CREATURES

This appendix contains stat blocks for creatures not found in the Fifth Edition SRD.

CAPTAIN

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 18 (chain mail and shield)

Hit Points 65 (10d8+20)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +6, Con +4

Skills Athletics +6, Perception +5, Intimidation +7

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Dwarven

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Brave. The captain has advantage on all saving throws against fear.

Leadership (recharges after a short or long rest). For 1

minute, the captain can utter a special command or warning whenever a nonhostile creature that it can see within 30 feet of it makes an attack roll or a saving throw. The creature can add a d4 to its roll provided it can hear and understand the captain. A creature can benefit from only one Leadership die at a time. This effect ends if the captain is incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The captain makes three melee attacks.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 8 (1d8 + 4) slashing damage, or 9 (1d10 + 4) if used with two hands.

Heavy Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, range 100/400, one target. Hit: 5 (1d10) piercing damage.



FAUNUS THE GOD

If you're here looking for stats for a god to throw against your Tier 1 party, things have gone awfully wrong. Faunus the God exudes a potent cloud of fear, is immune to non-magical attacks, and scoffs at magical ones. He crushes knights with his hooves and sucks the energy from spellcasters. Have some fun, be creative, and roll some dice if you feel like it, but it should be made clear that these characters are not going to bother Faunus.

FAUNUS INCARNATE

Large monstrosity, chaotic evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit points 30 (4d10 + 8)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)	6 (-2)

Skills Perception +2

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from non-magical attacks.

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages common

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Magic Resistance. Faunus incarnate has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Faunus incarnate makes one Sacrificial Knife attack and one Ram attack.

Sacrificial Knife. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Ram. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 8 (2d4 + 3) bludgeoning damage and the target must succeed on a DC 12 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of Faunus' choice that is within 60 feet of him and aware of him must succeed on a DC 12 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A frightened creature cannot move closer to Faunus. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to Faunus' Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

FOOTMAN

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 15 (studded leather, shield)

Hit Points 38 (7d8 + 7)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages Common

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The footman makes two Spear attacks or two Longsword attacks.

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage, or 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage if used with two hands.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d8 + 2) slashing damage, or 7 (1d10 + 2) piercing damage if used with two hands.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

HOPLITE

Medium humanoid (human), any lawful alignment

The hoplite uses the statistics of the **scout** except that it has AC 18 (breastplate and shield), STR 14, and has a spear or javelin instead of a longbow. Its Spear or Javelin attack is as below:

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. and range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage, or 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack.

Javelin. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. and range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

TERNI DRAGON

Large dragon, unaligned

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit points 19 (3d10 + 3)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	4 (-3)	10 (+0)	5 (-3)

Skills Perception +2

Damage Immunities acid, poison

Senses darkvision 30 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages —

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Camouflage. While not moving, the Terni dragon can be distinguished from its surroundings only with a successful DC 17 Wisdom (Perception) check.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 7 (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

Tail Whip. The Terni dragon sends its tail out against up to two creatures within 15 ft. of the dragon and 5 ft. of each other. Each target must succeed on a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or be knocked prone.

Gaseous Breath (recharge 6). The Terni dragon exhales gas in a 30-ft. cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for one minute. A poisoned creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself with a success. While poisoned in this way, a creature cannot move or take reactions or actions.

ULISSE

Medium beast, neutral evil

Armor Class 11 (natural armor)

Hit points 11 (2d8 + 2)

Speed swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)

Skills Perception +2

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages —

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Amphibious. Ulisses can breathe in air and water

Pack Tactics. The ulisse has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the ulisse's allies is within 5 ft. of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target.

Hit: 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage. If the target is a creature and receives damage, it must succeed on a DC 10 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Grapple. The ulisse grabs at a Medium or smaller creature.

The creature must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity or Strength saving throw or be grappled (escape DC 12).

VALENTINUS

Medium humanoid (human), chaotic good

Armor Class 13 (leather armor)

Hit Points 27 (5d8 + 5)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)

Skills Insight +5, Medicine +7, Persuasion +8, Religion +3,

Senses passive Perception 13

Languages Common

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Charming Presence. A creature who can understand Valentinus and listens to him speak over the course of an hour must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or consider Valentinus to be a good friend. If the conversation continues for 8 hours within the period of three days, the creature must make a second Wisdom saving throw with a DC of 16. A creature who fails this saving throw becomes a devotee of Valentinus and his god, Zadaatha, and a firm proponent of the ideals of love and peace.

Spellcasting. Valentinus is a 5th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks). Valentinus has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, light, resistance*

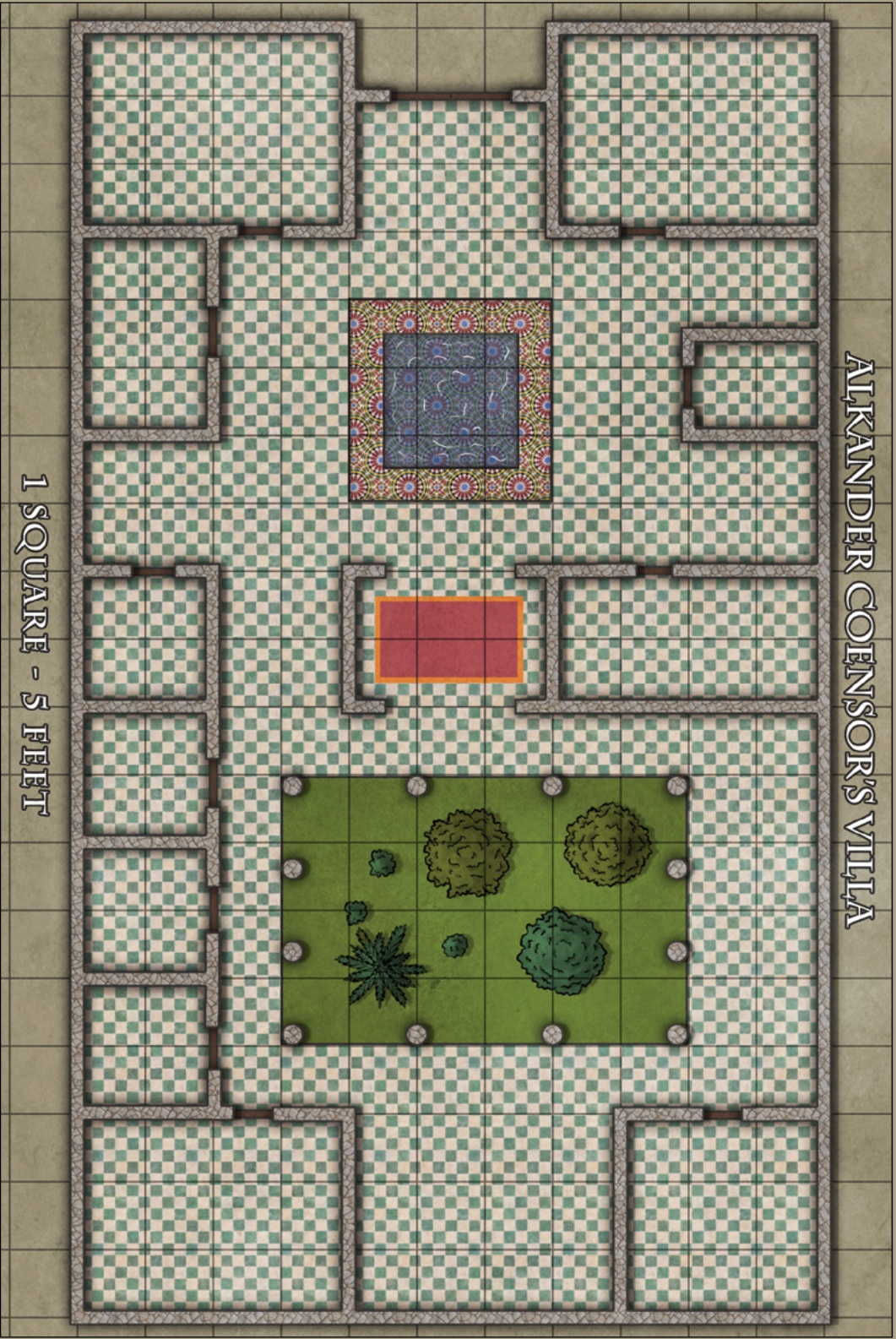
1st level (4 slots): *charm person, healing word, protection from evil and good, sanctuary*

2nd level (3 slots): *augury, gentle repose, lesser restoration, zone of truth*

3rd level (2 slots): *beacon of hope, water walk*

ACTIONS

Command Obedience (1/day). Valentinus utters a short phrase. Each creature of his choosing that can hear him must succeed on a DC 13 Wisdom or obey his command for one minute. If his command is given to prevent violence, the targets have disadvantage on the saving throw and those failing are unable to perform an action with the intent of causing damage for 15 minutes.



1 SQUARE - 5 FEET

ALKANDER COENSOR'S VILLA



↑
N

River Talamern

Freegate City

800 ft.

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ADVENTURES
WORTH
WINNING

FOR THE LOVE OF VALENTINE

A chance encounter connects your party with a charismatic prophet on the lam, and the woman who loves him. Congratulations, you've stumbled into an epic clash of religions, and you may or may not be on the winning side of that conflict. Sure, you have Love on your side. But they have soldiers, power, and maybe something more. Delivering your guy to safety means winding your way through a crowded city celebrating a raucous festival of fertility, and a race through the countryside, where all is not as it seems.

For the Love of Valentine takes your 1st-3rd level characters and their NPC charges through a land in turmoil, while being hunted by the law. And perhaps, something darker...? Inspired by the tales of St. Valentine and the ancient legends of Lupercalia, your players will ultimately have to answer the question: Will Love triumph?



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