



CARNIFEXUM



Carnifexum

Rumours & Hooks:

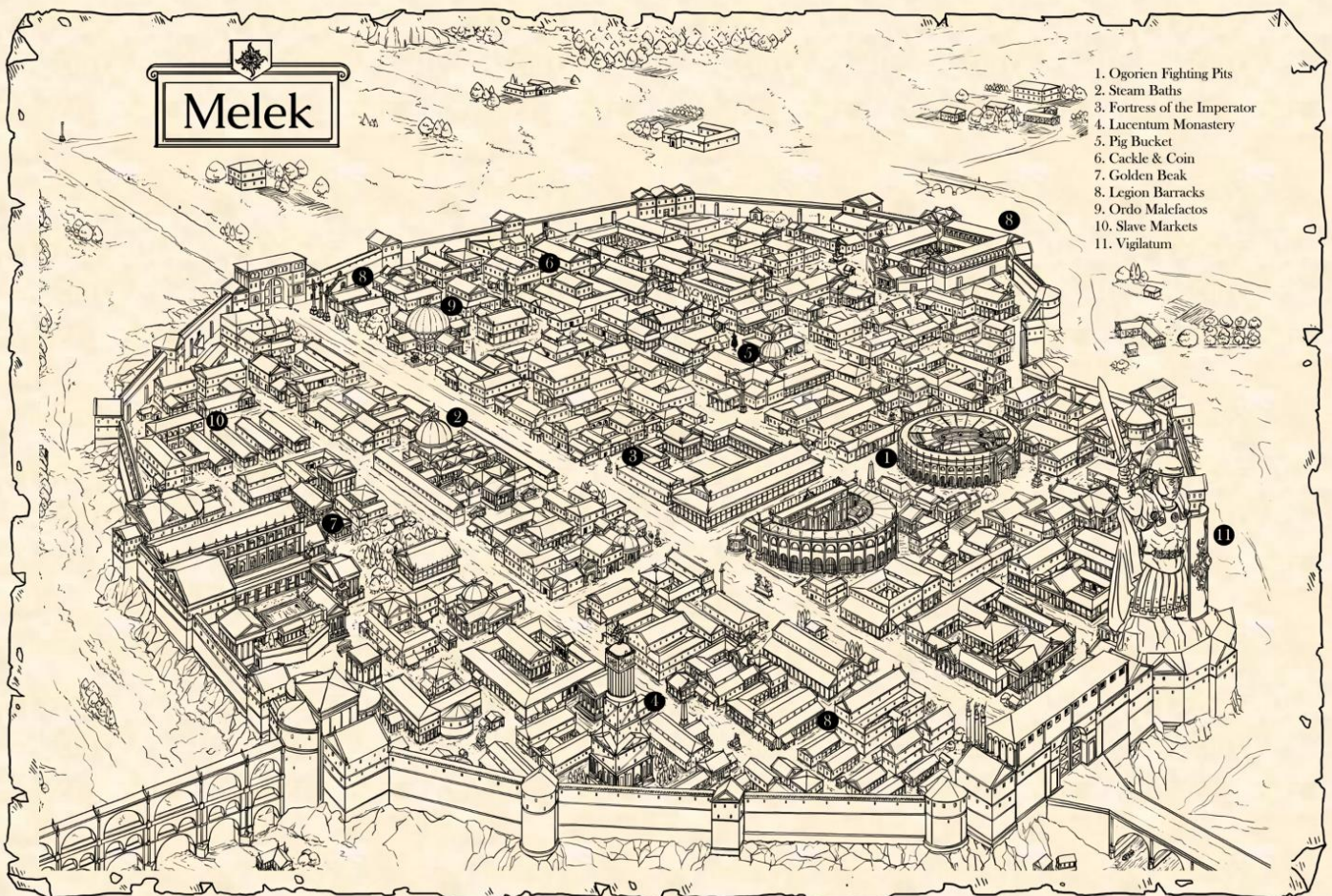
Carnifexum, the grand celebration of Nydissian blood sport, is due to commence in a few weeks time. Contenders from across the realm will descend on the southern city of Melek, hoping to win fame, fortune and glory.

Carnifexum is the pinnacle of Nydissian spectacle; two weeks of gladiatorial blood sport, chariot races, wild beasts, witch burnings and grand theatre - a public display of such magnitude it is marshalled only once between decades (if not longer).

As it happens, the Great Games are due to return, or at the GM's option have been brought forward to mark an important event (eg: military victory, important marriage, child born to the Empress, etc).

On this occasion the games are to be held in *Melek, City of Shackles*, ruled over by the newly appointed *Imperator Setirus*. The streets of Melek are stone paved, marked with drains, and often accompanied by footpaths. Buildings are predominately stone, decorated with arches, pillars, statues and obelisks. The larger villas display icons of the golden eye, the formal sigil of the *Lucentum*, the ruling power behind the Nydissian Empire. Dedicated to logic and reason, lucents eschew "fragile" emotions such as compassion and empathy, focusing above all on the "greater good" of the imperium (which often means trampling the rights of the individual).

Disciples of the Lucentum are agnostic or atheist, and worship no gods. Magic is considered a clear and present danger that cannot be ignored; casters and magic items are hunted by inquisitors of the *Ordo Malefactos*.



Magicians are generally killed on sight, or taken in chains to await the Lucentum's judgment. Enchanted objects are confiscated on behalf the Empire and "safely secured".

The PCs might become involved in this adventure as (i) indentured gladiators, (ii) tourists in the right place at the right time, (iii) voluntary competitors, or (iv) out of family rivalry concerning *Grandfather Rebus*' will.

Family Rivalry

Grandfather Rebus, one of the PC's blood relatives, passed away some time ago. An intrepid explorer, Rebus made his fortune in the Southern Empire and through his will left a spacious villa (or perhaps tavern, or public baths, worth many thousands of gold aurums) to one of his family members... whomever is able to get the furthest in the next Carnifexum as a gladiatorial competitor!



Assuming the PC wishes to compete, there is only one family member that poses any real competition, a female cousin named *Setoya*,

fierce and determined, fighting in the borderlands for years, Setoya has forged a name for herself as a dangerous mercenary.

Setoya, AC 15 (heavy armour), HD 6 (42 hp), 2 Swords 1d8+2, 19: disarm, S15 D14 C14 I9 P9 W15 Ch13 L8, Mv 30 ft. Setoya has Major Exploit Protection, *Causes Injuries* on criticals (LFG p.95), and has advantage on underhanded tactics such as tripping, kicking sand in eyes, employing poison, etc.

The Great Games

Carnifexum takes place in three primary locations within Melek's fortified walls. The gladiator combat occurs in the Ogorien Fighting Pits (a huge colosseum like structure), the chariot race runs throughout the city streets, and the theatre shows and wild beasts are held in the Grand Amphitheatre.

The players might involve themselves in any of the three primary events (gladiator combat, chariot race [entry fee 300 gp], or wild beasts show), or simply explore the city at large.

During the games the population swells with both spectators and traders, making it easier to find items of rare worth, including black market items (generally shifts item rarity down one grade).

If the party wanders the city at large, the GM might wish to roll on the following table every eight hours.

Street Encounters

1d20	MELEK ENCOUNTERS
1	2d4 legionaries throwing dice down a side alley. One has a particularly large grin and declares " <i>Hah! The fates are with me brothers!</i> "
2	A gang of 4d4 slavers decide to waylay the party, attacking them in a side street (as guard LFG p.114, but with 1d4 doses of the

	highly rare <i>Black Lotus</i> poison (<i>Luck</i> (Con) save or unconscious for 1d3 hours). If the party are incapacitated, they awake in chains as indentured gladiators.
3	<i>Lusicrix</i> , an elderly female with wispy hair, is selling ornate togas at a side stall. She is an expert seamstress, and thief, happy to sell her “special range” to the right buyer (garments with secret compartments, silent foot coverings, etc).
4	Oppressive heat and humidity has forced most people indoors. PCs engaged in pit fights or races today must make a <i>Luck</i> (Con) check or suffer 1d2 Con loss.
5	6d10 slaves are in open revolt against their masters, aided by 1d6 masked men who are distributing knives and clubs. Some of the 4d6 guards have dropped their whips, and are readying spears and swords.
6	A middle aged merchant named <i>Astartes</i> is selling books and maps from a covered stall. He is also an excellent forger and produces false party invitations, letters of introduction, identity documents and so on for discreet clientele.
7	A skilled hypnotist, <i>Arrix the Mysterious</i> , is performing a show for an appreciative crowd. In addition to his mundane skills, Arrix has recently learnt to cast <i>Charm Person</i> once per day. Nearby, a member of the <i>Ordo Malefactorum</i> watches with a suspicious stare.
8	A small monkey has escaped her enclosure and springs from behind a barrel, wriggling into an adventurer’s backpack to hide. A handsome but furious travelling performer appears moments later at the end of the street with a small net, obviously searching for something.

9	Two horses, carriages or chariots are racing down the street, young nobles from rival families (<i>Dusertes</i> and <i>Prifex</i>) at the reins.
10	A religious zealot is preaching from atop a wooden stool, inviting passers-by to prepare for the end of days, repent, and embrace the Old Ways (contrary to the secular credo of the Lucentum). A grim faced legionary brandishes a stout club and stalks toward the zealot.
11	A diminutive tax collector, <i>Dominus Cruxus</i> , bearing the Emperor’s seal, makes a bee line for the travellers and asks to see their weapons & armour licences.
12	A large, white tabby cat meows at one of the travellers, moving close to brush against his or her legs if given the chance. Both of the cat’s ears have been cropped. If befriended, the cat becomes extremely loyal and has excellent hearing, eyesight and instincts for danger. He is happy to nap during the day and stay up at night, keeping watch over his human.
13	1d4 teenagers are painting symbols of a twin headed serpent (a symbol of the Old Gods) on a building wall. Down a side ally, the travellers can see a squad of armed legionaries approaching. Both parties are unaware of the other.
14	An elderly farrier, <i>Ugalos</i> , is mending horse shoes in a half barn. His wife has passed, he has no children, and he wishes to pass on his lucky shoe to a deserving stranger. If the travellers impress him, he gifts it to them. The shoe is indeed fortuitous, and restores 1 <i>Luck</i> at a time of the owners choosing once per adventure.

15	A band of organised pick pockets target the street or square the party are moving through. A Perc (Detection) check vs Dex 14 is required to avoid losing a small random item/pouch.
16	<i>Dominus Carrex</i> (young noble, goatee, fine clothing) staggers in a cluttered ally and collapses. A pool of blood quickly forms.
17	A plague of mimes descends on the street. Their performances are poor to painful.
18	Alchemist <i>Octavius Scaevola</i> (" <i>Scaev</i> ") is hawking fire pots stacked up by the half dozen. Mid way through his sales pitch, a legion patrol appears at the end of the street. Scaev quickly scoops his pots into a sack and replaces them with undergarments instead, giving any potential customers a knowing nod.
19	A long haired Midlander bard with a handlebar moustache, <i>Ander Excelsior</i> , offers to make a ballad about the party's exploits (for a reasonable fee).
20	<i>Inquisitor Gaius</i> (Monk 7) is striding down the street in a sleeveless toga, flanked by 3d4 veteran legionaries (Fighter 3-4). Any obvious "adventurer" types may draw his attention, particularly if he suspects they might possess any magical items.

Gladiator Bouts

The gladiatorial games take place in the Ogorien Fighting Pits, a colossal, stone arched arena allowing thousands of spectators in the tiered galleries and overhead rope walkways that crisscross the fighting grounds. The central sands may be configured in a number of different ways, including a series of "pits", segmented by mechanical stone walls that rise out of the floor.

A PC involved in the gladiator games (either as a free warrior or slave) must fight a series of duels

in a knockout tournament. A duel ends when either combatant reduces their opponent to zero hp or otherwise incapacitates them. At the GM's option, if more than one PC wishes to duel, the party members might fight together in pairs vs an equal or similar number of opponents.

At the conclusion of any combat, there is an even chance the crowd cheers for the defeated's death (crowd indicates thumbs down) or mercy (crowd indicates thumbs up). Particularly flamboyant or otherwise entertaining gladiators might sway this chance at the GM's discretion.



PC gladiators are required to fight a total of seven bouts of combat, one battle every 48 hours, with the final occurring on the last day of the games. PCs may wear any armour, but must use the weapons allocated to them each bout (roll 1d10: (i) trident & net, (ii) twin shortswords, (iii) spear & shield, (iv) axe & dagger (v) great hammer, (vi)

mace & shield, (vii) whip & dagger, (viii) flail, (ix) staff (x) polearm.

The first four battles are randomly determined; roll 1d6 (reroll any repeats):

1. *Semper, Unblooded Slave*; olive skinned, whip scars, obviously nervous and unskilled.

AC 10 (no armour), HD 1d4 hp, Great Axe 1d12, 19: daze, S11 D10 C10 I10 P10 W10 Ch10, L3, Mv 30 ft. The unblooded slave must make a morale check when wounded to determine whether he surrenders, hoping for mercy from the crowd.

2. *Gordaal, Hopeful Mercenary*; a tall, lanky northerner. Left hander.

AC 14 (chain & shield), HD 2, Spear 1d6+2, 19: tripped, S14 D10 C12 I10 P10 W10 Ch10, L5, Mv 30 ft. The hopeful mercenary may negate one attack with his shield (LFG p.40).

3. *Ortu, Veteran Slave*; a bald southerner with tribal markings.

AC 13 (hardened leathers & shoulder plate), HD 3, Spiked mace 1d8+2, 19: prone, S14 D13 C12 I10 P10 W12 Ch10, L6, Mv 30 ft. The veteran slave fights with a flourish if he can, to better entertain the crowd.

4. *Double Trouble*. The PC must face off against two steely eyed, female Nydissian twins with ornate breastplates (*Veltrix & Simba*).

AC 16 (breastplates and leather skirts), HD 3, Scimitars 1d8+1, 19: disarm, S13 D15 C12 I10 P10 W14 Ch10, L6, Mv 30 ft. The twins never check for morale, and each may attempt one rescue benefiting the other (breaking the usual rules, LFG p.48).

5. *Tomen, Disgraced Knight*; helmet, breastplate & greaves, braided ponytail tied with black ribbon.

AC 16 (heavy armour), HD 5, Greatsword 1d12+2 19: daze, S15 D13 C14 I10 P13 W12 Ch13, L8, Mv 30 ft. Tomen has advantage on damage rolls and crits on 19-20 attack rolls.

6. *Khron, barbarian of the Skull Drinkers tribe*; chainmail arms, helmet, genuine contender for champion.

AC 14 (helmet & chain arms), HD 9 (56 hp), 2 Axes 1d8+3 19: cause injury, *Luck* save resists, S17 D15 C17 I12 P11 W16 Ch11, L10, Mv 30 ft. Khron may rage like a 9th level Barb, and crits on 19-20 attack rolls.

The final three duels are as follows (in order):

- 5th battle; Cousin *Setoya*.

In the fifth combat, the PC must face off against their mercenary cousin, *Setoya* (see p.3). For his part, *Setoya* holds nothing back, ruthless in her attempt to seize victory.

- 6th battle: "*Twister*" *Slade*, master thief of the *Red Hooks* guild; 5 ft 8", bundle of muscle, incredible acrobat.

AC 15 (ornate leathers), HD 8, 2 Daggers 1d6+2, 19: *Twister* gains a bonus attack, S15 D18 C10 I13 P15 W11 Ch11, L9, Mv 30 ft. The wily thief has Major Exploit Protection, Backstab, Skirmisher and Finisher abilities like a 8th level rogue, and may choose from the following tricks four times per combat: *Choking Dust*, *Hidden Blade*, *Flash Powder*, *Unseen Whip*. *Amazing Acrobat*: once per combat *Twister* may make a Dex check to negate an attack.

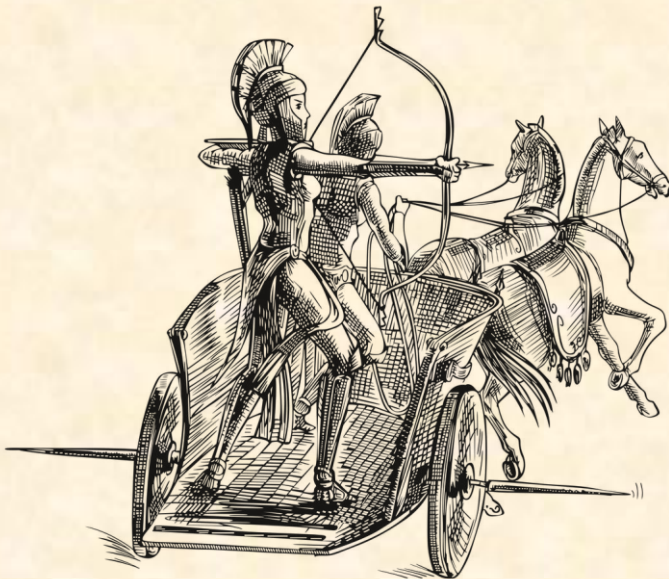
- Final battle: *Lofvix*, towering 7 ft northmen and ex-champion gladiator,

has come out of retirement to reclaim his title.

AC 18 (horned helmet, breastplate and greaves), HD 9 (70 hp), 2 maces 1d8+3 19: prone or push 10 ft, *Luck* save resists, S17 D17 C14 I13 P9 W11 Ch10, L10, Mv 30 ft. Lofviir has the Fighter Adaptable ability, with the Dual Weapons style. He may change styles four times per combat. The ex-champion may negate an attack with each mace as if they were shields, and perform one Major Exploit per combat (an ability normally restricted to PCs only; PC targets may make a *Luck* save to resist).

As might be expected, the final duel opens to great fanfare, including music, dancers and primitive fireworks, and includes Emperor Setirus (Melek's ruler) in the audience.

Defeating Lofviir in combat earns the PC the title of *Victorem* (see below).



Chariot Race

The great chariot race is held on Day 7, mid way through the games, and involves a circuitous route through the city streets. Each chariot has two horses and two riders. One of the riders must steer the vehicle whilst the other may employ one

weapon (chosed from: bow with 5 arrows, 3 javelins, or a net [may be thrown 30 ft, no damage, allows user to grab/trip the target at range, or possibly jam chariot wheels at GM discretion]).

The race may be resolved as a Chase (LFG p.83), with modifications as follows:

- (a) Each chariot driver makes an Int, Cha or Dex (Animal Lore) check to coax their horses faster. The best check increases their lead against the rest of the pack, or closes the gap on the leader, by 2d6 ft.
- (b) There are 1d4+4 other chariots in the race (other players might like to control some of them to assist the GM). The NPC riders are as *Guard* (LFG p.114, but Dex 15).
- (c) The race lasts 2d4+5 legs, the leader at the end of the final leg is the victor.
- (d) If a Chase Event occurs, there is an even chance the event affects the PCs or the leader (or one of the pack if the PCs are leading).
- (e) Event hazards and obstructions might include: a child or animal running onto the street, a malicious spectator shooting a crossbow, large pothole, stacked barrels forming an impromptu wall, spectators showering the racers with garbage/ale mugs/flowers, chariot collision, etc.

The winner of the chariot races earns the title of *Victorem* (see below), or alternatively there might be a few preliminary heats that lead to a final race.

Great Beasts

On various days throughout the games, wild beasts are on display in the grand Amphitheatre, including rare polar bears, dire wolves, western

panthers, giant serpents, winged snakes, feathered mouters, hammer snails, etc.

During the second week, courageous warriors are sought to fight the beasts, either as athletic displays to first blood (as the owners do not want their expensive beasts killed), or brutal death matches (drawing the greatest crowds and massive gambling stakes; the owners are richly rewarded). If PCs wish to get involved in fighting the great beasts (either as volunteers or slaves), roll 1d8:

1. *Polar Bear* (as *Owlbear* LFG p.120)
2. *Feathered Maw* (Midlands p.97)
3. *Dire Wolf* (LFG p.130)
4. *Winged Snake* (Midlands p.102)
5. *Giant Serpent* (LFG p.122)
6. *Giant Wasp* (Midlands p.105)
7. *Hammer Snail* (Midlands p.100)
8. *Mammoth* (LFG p.117)

Defeating the relevant beast in single combat (or perhaps even taming it by some miracle of animal handling), earns the title of *Victorem* (see later).

Theatre & Other Celebrations

The Great Games are marked by a number of free or discounted plays (primarily comedies and tragedies), musicals, poetry readings and dances. Additionally, up to 1d6 witches/warlocks are publicly burnt at the stake by the *Ordo Malefactos*, and 2d6 other high profile serious criminals beheaded, lashed or otherwise dealt with by the *Lucentum*. The executions draw

large, jeering crowds, overseen by highly trained legionaries. Any attempt to intervene is met with overwhelming, deadly force.

Victorem

Champions of the gladiator battles, chariot race and great beasts earn the title of *Victorem* and awarded golden urns marked with the Lucentum's sigil (a flaming eye), worth 1d4 x 500 gp. Victorems garner lifelong fame, opening many doors in the certain circles, and garner significant political influence. Champions retain their titles for approximately 10 years, or until the next Carnifexum. They might also, from time to time, draw challengers or attract henchmen.



Aftermath

If the party manages to earn a champion title, the PC becomes famous overnight, unable to walk Melek streets without fans approaching them to ask enthusiastic questions or congratulate them. Significant political and business opportunities are likely, as various power brokers seek to leverage the Victorem's goodwill with city residents (free and slave).

If Setoya is bested in the gladiator bouts, the PC earns Grandfather Rebus' villa/baths/tavern; worth many thousands of gold coins. If Setoya was killed, there will be fallout with other family members, some of whom may seek a blood debt or other vengeance.

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