

Crescendo

A Dungeons and Dragons Adventure for Characters Level 3-5

Timaeus hurried backwards, shielding with his sword, as the lycanthrope in bear form rushed again. He barely avoided a great sweeping paw, which tore one of the rigging ropes from its peg instead. Without warning the stage curtain flew upwards and the two combatants found themselves unexpectedly staring out at the Royal court and several hundred audience. There was a long silence filled with puzzled, expectant faces. Nervously, helplessly, the fighter began to sing "Come Walk With Me Fair Maiden." Beside him, the bear began an ungainly dance.

Hanging from a gantry high above them, two dwarfs hissed at each other. 'Now what?'
'I think that werebear is standing on a trapdoor,' replied the other. 'I have an idea.'

To run Crescendo, the DM will require The Players' Handbook, The Dungeon Master's Guide and Monstrous Manual. The game is suitable for three to six players of levels 3-5. The adventure can be set in any reasonably large city. References are made throughout to the King and his attendants, but it is suitable to substitute any powerful aristocrat or merchant in this role.

In this adventure, the PCs are requested to help ensure the success of a grand new theatre on its opening night, by protecting the star of the show from a team of mysterious assassins. There must be no hint of scandal, no interference with the performance. It is a task that requires the utmost delicacy and thought. Which of course, is why the players are sought out.

Running Crescendo.

Hooking the Players.

Initially the players will be approached by José and his daughter and offered the sum of 1000gp for a night's work – namely to protect his star performer from the assassins who are targeting her. The first night is critical to José. If he can just get through this, he is sure everything will be fine. If necessary, Miss Le'Vash herself can plead with the PCs for aid. If pressed on why the assassins are after her, she will say only that they are enemies of her family - a long ancestral line in her own country - and that they hunt her for this reason. That's fairly close to the truth. *Detect Evil* abilities can lead to things getting heated, but Le'Vash will continue to protest her innocence, claiming that she's just a little naughty sometimes.

The Assassins' Plan (Default Time Line)

The default time line for the evening is as detailed below. However, the DM should be prepared to improvise whenever given the chance. Based on PC actions, the assassins will alter their plans, taking advantage of any weaknesses they perceive in the PCs' guard. Remember that the assassins are essentially in three teams and the players may not realise this at first. The DM should have fun exploiting this by leading them in the wrong direction and asking himself "what would crazed assassins do?" Ideally, the DM should lay on each problem carefully, so as to arrive at a nice crescendo at the end of the performance.

From 5:00pm to 7:00pm, performers and crew arrive. José is present throughout this time, getting in the way and fretting. Le'Vash arrives mysteriously in her dressing room at 6:00pm. Welton and Tristan arrive together amongst the other performers. At this point, their weapons and armour are still backstage amongst the props, although Tristan has a small stoppered vial of poison down his breaches, see below, (Search check DC 18 if PCs search his clothing). Mingella will be present from this time onwards and will follow the PCs around getting in the way. If the PCs wish to get paid, they should be polite.

At 7:00pm, the theatre fills with people. Amongst them is Wendel who enters the standing only area carrying a bouquet of flowers. Sir Geoffrey arrives separately disguised as a blind man with Zariel guiding him in Hound form. He takes a seat near the stage. On a successful spot check (DC25), a PC may notice Sir Geoffrey open his eyes occasionally for a sneaky look round. If queried why a blind man carries sword and armour, the knight will explain that he still wears it for formal occasions.

At 7:40pm, the King arrives with his courtiers, guards, personal chef and favourite mistress. There is much bowing and scraping on the part of everyone else and Miss Le'Vash appears in order to curtsy and be presented by José. The King will then proceed to the Royal Box where his chef sets up a small barbecue and begins cooking peacock tongues.

At 8:00pm, Wolfgang takes the stage and begins the first act. Miss Le'Vash makes her first appearance at 8:20 and her ten-minute aria will receive a standing ovation and flowers. During the aria, Tristan in the wings will attempt to slip a powerful poison into the mead she drinks between acts. (Spot check DC 20 if a PC is just in the general area, DC 12 if they are specifically watching the cast). This will not harm her, but her continued well-being will prove to the assassins that she is what they think she is. The poison is Arsenic (DMG, pg297, DC13, 1 Con / 1d8 Con). Tristan carries only one dose. If approached by hostile PCs, Tristan will likely flee. He will not reveal that he is not alone by seeking help from the others, and they are not likely to help him. They may however take advantage of the distraction if the PCs are led elsewhere, bringing forward one of the next attempts.

The remaining attempts will take place depending on PC actions, but will happen before the show ends at 10:00pm.

Tristan and Welton will attempt to cut the ropes holding up the facade (G8) whilst Miss Le'Vash is on stage. If she is injured this will be a cue for them to try and finish her off along with Wendel.

In the second act, Miss Le'Vash is required to disappear through the trap door. Wendel will attempt to get under there and be waiting for her. It is perfectly possible that the PCs will notice him slip through the hatchway, but they will still be faced with the problem of rescuing Miss Le'Vash as she is pursued around under the stage by the werebear. If the PCs have no silver or magical weapons, the DM may provide some in the form of the aristocrat's cutlery in G10. This will require an imaginative bluff check to borrow however.

Finally, if all else fails or if there is an obvious opportunity, Sir Geoffrey and Zariel will make their move. They will focus their efforts entirely on the Succubus and take full advantage of the PCs absence should they be in pursuit of any previous assassins. Their aim is to kill her, but failing that will at least try to expose her for what she is.

Changing sides:

Many PCs will be happy to fulfil this mission even if aware of Te'levash's nature; and even many good characters will dislike Sir Geoffrey's fanatical determination to kill the singer. Others however, will

see Evil and Good and decide that they are on the wrong side. If this happens, then the simplest thing the DM can do is to let them. Things become little simpler for the PCs if they are trying to assassinate Te'Levash. They must still avoid triggering the ire of the king. To emphasize this, you can have the king clearly enjoying the performance of the succubus and resent the PCs hovering around getting in the way. One of the perks of being a king is getting rid of people one resents. Attempts to inform the King of her true nature can be met with disbelief, irritation or an innocent *suggestion* to the King from Te'Levash herself, *'not to listen to these fanatics.'*

If the PCs do not catch on to the danger of angering the King, their new allies can be used to bring home the point. e.g.

Player: Let's just kill her while she's on stage.

Sir Geoffery: An excellent plan. I am not afraid to die in the cause of Good!

Zariel: And death will merely return me to my native plane. Let us attack...

Player: On second thoughts...

The succubus may also be less defenceless than she has let on. She can make excellent use of her Disguise Suggestion ability to turn the entire audience against the PCs if need be, and especially the King's guards and aristocrats. Making one suggestion per standard action, she can bewitch 100 people in the space of a ten-minute aria, who will be outraged to see assassins targeting their beloved star.

Also there is the issue of communication with their counterparts. If previous contact has consisted of attacking each other, then suddenly convincing them of good intentions may be difficult.

The Show

The plot of the show has not been detailed. Nor has the style of the music. For medieval period settings, the show should consist of native language folk-music with much buffoonery. For more sophisticated settings, the show could be a full opera. The DM should improvise the story as needed (but probably not the music). As in all Operas, the general plot is that the tenor wants to get close to the soprano but the bass keeps getting in the way.

NPC Roster

Te'Levash, Succubus,

'Really, must we be judged on our origins? Is there no space for repentance? None for pardon left? All I wish to do is bring a little happiness into people's hearts... You look strong, would you rub my shoulders for me, please?'

Willowy, delicate, long-limbed and pale-skinned, her hair as light gold as an angel's. She could *be* an angel if the expression was just a little purer. As it is, the eyes are a little too deep, the lips a little too full and the innocent expression gleefully fake. But her voice – her voice is as musical talking as it is when she sings. It's almost impossible to really think about the words, when the way she talks is so heavenly.

Advanced Succubus, MMI, p47: CR 8; Medium Outsider (chaotic, extraplanar, evil, Tanar'ri); HD 7D8+7; hp 39; Init +1; Spd 30ft, fly 50ft (average); AC 20, touch 11, flat-footed 19; Base Atk +7; Grp +8; Atk +8 melee (1d6+1 claw); Full Atk +8 (1d6+1 2 claws); Space/Reach 5ft / 5ft; SA Energy Drain, spell-like abilities; SQ damage reduction 10 / cold iron or good, darkvision 60ft, immunity to electricity and poison, resistance acid, cold, fire 10, SR 18, telepathy 100ft, tongues; AL CE; SV Fort +6, Ref +6, Will +7; Str 13, Dex 13, Con 13, Int 16, Wis 14, Cha 26.

Skills: Bluff +17, Concentration +10, Diplomacy +12, Disguise +17* (+19 acting), Escape Artist

+10, Hide +10, Intimidate +17, Listen +19, Knowledge (The Planes) +3, Knowledge (Songs) +3, Move Silently +10, Perform (Sing) +17, Search +12, Spot +19, Survival +2 (+4 following tracks), Use Rope +1 (+3 with bindings)

Feats: Dodge, Mobility, Disguise Suggestion**

Energy Drain (Su): 1 negative level, Fortitude save (DC 21) after 24 hours, Will save (DC 21) Suggestion

Spell-Like Abilities (Sp): At will—Charm Monster (DC 22), detect good / detect thoughts (DC 20), ethereal jaunt (self + 50lbs objects only), polymorph (humanoid only, any duration), suggestion (DC 21), greater teleport; 1 per day Shout; CL 12th

Tongues (su) permanent, as the spell, CL 12th

*While using *alter self*, the succubus gains a +10 to Disguise checks.

**New Feat, see appendix

Sir Geoffrey Lionel, Male Human Paladin 5

'Evil must be eradicated. There can be no exceptions, no failures. We will purify this world.'

Tall and quick with a lean and hungry look. His long and handsome face has the look of nobility about it, as does the fine sword and armour that he wears. Remarkably however, the holy symbol of Heironeous is branded into his forehead and the backs of each hand, perhaps as a mark of extreme devotion. His blue eyes burn with a holy passion as he grips his sword.

Human Pal 5, DMG 118. hp: 37

Zariel, Hound Archon

Archon Form: *'Long have I searched for you, Queen of Evil. Now you shall taste justice, as I taste your flesh.'*

Canid Form: *'Rowwwrrr.'*

Archon Form: A squat, dog-headed version of a minotaur, it seems. Though about 5'5" tall, it's almost the same from shoulder to shoulder and its muscular arms look capable of bringing down the theatre itself with a few careless swipes. A fierce light shines in the canine eyes and flecks of saliva froth around its powerful jaws. It wields a greatsword with distressing ease and everything about it indicates a dog-man-creature on a mission.

Canid Form: A large, powerful hound. It looks like it's been bred for pit-fights and could probably run down a warhorse. It glowers up at you with angry eyes.

Hound Archon. MMI, p16; hp: 33.

Wendel, Male Human Werebear, Warrior 1

'In the name of Pelor, I'm gonna rip your arms off, human.'

Human form: A great big bear of a man, about 5'8" with a chest like a barrel and arms like an ogre's. A broad face with a mane of shaggy black hair and beard do nothing to make him look more human.

Bear form: A great big bear.

Werebear. MMI, p171; hp: 62.

Welton and Tristan, Male Humans Warrior 3

The male chorus all shuffle past you onto the stage dressed as soldiers. They wear replica chain-shirts beaten out of tin and carry blunted but shiny spears. In rehearsal, their comical dance number was most amusing.

Human War 3: CR 2; Medium Humanoid; HD 3D8+3; hp 20, 19; Init +0; Spd 30ft; AC 14, touch 10, flat-footed 10; Base Atk +3; Grp +3; Atk +4 melee (1d6 + 1 shortspear); Full Atk +3 (1d6 + 1 shortspear); Space/Reach 5ft / 5ft; AL LG; SV Fort +3, Ref +1, Will +0; Str 13, Dex 11, Con 12, Int 10, Wis 9, Cha 8.
Skills: Climb +5, Jump +3, Knowledge (Religion) +1, Perform (Sing) +1;
Feats: Toughness;
Possessions: Shortspear, Chain Shirt

Welton and Tristan were both choir boys at Sir Geoffrey's church and remain highly dedicated to the noted Paladin. They have conspired to be hired as performers, all the better to get close to Miss Le'Vash unsuspected. If queried about their real armour they will either claim that they are heirlooms worn for greater authenticity, or that they simply pulled them at random from the costumes.

José Bernárd, Male Human Commoner 2

'I'm sorry your friend is dying, truly, but could he not do it a little more quietly?'

José is a big, balding man, with an everlasting forehead and a belly that could digest a halfling. Though his face betrays his common origins, his clothing is quite fine. When he speaks, it is with some attempt at refinement. If addressing nobility, his speech becomes painfully flowery and ingratiating. He is aware of Te'Levash's true nature... but where is the sin in letting her make him just a small fortune?

José will react with terror at any hint of scandal or exposure of his star. He will hide bodies and certainly be doing his best to mop away any blood up until that point. He has worked his way up from nothing and is not unresourceful. Any reasonable assistance that the PCs require, he will endeavour to provide. Along with clean tunics every time they are stabbed.

Mmme. Mingella Bernárd, Female Human Commoner 2

'Oh, it's so wonderful! It's a dream come true. And I just know that we're safe in your hands.'

Seventeen, sweet and ample; she has a round, pretty face, full of trust in the PCs' abilities. Mingella is the daughter of José and intensely proud of her father's social climbing. She idolises the beautiful Te'Levash and emulates her as much as she dares. Though not courageous, she is willing to do whatever she can to help the PCs ensure the success of the theatre.

Thelania, Female Elf, Expert 2

'I have a harpsichord with mice in it, a violinist nine-months pregnant, a percussionist who is the husband, a flautist who's the father, and a tenor who is drunk and due on in the next act. So if you could please do your part and ensure that no-one actually dies on stage, it would be most appreciated.'

A small, prim elf with a thick sheaf of musical score under her arm and a baton that she threatens people with like a wand. Her hair is cut short and functional and her face is pretty and bad-tempered.

Thelania is well aware of Miss Le'Vash's sinister origins. Quite frankly, she doesn't care. She is the best soprano Thelania has ever heard and she could be the Lord of the Abyss himself if she performs tonight. The show is all that matters. Thelania is probably the NPC most likely to take up a crossbow and shoot an assassin herself. Anything to keep the show going.

Wolfgang Stephan, Commoner 2

'Mi mi mi'

Fat, forty, balding and smarmy. You'd be surprised how fast he can run away when there's danger. Wolfgang is the principle tenor and the "love interest" for Miss Le'Vash's character - a role that he is delighted to play. If endangered however, he may abandon the show, leaving any bardic PCs to save the night.

The King.

The King's party consists of Himself, his cook (Expert 1), his favourite mistress (Expert 2), four servants (Commoner 1), eight sycophants (Aristocrats 1-7) and fourteen royal guards (Fighter 5, DMG, pg117), armed with bastard swords, heavy crossbows and half-plate +1. All items are masterwork. Further help can be summoned from outside in 1d8 rounds. Naturally any commoner in the audience would relish the chance to save the King's life.

The DM owes it to the players to make it *very* clear that the King should not be upset by anything, this evening.

The Circle Theatre.

G1. The magnificent new Circle Theatre, is a great fat drum of a building. Walls of fine timber freshly painted in white with great black beams and crimson flags present a dramatic sight. A sign on a stake outside proclaims for those that can read - only six copper bits for standing room or just nine for a seat. And more importantly, for the opening night, the lovely Miss Le'Vash will perform. A grand double-doored arch leads inside.

G2. This fortified office is where tickets are sold and enquiries are taken. It contains José's desk and assorted paperwork. Ordinarily it is locked by a sturdy door.

G3. The floor of the theatre is a wide open space some 75' from side to side with a sawdust floor and space for over four-hundred people to stand comfortably and assorted food salesman to pass amongst them. Barring the rigging for various stagecraft some 20' above, the area is open to the sky, and at noonday performances, the sun lights the place. At night, the stars and the moons shine brightly down and torches illuminate the stage. Each layer of wooden seating around this area is 4' higher than the previous one.

G4. The stage is a raised wooden platform some 45' across and 20' deep, suitable for true extravaganzas. It stands some 5' from the ground and small wooden pickets around the edge are placed to stop people from the audience climbing on the stage (1d2 damage to any character that falls or is thrown on them, Ref (DC 15) to avoid).

A covered area of the stage provides shelter when it rains and scope for more complex sets. For the play tonight, the painted facade of a grand tall house has been erected, complete with upper story and windows.

G5. This tight little spiral staircase leads to the roofed section of the theatre, which covers all but the central area. This provides access to rigging ropes that are sometimes needed and two buckets which serve any cast or crew that need them. When full, these are emptied off the edge of the theatres rear walls to a ditch below. The men's and women's buckets are clearly marked.

G6. This large area is an assault course of props, costume rails, performers, crew, seamstresses and *ad hoc* changing rooms made out of rails of clothing. The entire area counts as difficult terrain, costing double movement and is impossible to run or charge across.

A small hatch leads underneath the stage and provides access to the trapdoor. The stage is 5' high and anyone over this height suffers a -2 to attack and reflex saves underneath it. Any given 5' square area of the stage requires a Strength check (DC15) to break through. Note that werebears are just under 5' tall on all fours and rather capable of a DC 15 strength check. Detecting whether you are under someone takes a Listen check (DC 13) and detecting the relative weights of the people above requires a Listen check (DC 19).

G8. These two stout ropes, affixed to an iron ring in the floor, hold fast the prop house-front that forms the backdrop for tonight's extravaganza. They don't especially stand out amidst the rest of the chaos that is known only as 'backstage' however. If some dastardly person were to cut these ropes, then it *may* be possible for an exceptionally strong PC to hold up the 'house' until they can be re-secured. There is plenty of rope and rigging about that could be used to do this, but it will take a Use Rope check (DC 18) for each severed rope. Holding up the backdrop requires a Str check each round (DC 8 if one rope severed, DC14 if two ropes are severed). Note that a character need not be heavier than the facade in order to hold it back, as there are plenty of things that the character can brace himself against (including clinging to the original ring).

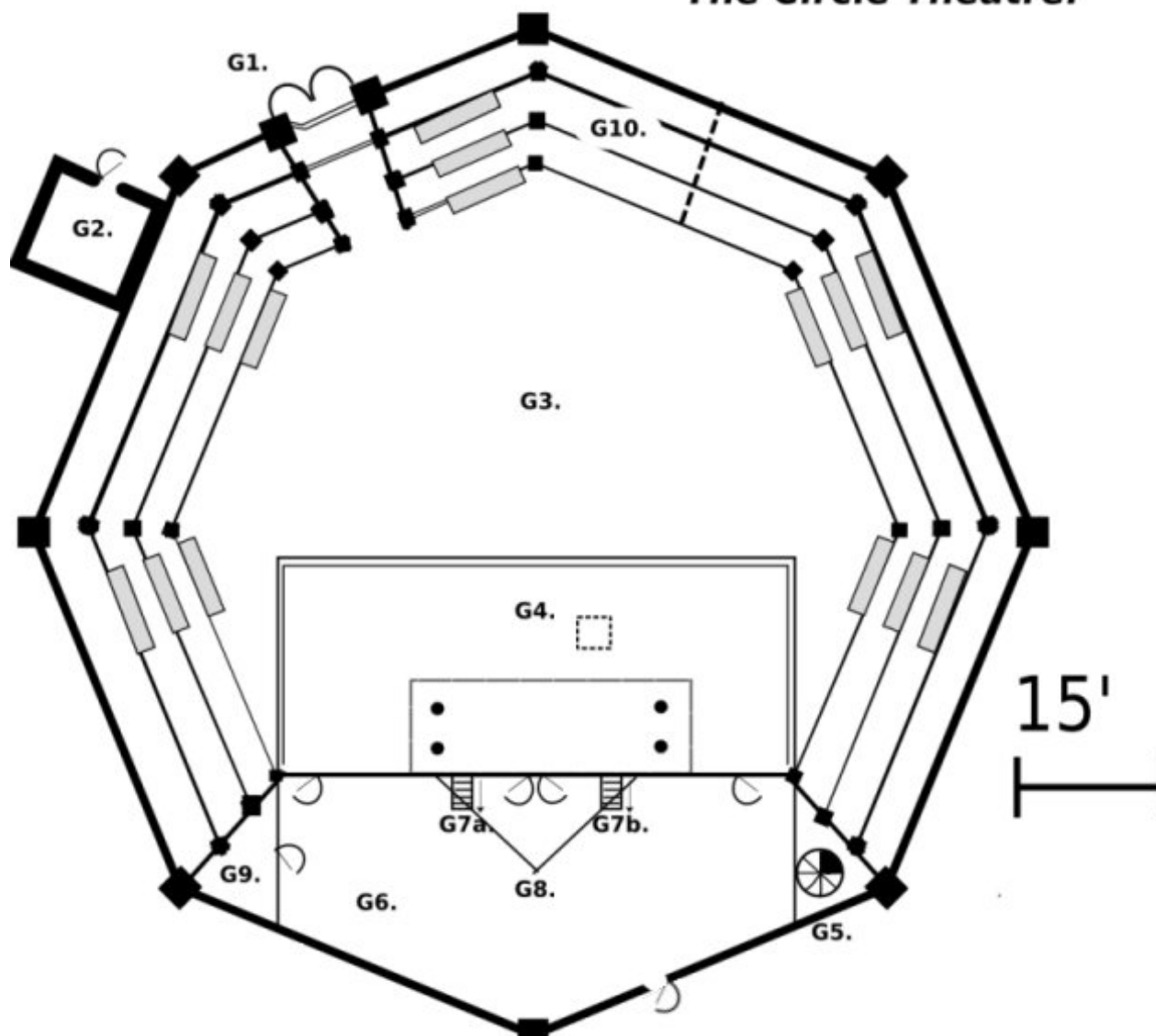
Should the ropes be cut, the facade will drop in the following round. Anyone in the middle 30' of the stage from side to side must make a Reflex save (DC 20) to get away or stand under a "window." Characters failing a save take 4d6 damage.

G7a. G7b. These short, rickety staircases and platforms lead to the "windows" in the house front, from where a performer appears to the audience. A Strength check (DC 15) will send the whole structure tumbling down. At various points in the show, Miss Le'Vash appears at the windows. Though she can hover at the window by unveiling her wings should the structure be knocked away from underneath her, such a demonstration will cause some amazement to those backstage who can see it. Alternately, PCs with the Climb skill could support her on their shoulders with a Strength check (DC 12) if they can get up there fast enough.

G9. Only Miss Le'Vash has a private dressing room. And this is it.

G10. This partitioned off area of seating is set aside for the King and his entourage.

The Circle Theatre.



Disguise Suggestion (New Feat).

The *Suggestion* spell or spell-like ability can be combined with another action disguising its use.

Prerequisite: Ability to cast *Suggestion* or use a similar spell-like power.

Benefit: Any victims or witnesses to your *suggestion* must succeed on a Knowledge (Arcana) check against a DC of CL + the appropriate ability score (Cha, Int or Wis). Failing this check means further suggestions will go unnoticed. Suggestions are normally disguised as conversation on any subject and the *suggestion* need not be explicitly stated. Other common disguises are song, dance and hand gestures.

Normal: Casting *suggestion* or using a similar spell-like ability is a standard action that cannot be combined with other actions and is apparent to witnesses as a *suggestion*.

Balancing the Adventure. (GM Notes)

The adventure is listed as 3-6 players of levels 3-5, or total party level of around 15. Because this adventure has a low-number of encounters, the opponents might be expected to be higher CR than

usual. However, the adventure also has more of a focus on preventing certain actions so I've kept the opponents a little weaker than they ought to be. It doesn't matter that Welton is a level 3 warrior when all he needs to do is cut a rope to complete his task. It is anticipated that there should be a grand fight at the end, however. Given that the PCs will probably still be in good shape, both Sir Geoffrey and Zariel are beefed up for a dramatic fight. Should things go wrong, there are plenty of ways for inventive PCs to even the odds. I was in two minds about including the werebear as the party may not have much in the way of silver or magical weapons at this level. I went with it though, partly because there are restrictions on Wendel's behaviour that smart PCs can use. For example, Wendel doesn't want to kill innocents (LG), doesn't want to expose himself in front of the King's guard and is motivated by getting at Te'Levash not killing the PCs. As such, PCs should be able to turn this more into a recurring and chase scene than a fight to the death. Mostly however, I put him in because an angry bear crashing around backstage is exactly the sort of insane problem I want PCs to deal with in this adventure.

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