

THE ARABYAN KNIGHT

Overview: At a coaching inn, an Arabyan warrior is challenging every male noble who will not turn back to a duel. He is the bastard son of the local baron, who rejects him out of shame & love for his wife but won't let the roadwardens intervene.

Act 1: None (but commoners) Shall Pass!

The PCs will hear rumours of what's happening before they get to the inn. These begin as quite fantastical: a beastman/troll/demon occupies an inn & is killing all first-born sons, etc. The stories get more accurate closer in: an exaggerated, but accurate, version is told them by an injured knight riding back after having gone to test his mettle.

At the inn everything looks normal, bar the Arabyan & his small retinue who keep apart from other guests. A squad of imperial roadwardens at the inn is clearly there to observe. Shortly after the PCs' arrival on the first evening, an arrogant young knight arrives & loudly challenges the Arabyan, who kills him in a single combat in the inn's yard before returning to his dinner. Bookmakers will take bets.

Act 2: Unofficial Investigations

After the fight, the roadwardens' captain hires the PCs as deniable proxy investigators.

Local rumours: the Arabyan came to avenge his father killed by the baron on crusade; he's the baron's bastard son come to claim his inheritance or a demon hunting the baron for a past crime; the baron's wife blames him for their childlessness; she is barren & fears divorce, but the baron loves her.

The Arabyan's retinue: a teenage girl (his daughter, but this is not publicised), an advisor/physician, a simple-minded bodyguard, & a young valet (a slave originally from the Empire; the others are Arabyan). Respectable PCs can socialise with the knight (who speaks Reikspiel), scholars with the physician (who speaks Classical, but not Reikspiel), others with the valet. All are friendly but guarded & claim the knight will stop the combats when the baron no longer insults him by refusing an audience.

Each morning the girl goes to the baron's nearby castle with a message, waits, & returns late without being able to deliver it. The PCs might rescue her from robbers & thus bring the Arabyan to confide in them, or intercept the message (a petition for an audience, addressing the baron as 'waalidi': 'my father' in Arabyan, as e.g. the valet could confirm).

A lockbox in the Arabyan's room contains: a signet ring with the baron's seal & an enamel cameo of the young baron (as seen in the castle portrait).

At the castle: nobles can visit the baron, who is formally polite but distracted & ruled by his wife; others can sneak in with the servants. Inside, PCs can find: a portrait of the baron as a young knight with his Arabyan spoils; Arabyan tapestries patterned like the knight's cloak (both made by his mother); a long-furnished but disused nursery.

Act 3: Father & Son

A scion of the imperial family arrives with a large entourage, including many powerful people (nobles, clerics, ministers, spies), sets up camp, & challenges the Arabyan for the next day. That night he feasts at the castle; the camp becomes a mini-carnival. It is rumoured that if the scion dies, the baron will be dispossessed. The roadwardens can/will bring the PCs & powerful/official interested parties together.

The next day, just as the scion is about to fight, the baron interrupts & fights in his stead. The fight lasts longer than need be: the baron won't concede & the Arabyan is clearly reluctant to kill him but eventually does so. He then declares his identity, using the ring as proof, if the PCs didn't steal it. The baron's widow challenges the claim & it is tried before the assembled nobility. Without help, the Arabyan will lose & be hanged for fraud & murder.

At different points, the PCs may be asked to help or hinder the Arabyan by parties from the camp or friends among his retinue, or both. PCs could use contacts from the camp to influence the trial; have the baron betray his wife & admit paternity; publicly shame him with proofs; kill/disable the Arabyan.

Variations & Complications

The episode may easily be set outside the Empire.

The bodyguard just pretends to be simple-minded.

The physician has advanced medical knowledge which he can share, but it may be thought heretical.

The valet begs the PCs to help free him, so that he & the Arabyan's daughter can elope together.

The baron's wife tries to stop any investigations & may be behind the attack on the girl.

The Arabyan knight is, alternatively, a demon & the 'physician' the demonologist who controls him.