

THE ESTALIAN PRISONER

Overview: A distraught widow wants to pay her son's ransom, but she is being duped.

Act 1: Proof of Life

The PCs are hired by a seemingly wealthy widow to deliver a ransom. Her only son was captured by an Estalian bandit while touring the southern Old World. She paid the ransom, but was then told the bandit was caught by an Estalian baron who now wants a reward for 'rescuing' her son. She gives the PCs a letter of credit to draw on with her banker. They must return with the son or proof of life.

Act 2: Unhelpful Contacts

The PCs travel to a major city (e.g. Altdorf or Nuln) to meet the baron's representative & the banker. The latter explains the widow is in fact almost ruined & he can only give them some valuable family heirlooms. He also recommends they contact a powerful family with old ties to the widow. They will not intervene in a private matter, but do suggest it may be a scam. They will make bad enemies if the PCs abscond with the money or abandon the job.

The PCs meet the baron's representative in an establishment catering to rich youth & their criminal friends. He refuses to take any valuables, insisting the PCs fence them & bring cash instead to a newly scheduled meet. An appropriate test reveals his Estalian accent is faked. The clock is now ticking towards the PCs' next meet with the 'contact'.

Act 3: The Hustle

Fencing the valuables gets only a fraction of their worth & will not cover the ransom. If the PCs pay the 'Estalian' without getting proof of life, he'll disappear & they'll have to investigate. Demanding proof of life will elicit demands for more money. Continued refusal will lead the 'Estalian' to flee & if he escapes, to him arranging an attack on the PCs.

Inquiries at the inn reveal the 'Estalian' to be the dissolute young son of a local noble. Following him leads to his university lodgings, brothels & gambling dens. Further observation or infiltrating demimonde circles sees him in the apparently willing company of the son, who is in on the scam & has been dissipating his money here: he never went to Estalia.

Act 4: Appeals, Moral & Otherwise

Alerting the 'Estalian's' family to his scam will cause him to be sent away, but they won't help the son & will protect their own from any legal ramifications. Doing this or calling the 'Estalian's' bluff will cause him to pay off his own criminal debts by selling the son out to the gang to which they both owe money.

By contacting the son in private, the PCs can persuade/intimidate him into returning with them. Being informed of his mother's actual finances will help persuade him, but he is also in love with his favourite prostitute & will not leave without her, or at least knowing she will be safe.

Act 5: The Prodigal & the Prostitute

The prostitute is not in love & will require material assurances to leave the city. If the 'Estalian' has tipped off the gang, they are holding her as 'collateral'. Meanwhile, word has leaked of the son leaving, & the PCs have to smuggle him out before city bailiffs & bounty hunters enlisted by respectable creditors can put him in debtors' prison.

If the PCs return with the son, they still have to explain his absence without alienating the widow (e.g. by claiming they successfully bought him free, or that he escaped). The PCs' reward is a letter of recommendation to her powerful friends, useful for one instance of material aid (e.g. release from prison; access to a high-society event).

Variations & Complications

The prostitute works for the gang: her 'rescue' is a trap. Or she is also in love, but the widow would disown her son if she discovered their romance.

The gang runs the scam & the 'Estalian' is a dangerous gangster, not a dissolute young noble.

The widow is rich, but so miserly she has her banker claim she is poor even with her son's life 'at risk'. The scam is his way of getting any money at all.

Set in Tilea, a Myrmidian temple hires the PCs to ransom an Initiate 'kidnapped by Estalian heretics' while on pilgrimage to Magritta. The PCs must retrieve him without exposing his scam.