



## CHAPTER 3. THE BLACK BIRD

One of the most notorious criminals ever to be interred in Castlegrasp's dungeon has escaped, leaving almost no trace behind. A powerful, authoritarian noble has placed one of the largest bounties ever seen on the man's head: 20,000 gold pieces dead or alive. This incredible sum draws adventurers, rangers, and bounty hunters from all corners of Omeria. And the race is on. Of course, those who seek to collect the reward aren't the only ones hunting the escaped prisoner. A dark being known only as the Black Bird is also hunting the prisoner, but for a different reason. Rumors persist that the prisoner knows the whereabouts of a powerful tome of ancient evil and the Black Bird's masters wish to collect the book and destroy anyone who knows about it.

Black Bird is a 3rd-level Fifth Edition adventure for 3-5 characters. Characters who survive the adventure should be two-thirds of the way to level 4 by the adventure's conclusion. This is the third chapter in the *Hand of Eight* adventure path. It can be played as the kickoff for the larger adventure setting or as a one-shot adventure for your characters to follow.

The campaign is intended to be set in the DMDave crowdsourced campaign world of Omeria, but can just as easily be inserted into any other large city overlooking a large ocean or sea.

### BACKGROUND

Two weeks ago, the notorious criminal, Mega the Brash, leader of the Odzedoz pirates of the Ghost Holm, was arrested and interred in the dungeons of Castlegrasp. His crime? The abduction of Nadia Mansouri, daughter of an important Castlegraspian noble. If Mega is found guilty of the crime by Castlegrasp's jury, he will be turned to stone and placed in the city's Yard of Deterrents.

Of course, Mega always has a plan in place. Two nights ago, one of the dungeon guards was murdered by a doppelganger on Mega's payroll. The doppelganger assumed the appearance of the guard, took his position at the jail, disabled the second guard, and freed Mega from his cell. The doppelganger gave Mega a *hat of disguise* which he used to assume the appearance of the second guard. With a *silent image* scroll, the doppelganger created the appearance that Mega and both of the guards were still in place. By the time the illusion ended, Mega had escaped the city through the eastern gate and the doppelganger assumed another role in the city.

Once the body of the first guard was discovered a day after Mega's escape, the authorities determined that a shapeshifter was at work. Baariq Mansouri, the noble whose daughter was kidnapped by Mega, immediately put out bounties on Mega and his associate. "Mega the Brash, Wanted by the Royal Jury of Castlegrasp. Alive or Dead, 20,000 gold pieces." Bounty hunters, rangers, and adventurers from all over central Omeria answered the call.

Inevitably, the characters learn of the bounty placed on Mega. One would assume that their having a history with the orc would give the characters an edge. Unfortunately, the competition is steep and the hunt has already begun.

### THE BLACK BIRD

Bounty-seekers are the least of Mega's worries. A creature known only as "The Black Bird" seeks the orc as well. The Black Bird suspects that Mega knows the whereabouts of an unreadable ancient text called *Prime*. It is the Black Bird's mission to find Mega, learn what the orc knows about the book and its current location, then destroy him.

The Black Bird is a force of nature, leaving a trail of bodies in its wake. Likely, he will be the most dangerous creature that the characters have faced so far in their journeys thus far.

## WHAT IF MEGA IS DEAD (OR NOT IN PRISON)?

This adventure assumes that Mega survived the first and second chapters of the *Hand of the Eight* adventure path and was taken into custody. However, it's possible that Mega died at some point in either adventure or escaped. If that's the case, don't worry: It's still possible to run this adventure.

First, if Mega died or escaped, replace the imprisoned orc with either his brother Xnath (detailed in Chapter 2) or, if Cnath died, too, substitute an appropriate associate. You can use Mergigoth, or another orc who was part of Mega's organization (such as the orc felled from its giant vulture in the Background of part 2).

If Mega survived and escaped, Mega arranged the escape of one of his associates, instead. Knowing that the escaped criminal will lead any who follows him/her to Mega, Baariq offers the same bounty. The only difference is that the characters and NPCs tracking the escaped prisoner will follow them to where Mega is located.

If Mega died but the book was given to his first mate Gluronk, the escaped criminal knows where Gluronk and the book are and can lead the way.

In the rare instance that Mega has been dead since Chapter 1 and the characters have had Prime this entire time, the adventure can still play out the same way. However, The Black Bird wants to find the remaining members of the Odzedoz in order to learn what happened during their assault on Haver. It's from the orcs the Black Bird learns that the characters have the book. During the final battle with the Black Bird, the Black Bird focuses his efforts on the characters and the recovery of Prime instead of killing Mega.

## ADVENTURE SUMMARY

The adventure starts when the characters are called to the coastal city of Castlegrasp by the noble, Baariq Mansouri. They are informed by Mansouri that Mega the Brash has escaped Castlegrasp's dungeon and is likely headed north towards Lost Dragon Pass. Unfortunately, Mansouri has no other clues for the characters to follow.

From there, the course that the remainder of the adventure takes relies heavily on the characters and the choices they make. While he's been careful, Mega has left numerous clues along the way. Craftier characters will be able to follow them to Mega's ultimate destination.

Through their travels, the characters encounter various bounty hunters, rangers, and other adventuring parties who seek the reward. They also cross paths with the mysterious and dangerous Black Bird who seeks the ancient book rumored to be in Mega's possession.

The climax of the adventure takes place at a lodge hidden in the forests of the Qerno Peninsula. There, they must protect Mega from the Black Bird and keep the book out of evil's hands.

## ADVENTURE HOOKS

If the characters partook in the first two chapters of this adventure, then they should have enough incentive to chase after Mega. Not to mention, a 20,000 gp reward is nothing to scoff at. If you are running this as a one-shot adventure, here are a few hooks you can employ to get your characters interested.

### MASSIVE BOUNTY

Easily the biggest motivator for the adventure is the sizable bounty placed on the head of Mega by Baariq Mansouri. While the characters won't have the same edge over the competition they would have had they worked for Mansouri in the past, it's still a reward that's worth pursuing.

### SOMETHING WICKED

Rumors persist across the Weysevain Coast that an evil creature known as the "Black Bird" is on the trail of an orc who escaped the dungeon in Castlegrasp. As the creature moves up the coast, it leaves a trail of bodies in its wake. The characters are tasked to stop this creature before it can kill more humanoids.

### ANCIENT TOME

The characters learn the real reason why so many are after the escaped orc, Mega: supposedly, he carries an unreadable book said to possess power that eclipses even the Redstone Dinzers of Odonburg. Although not much else is known about the book—not even its title is known—it's considered priceless by those who want it. Only trouble is, anyone who's been in the possession of the book has either died, gone insane, or been imprisoned.

## THE WISE SHIRT

The adventure starts when the characters are relaxing at the Wise Shirt tavern and bar in the coastal village of Haver. Haver is a popular stopover point for southern Omerian sailors headed north. The bar is owned by an uptight and anxious elf named Aywin Luphine (LG male high elf **noble**). Fortunately, Luphine mostly stays out of the way, allowing his star bartender, Bezka Wells (LG female half-elf **noble**) to act as the face of the tavern. The food is hot, the drinks are stiff, and if the characters need, there's even a few beds in the rear. You can learn more about the Wise Shirt and Haver in Chapter 1 of this adventure path, *Storm of Mega*.

Whatever reasons the characters have for being in The Wise Shirt, eventually a messenger from Castlegrasp arrives carrying a satchel full of posters. After a quick word with Luphine, the messenger pastes one of his posters on the wall.

Read the following description:

You watch as the blue-and-purple-clad messenger pastes a huge poster on one of the walls of the tavern. Immediately, everyone stops what they are doing and stares at the poster. Even Bezka stops drying a freshly-washed mug for a moment to stare at the poster. "Suen's wrath," she gasps.

There is an pen-and-ink drawing depicting a sour-faced orc with a white mohawk on the poster. Below the image, the poster reads:

*'Wanted!*

*Mega the Brash, orc pirate and scourge of the Ghost Holm, for murder, theft, extortion, sabotage, kidnapping of a noble's daughter, and prisonbreak.*

*20,000 gold pieces. Dead or alive.*

*Seek Baariq Mansouri of Castlegrasp for details.'*

"20,000 gold pieces? That's the biggest bounty I've ever heard of!" comes a voice from the rear of the tavern. A bald-headed man with a horizontal scar on his brow stands and puts his finger between the eyes of the drawing of the orc.

"Guess I've just found my next job!" the bald man says, hiking up his sagging trousers over his comically round gut.

If the characters helped Baariq rescue his daughter (in Chapter 2, *Assault on the Ghost Holm*), then they should immediately recognize not just the name of the orc pirate, but also Mansouri. In fact, the messenger was tasked to find them once he passed through Haver.

"Excuse me?" asks the Castlegraspian messenger. "But Lord Mansouri asked me to specifically find you. He thanks you for helping him in the past and hopes that you are able to take this bounty on his behalf. If you are available, he hopes that you can meet him in Castlegrasp before the week is through."

Should the characters decide to take the bounty and Mansouri's offer, they must travel south to the city of Castlegrasp. It's two days' journey by horse or one day by sailing vessel. The characters can book passage on a sailing vessel for 10 gp each.

## CASTLEGRASP

Castlegrasp, the City of Granite, is the last major city before the Desolation of Ditimaya and the Obsidian Plain divide the rest of Omeria from the southern end of the continent. Ruled by Khan Hayyan Harrak XI (known by his people as 'Fair Eleven'), Castlegrasp keeps the peace thanks to its strong military and strict, but just, laws.

Castlegrasp is home to some 12,000 humanoids, the majority of which are Ditimayan humans. Indestructible granite walls surround the whole of the city. The mighty Castlegraspian Stonearms (LG any race knights) protect the city and keep the peace while the legendary Castlegraspian Navy patrols the turbulent waters of the Bay of Suen and the Omerian Ocean.

Thanks to the Castlegraspian navy's watchful eye, southern merchants feel safe traveling along the Scorched Coast. And as the connecting point between southern and central Omeria, Castlegrasp is a major trade port. Goods from Odonburg, Qey, Yraka, and more touchdown in Castlegrasp.

There, the merchant houses purchase and issue the goods caravans for journeys north along the Arrow Road. Castlegrasp itself exports the unusually durable granite from which it earns its nickname as well as plums, sheep, and of course, its famous wines.

Due largely to Fair Eleven's just and (some would argue) liberal attitude towards criminals, most of the crime that existed two decades prior has vanished from Castlegrasp. Still, it has its fair share of black hat organizations. The city's biggest criminal organization, the Crystal Toad handles black market trade and is rumored to have many of the city's nobles on their payroll. Meanwhile, the shadowy cadre of assassins known as the Owls earn heavy purses of gold as murderers-for-hire. In the Low Ward, a new devilkin crimelord named Light Beyond the Hills invokes terror among the ward's citizens.

Not only does Castlegrasp act as the starting point for the adventure, but it could also function as an exciting base of operations for characters adventuring in Central Omeria.

## ARRIVAL IN CASTLEGRASP

When the characters arrive, read the following:

Castlegrasp, the City of Granite juts like a sand-colored fist at the edge of the Bay of Suen. The unbreachable forty-foot walls that surround the city wrap the city like the arms of a protective mother. At the center of the city on a great mound is the infamous Violet Qsar, the royal palace and home to the city's eleventh Khan, Hayyan Harrak. He's commonly known as "Fair Eleven." Castlegrasp's blue and violet banners flutter in the warm breeze escaping from the south where the haze of the Obsidian Plain lingers; a stern reminder of the city's original purpose.

Even before you even enter the city, you find yourself surrounded by foreign merchants hawking their wares along the road. A Dinzer seller offer rare, brightly colored birds and other strange critters in locked cages. Yrenkan fruit vendors pressure you with odd, yellow fruit shaped like crescent moons. You even come eye to eight-eyes with a mysterious krig; he deals in leatherwares—"studded leather from Orbea, very good, yes!" clicks the man-spider.

Also among the crowd, you see the legendary Stonearms, the royal templars of Castlegrasp. Most cover their faces with blue and violet keffiyehs or wear ivory masks carved to look like tigers. However, there is no mistaking the rocky limbs from which they derive their honorifics.

Another surprising feature of the city are the wild tigers that roam its streets. The great amber, black, and white seemingly cats pay no mind to the city's inhabitants. However, many of the Castlegraspians make sure to bow their heads in the presence of the city's most sacred animal. A girl, no older than seven, ties a bow made of flowers to one of the beast's tails—no protests comes from the feline.

Baariq Mansouri lives in the section of town known as Sweet Olive Ward (Area 23 on the map). He has asked those who seek more information on Mega's bounty to seek his assistant, Tree by the Lake at a small shop at the north edge of the Dek Bazaar (Area 14). While the sense of urgency should be high, the characters are free to spend time exploring the city. In addition to the locations mentioned on the map of Castlegrasp in the Important Locations section, there are many opportunities for adventures, sidequests, and random encounters. Some suggestions are detailed below.

## SIDE QUESTS

Castlegrasp offers plenty of opportunities for the characters to encounter NPCs who may need help. Of course, the characters are under no obligation to do so, potentially getting sidetracked from their mission. However, these side quests may provide additional rewards, experience, and discoveries for the characters.

### 1 - BOUNTY HUNTERS WITH A DEBT

One of the bounty hunters that's trying to collect on the Mega bounty has a few enemies in Castlegrasp. He or she thought they could enter the city and get the information without notice, but they were wrong. Eros Mulopoulos (NE male human Knotsider **thug**), a heavy working for the Crystal Toad, noticed the bounty hunter immediately. Not wanting to get the Crystal Toads' hands dirty, he hopes that he can contract the characters—who should look stick out like sore thumbs in Castlegrasp—to collect on the debt. If they collect the debt—1,000 gp—he'll pay them 10 percent of the take. The bounty hunter has been seen drinking at the Armed Lavender (Area 5). To determine the name, personality, and stats of the bounty hunter, refer to the Bounty Hunter section later in this adventure.

### 2 - CHASE OFF COCKATRICES

Two brothers, Sufyan and Ayoub (LG male Ditimayan human **commoners**) approach the characters while they are traveling in or near Castlegrasp. The pair own a fox farm just outside of town that they inherited from their mother who passed away last winter. If that wasn't enough to deal with, their foxes have been consistently attacked by cockatrices every night. Now, the brothers are worried they won't have enough foxes to earn a living selling their pelts. The Stonearms won't handle it as cockatrices are considered holy animals in Castlegrasp. The brothers can't offer much more than a warm meal and a space to sleep in their barn. If the characters agree to help, they must stake out the fox pens at the brothers' farm. Some point during the night, the cockatrices arrive. There are six in all. Killing one or two of the monstrosities is enough to permanently drive off the whole brood.

### 3 - RESCUE ONE-OF-EIGHT

While the characters are traveling through the northern section of the city, they discover a group of five young men beating an old, blind man in an alley. The young men are easy to run off (all N male Ditimayan human **commoners**). The man, who tells the characters his name is One-of-Eight, is a blind seer (NE male Ditimayan human **mage**) who works at the temple of Yrena (Area 8). He asks that the characters escort him back to the temple. Any character born in or near Castlegrasp or who passes a DC 10 Intelligence (Religion)

check, immediately recognizes who the old man is and the controversies surrounding Yrena's temple. He has no money to pay the characters, but thanks them for their assistance.

### 4 - STOP A THIEF

As the characters make their way through one of the city's many bazaars, they hear the unmistakable cry of "Stop! Thief!", from Jibbran (LG male Ditimayan human **commoner**), a dried meat vendor. Jibbran turned away from his stall for a moment and a thief swiped his change pouch full of the days' earnings. The characters see the thief running through the bazaar. The thief's name is Roundabout Jen (CN female Knotsider human **spy**). She's quick and will try to outrun the characters—and possibly even a Stonearm or two—but if they catch up to her, she will immediately surrender the pouch. Unfortunately, if she's caught by Stonearms, she will immediately be arrested and taken to Castlegrasp's dungeon.

### 5 - RETURN A BOOK FOR NADIA

If the characters met Nadia Mansouri in the last adventure, she will be pleased to see them again and will send one of the family servants to invite them to her home in Sweet Olive Ward. Since her abduction, and especially since Mega's escape, she is afraid to leave the home. In addition, a pair of Blueguard girls (LG female human Ditimayan **guards**) stay at her side at all times. She asks that the characters return a book for her at the Maktaba (see Area 19). The book is The Legend of Hearth, signed by its author, Grovalder Hewpillar.

### 6 - CATCH A CHEATER

Hamza Belghiti (N male Ditimayan human **commoner**), a vendor for the merchant House Benjelloun, suspects that one of his stall neighbors, Reema Toufiq (NE female Ditimayan human **commoner**) of Ibn Al-Hasan is padding her numbers during The Big Game (see Area 14). He offers the characters 5 gp per hour if they will sit at the kabob cafe near their stall and keep an eye on her. If the characters agree, each hour they sit in bazaar, have them make a group DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. If half of the party or more are successful on their checks, they notice that the same person keeps coming to her stall and purchasing fruit, typically once every 20 minutes. The buyer is another member of Ibn Al-Hasan. If the characters reveal this to Belghiti, Belghiti exposes her to the referees. Ibn Al-Hasan is a powerful merchant house in Castlegrasp with connections to the Crystal Toad. The characters could end up making enemies during their short stay in the City of Granite.

### 7 - LOAD THE STATUE CART

Two dwarves, Kobol and Lilac, drag a large cart through the city pulled by a **red-striped thornfoot**. Kobol and Lilac (LN male and female Von Doral dwarf **commoners**) shout at the characters, "You! You all look strong. With us! There's a silver or two in it for you." If the characters go along with the dwarves, the dwarves lead them to the Yard of Deterrents (see Area 18). There, the characters get a glimpse of Castlegrasp's infamous criminal-justice system. Six of the statues at the center of the grotesque statuary have blue paint stripes across their back. These criminals served their time but were not claimed by family and friends. The dwarves need help lifting the bodies onto their cart. From there, the dwarves will carry the statues north and deposit them in

the Petrified Labyrinth. The statues are heavy, each weighing 900 pounds. Once the characters have helped the dwarves, the dwarves pay each one 1 sp for their help.

## 8 - FIND ECHO IN THE WIND

In the Low Ward (Area 16), a devilkin mother named Breeze in the Pines (LG female tiefling **commoner**) is hysterical. Her daughter, Echo in the Wind is missing. The fear of all parents in the Low Ward is that if their child goes missing, the Light got them. She begs the characters to investigate, swearing it must be Light Beyond the Hill who took her daughter. Other devilkin **commoners** beg her to keep her voice down and not blame the Light until they know better. Fortunately, Echo wasn't taken by the Light or any of his lackies. Echo was playing around the petrified dragon, Grytias (Area 11), and got stuck on the dragon's ridged back. As usual, there are no Stonearms or militia to be found in the Low Ward. Therefore, one or more of the characters will have to climb up the dragon, retrieve the devilkin girl, and deliver her safe to her mother.

## RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

In addition to the side quests that characters can take on, there are plenty of strange, wonderful, dangerous, and amazing encounters in the City of Granite. Roll a d20 three times per day of game time, checking for encounters each morning, afternoon, and evening or night. An encounter occurs on a roll of 16 or higher. Roll a d20 and check the Castlegrasp Encounters table to determine what the encounter, or simply choose an encounter you like.

## TREE BY THE LAKE

Tree by the Lake (LG male tiefling **commoner**) is taking inventory at one of the Mansouri wineshops at the northern end of the Dek Bazaar. The short, squirrely devilkin has been meeting with bounty hunters for the last two days. By the time the characters arrive, he's exhausted but willing to answer questions for them, especially if the characters are the ones responsible for rescuing Nadia Mansouri in Chapter 2.

Tree outlines the details of Mansouri's bounty:

- The bounty is 20,000 gold pieces to be paid in Castlegraspian din. The reward is the same dead or alive.
- If Mega is killed, the orc's head must be brought back to Mansouri and identifiable through divination enchantments.
- While there have been a lot of people asking about the bounties, there are only eight well-known bounty hunters and bounty hunting groups involved in the hunt. Their details are described later in this adventure.
- Mega and his associate were crafty and didn't leave many clues during their escape. However, he suspects that the associate was likely a shapeshifter of some sort and used illusions to smuggle Mega out of the prison.
- The city went on lockdown after the escape. This means that Mega and his associate only had the duration of an illusion spell to escape the city.
- Ten of the Odzedoz orcs that lived in Jando's Spire were captured and put into the city's dungeon. They are all sentenced to petrification in the Yard of Deterrents on the Day of Tigers (the last day of the week).

## CASTLEGRASP ENCOUNTERS

### d20 Encounter

|       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1     | A wandering <b>tiger</b> rubs its head against one of the character's legs.                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 2     | A <b>red-striped thornfoot</b> breaks its restraints and traps a shop keeper in their stall as it thrashes about.                                                                                                                                        |
| 3     | A child pickpocket (unarmed <b>commoner</b> ) tries to pilfer one of the characters' coin purses.                                                                                                                                                        |
| 4     | A destitute devilkin woman ( <b>commoner</b> ) lies in the street and weeps. She claims that she has visions of the Black Bird every night. "He is coming! She warns! And when he does, the eighth hand will move once more!"                            |
| 5     | A runty <b>xorn</b> hobbles down the street. Considered a holy creature, the locals won't mess with it, but they do their best to remove any gems or jewelry they are carrying. The characters may not be so lucky.                                      |
| 6     | Walking past a bordello, a devilkin woman ( <b>commoner</b> ) encourages one or more of the characters to join her.                                                                                                                                      |
| 7     | While walking through a crowded street, someone intentionally runs into one of the characters. It's one of their bounty hunter competitors. Refer to the Bounty Hunter section for details and stat blocks.                                              |
| 8     | A prankster ( <b>commoner</b> ) tells a Stonearm (knight) that he thinks he saw the characters steal fruit from a fruit vendor's stall. The Stonearm accosts the characters.                                                                             |
| 9     | "Move, fools!" shouts a burly man (veteran) to the crowd as four tiger-masked men ( <b>guards</b> ) carry a litter down the street. Within is an important Castlegraspian noble.                                                                         |
| 10    | The characters walk past a suit of an ornate <b>animated armor</b> that seems to be operating on its own. In the center of its helmet is the golden Eye of Worlds, the royal symbol of the Omerian Throne. The armor is a remote traveler from Odonburg. |
| 11-20 | The characters meet an NPC with a side quest (see "Side Quests" above).                                                                                                                                                                                  |

- The orcs told the Stonearms that Mega's first mate, Gluronk, was missing from the raid on Jando's Spire. It is likely Gluronk is carrying an object of great importance. Rumors among the captured Odzedoz orcs is that Mega has a brother who lives north of the Basilisk's Spine. It is likely that is where he is traveling.

That is all of the information that Tree has for the characters. He recommends that they try to find clues by gathering information. If they can find more clues or associates of Mega's, then it's possible that they can follow the orc's trail from there.

Tree answers any other questions he can to the best of his ability but eventually recommends that the characters get started as soon as possible, especially considering the number of interested parties there are.

## TRACKING MEGA

The hunt for Mega begins in Castlegrasp. With little to go on, the best place for the characters to start is the city itself. Gathering information in Castlegrasp presents itself as a two-

### CASTLEGRASP RUMORS

#### d20 Rumor

- 1 "A rare creature—a doppelganger—was seen shifting at the docks three weeks ago. If a doppelganger is in town, it may have been the one that helped Mega escape."
- 2 "The Crystal Toad is a dangerous criminal organization in the city. It's possible that Mega and his associate were smuggled out by one of the Crystal Toad's runners." (Area 13)
- 3 "If Mega and his associate really wanted to avoid the attention of the Stonearms, he probably dealt with the devilkin in the white hat (Light Beyond the Hills)." (Area 16)
- 4 "The day after the lockdown, the Yard of Deterrents was swarmed by hundreds of blackbirds. It was inexplicable, but many who saw it think that it's an omen." (Area 18)
- 5 "There used to be ancient tunnels that ran out of the city, some were converted to sewers while others have been sealed off by the Stonearms. The orc pirate might have escaped through one of those tunnels." (Area 12)
- 6 "During the lockdown, only one of the gates remained open—the Sunrise Gate in the Sweet Olive Ward. Only city citizens carrying identification could leave through the gate during the lockdown. If Mega had another associate that was a noble living in the city, he may have escaped through the Sunrise Gate." (Area 15 and 20)
- 7 "The day after Mega disappeared, three people were killed at a house north of El Asoufi vineyard. Rumor has it that it was a freak occurrence that killed them all. Still, it's believed that Mega's escape had something to do with it." (Area 21)
- 8 "During the lockdown, a Knotsider gnome threw a fit because they wouldn't let her leave. They arrested the woman and impounded her ship. She was let off with a warning. Supposedly, she's been drinking at Temple of Suen until she can afford to get her ship out of the Bay." (Area 10)
- 9 "It seems crazy to travel along the Leash and through the Lost Dragon Pass with such a large bounty on his head. A less-traveled and much more dangerous journey through the Desolation of Ditimaya to Qola might make more sense."
- 10 "There is a list of banned magic items in the city. It's likely that they used one of those items, probably something to change their appearance."

fold challenge. First, most Castlegraspians are lawful citizens, so they are unlikely to have connections to figures in the underworld. And the figures of the underworld that do operate within Castlegrasp don't exactly share their identity with those outside their organizations. Second, there are bounty hunters who already have a headstart on the characters asking the same questions and speaking to the same people. Even if the characters find an important clue, it's likely that one of the hunters heard it first and are already on their way to finding the next clue.

#### d20 Rumor

- 11 "The last person to break out of the Castlegrasp Dungeon was a krig named Ivyn Kozer. He just got stone-to-fleshed three weeks ago and is now working in the sunflower fields south of the city. He may have insights to share with you regarding escaping the dungeon." (Area 22)
- 12 "The girl, Nadia, claims that she was captured to translate some ancient book that the orc stole off a group of sages. You might talk to the sages at the Maktaba about the book and what course of action an orc with a book like that might take." (Area 19 and 23)
- 13 "A pair of halfling bounty hunters seem to have found out the orc's next destination. They were seen heading through the Sunrise Gate to the north of Sweet Olive Ward." (Area 20)
- 14 "Just this morning, a fight broke out between some muscle-headed dwarven bounty hunter and a group of devilkin down in the Lower Ward." (Area 16)
- 15 "Need a smuggler? Stavros Nanakos is the person to talk to. You can find him down in the docks. And you didn't hear this from me." (Area 13)
- 16 "If it really was a shifter that broke the orc out of prison, then you should talk to Parody. She's one of Alzahra Nedali's girls at the Beautiful Tigress. I bet she knows the identity of the one who broke the orc out." (Area 4)
- 17 "If the Khan had an interest in this matter, he would send one of the Granite Nine to track the orc. Hard to know if this is true or not since their identities are all kept a secret, but someone who would know is Fayaz Salem. He's a historian that works at the Maktaba." (Area 19)
- 18 "When it comes to evil, the eight blind seers at the Temple of Yrena can find what you're looking for. Fair warning, however—their divinations comes with a steep price." (Area 8)
- 19 "The sewage system of Castlegrasp leads to the harbor and the harbor is heavily guarded, so it's doubtful he got out that way. But if he was truly daring, he may have entered the March of Stonearms and escaped through one of the old tunnels there." (Area 12)
- 20 "Am I the only one who thinks he flew away? It's how he got into the city and kidnapped that girl in the first place. Who's to say he didn't do that again?"

For each hour spent talking to people in the city, a character can make a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check. If they choose Persuasion, they can add a +1 bonus to the check for every 1 gp that they spend (to a maximum bonus of +5). Characters with the criminal background make this check with advantage. If the check succeeds, roll a d20 and consult the Mega Clues table to determine what the character learns. It's possible that the characters can learn the same rumors more than once. Some of the clues direct characters to locations in and around the city. Refer to the area mentioned in the Important Locations section for what happens when the characters follow up on the clues.

## IMPORTANT LOCATIONS

The City of Granite is a thriving metropolis with hundreds of homes, shops, and places of interest. Below are some of the popular destinations found in Castlegrasp, keyed to the map of Castlegrasp on [pagenumber].

### 1 - THE VIOLET QASR

The Violet Qasr is the royal palace of Khan Hayyan Harrak XI (N male Ditimayan human **noble**). Off-limits to outsiders and guarded by the Stonearms' most elite fighting force, the Granite Nine (all LN Ditimayan human **knights**), there are whispers of great treasures hidden within the Khan's palace. It is rumored that hundreds of feet below the palace, Uve the Harrow's ring is locked in a vault of permanent ice and protected by dao Gasta-Harrak's greatest warriors.

The Khan often makes public appearances from the front of the Qasr upon the great, circular Dais of Khans where he takes answers directly from the people of Castlegrasp in a townhall format. It's the Khan's openness and frank manner of speaking that's earned him the nickname Fair Eleven.

### 2 - ORCHARD PARK

The Violet Qasr overlooks a two-acre olive orchard at the center of the city. In addition to the olive trees which give the park its name, the park has many open fields for recreation and lounging, as well as a large, cold-water pond named Uve's Ire.

Statues of nine of the ten previous Khans are carved to look as if they are hiding among the park's trees. The only Khan whose statue is missing is Khan Hayyan Harrak III, also known as Forgotten Three. His statue is found two miles outside of the city at the edge of the Desolation, half-buried by the sand.

### 3 - THE VAGUE OLIVE INN

Also known as the Inn of Many Bridges, the Vague Olive is an inn, restaurant, tavern, market, and, of course, a popular gateway into the Orchard Park. The inn itself consists of eight separate buildings, all painted different shades of blue and violet each connected by ornate, crisscrossing bridges illuminated by willow-lights.

During the Autumnal Equinox (commonly referred to as Ditimayan New Year), the Olive celebrates with its popular Festival of Blue, where the citizens of Castlegrasp don blue masks and robes to celebrate the cooling of the Desolation and the return of the Weysevain wet season.

The Vague Olive is owned by Kashgar Rapos (N male **krig**). Having lived in the city almost since its inception, Kashgar is one of Castlegrasp's wealthiest and most influential citizens. The eight-eyed noble has a close relationship with the

current Khan, as well as five of the khans before him. After all, it's no coincidence that his mighty tavern sits at the edge of the Olive Park with a clear view of the Violet Qsar.

### 4 - THE BEAUTIFUL TIGRESS

If there is one thing that all Castlegraspian nobles love to do, it's outdoing one another. Seeing the elaborate design of Kashgar Rapos' Vague Olive, Alzahra Nedali (LN female Ditimayan human **noble**) went the other direction with her inn. The tallest building in Castlegrasp, the Beautiful Tigress is less an inn than it is a tower with many bedrooms. And the further one climbs the Tigress, the higher the room fee.

Supposedly, the suite at the very top costs a tenant as much as 2,000 gp per night. But it comes with many "perks."

Despite displaying a public persona of a bitter and uptight wine heiress, Nedali is actually one of the most beloved people in all of Castlegrasp. On more than one occasion, the citizenry of Castlegrasp have suggested that were the city to elect its next Khan, Nedali should be next in line. Seeing as how Fair Eleven has no heir—male or female—it just might happen.

*Tracking Mega.* If the characters heard a rumor that Parody might know something about the Shifters, they can find her here. Parody is a **doppelganger** who provides escort services for the Tigress. She's already been visited three times by bounty hunters and she's tired of telling everyone the same thing: "I don't know anything and it's racist to think that all shifters know each other."

### 5 - ARMED LAVENDER INN

Not all of Castlegrasp's inns are works of art or demonstrations of power and wealth. The Armed Lavender inn, a box-of-a-building pressed close to the city's outer walls, is a warehouse-sized fest hall that caters to Castlegraspians of all stripes. Its proprietor/bartender/entertainer, Rolf Anderberg of Jovelnot (NG male Knotsider human **scout**) delivers his northerner attitude and charm night after night. No one's ever seen Anderberg sleep. So, a frequent joke heard in the Armed Lavender is that Anderberg is secretly a Dinzer construct disguised as a northerner. "Splash a little water on him, and he'll likely rust."

Of course, the Armed Lavender comes with plenty of controversies. Its lack of security makes it one of the Crystal Toad's favorite places to do business.

### 6 - THE AMAZING CLOCK

Truly a sight to behold, the Amazing Clock is just that—a gargantuan clock. Fashioned by a silent mage named Oxon nearly 500 years ago and gifted to Castlegrasp shortly after its founding, this eight-handed clock does more than just tell time. It can predict phases of the moon, eclipses, and even seasonal weather patterns. But its greatest function is its ability to predict catastrophic events.

Whenever the clock's eight hands align as one, catastrophe follows. So far, the clock's hands have aligned themselves seven times in the last 500 years. Each ominous alignment was given a name: the Hand of the One, the Hand of the Two, and so forth. Because the alignments rely on the clock's unpredictable eighth hand for its forecasts, no one knows when the next alignment, the Hand of the Eight, will occur. And since this alignment will be eight on eight, many think it will be the clock's final alignment which will signal the end of the world. Hence the popular middle-Omerian expression

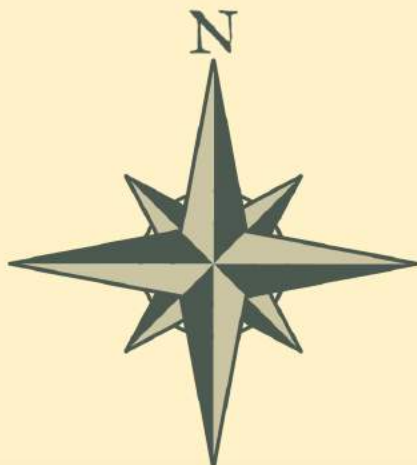


Bay of Suen

Vineyards

Sunflower Fields

Castlegrasp





and toast, "Until the Hand of the Eight" (in essence, "seize the day.")

At all times, the Amazing Clock is protected by the final Dinzer Gear Golem, Constant. Not that anyone could harm the clock if they tried, mind you; Oxon's enchantments are unbreakable. Still, Constant stands guard as a reminder of the Castlegraspian-Dinzer alliance that has kept central and southern Omeria united for over a century.

## 7 - THE MAGIC DART

Looking for magic items? Look no further than the Magic Dart. Outside, the Magic Dart looks like an ordinary shop. Other than a simple wooden sign with its name painted in blue and purple, there's nothing special about it. Step inside, however, and right away you'll notice that the Dart is impossibly deep. The first thirty feet or so of the Dart is where most of the typical common and uncommon magic items one expects to be sold in a magic shop can be found. But the further you walk towards the back of the shop—of which you will never find the end—the stranger and more unusual the offerings become. Because of its neverending nature, a tradition known as "Running the Gauntlet of Dreams" has attracted adventurers and arcane scholars far and wide. To run the gauntlet, a visitor to the shop must see how far back into the shop they can travel before they wish to return. A gauntlet-runner can walk for miles into the rear of the shop without ever finding the end. Most turn back in fear of the dangers that hide deep within the bowels of the Dart. Fortunately, the moment someone

turns back, they discover themselves within the front of the shop once again as if they had traveled no further than a few feet.

The shop has only one known employee, Gudner. Gudner sits behind the counter at the front of the shop reading tomes day and night, pausing only to collect gold from customers for their purchase. Even those who've Run the Gauntlet and returned with legendary items have received little more than a "thank you, come again" from the tired-looking old man.

## 8 - TEMPLE OF YRENA

One would think that Castlegrasp's position on the border of the Obsidian Plain would make its citizenry shy away from the worship of Yrena, Goddess of Destruction, but quite the contrary. Having seen the effects of her wrath, Castlegraspians hold great respect for Yrena.

Yrena's temple is a circular building with a large circular courtyard at its center. A statue of the ram-headed goddess towers at the center of the courtyard, standing over the broken body of her lover, Zealdir, also a statue.

The temple is cared for by eight blind seers, Yrena's Witnesses (LE male Ditimayan human **mag**es). In addition to their eyesight, the Witnesses have given up their names and personalities, each referring to himself as 'One-of-Eight.' Although murder is illegal in Castlegrasp, Khan, despite being a skeptic, allows for the Temple of Yrena to make the eight sacrifices required by the Witnesses' tenets. In recent years, a movement calling for the end of the tradition has gained strength.

**Tracking Mega.** As the characters may have heard, the seers do have methods in which they can find Mega, but it comes with a very high price. One of the city's nobles, Tara Mounir (NG female Ditimayan human **noble**) is responsible for the movement to end the temple's practice of sacrifices. The seers argue that their sacrifices are the only thing that keeps the Hand of the Eight from happening. In three days, Mounir is meeting with Khan to discuss the situation. Popular opinion suggests that Mounir will succeed in having the law changed. If the characters can stop Mounir and offer evidence that it was they who did it, the seers will perform a scrying ritual to discover the current location of Mega. The group actually possesses a strand of hair recovered from the city dungeon they can use to pinpoint his location. The result of the ritual is similar to a *scrying* spell with a +8 bonus to the spell save DC.

## 9 - SHRINE OF NAEYER

"At Naeyer's feet!" is the worst curse a central Omerian can throw at his or her enemy. Naeyer, the Sun God, is feared more than both Yrena and Suen combined. Only by the care and wisdom of the Children—the water sprites—are central Omerians protected by Naeyer's cruel hand.

As the god of fire and ifrits, Naeyer is identified by most central Omerians as an evil god. Those who worship him are called the Cracked, as their faces are often a blistered mess of damaged, bleeding skin. Despite the presence of the shrine, none of the Cracked are allowed in the city. The small, ramshackle shrine only exists to appease the cruel, chaotic god.

When the first rains fall on Castlegrasp following the Autumnal Equinox, Castlegraspians travel to the shrine to mock and shame the god, believing that once again the Children have once more protected them from Naeyer's wrath.

## 10 - TEMPLE OF SUEN

Suen is the goddess of storms and worshiped primarily by sailors, fishermen, and others who work in or around the sea. Seen as neither god nor bad, the neutral goddess Suen can bring destruction just as quickly as she can bring great fortune.

The Temple of Suen in Castlegrasp is more than just a place of worship. It's also a popular tavern overlooking the Omerian Ocean and Bay of Suen. The high priest of the temple/tavern Barsumlin Coinminer (LG male Von Doral dwarf **priest**) serves drinks and issues prayers. Half the time he's drunk on his own supply, though, and passed out on the floor of the temple.

Ten years ago, the worshippers of Suen tried to erect a statue dedicated to the goddess in the harbor. Unfortunately, a southerner fishing boat accidentally bumped into the statue, knocking it onto its side. Later that year, that same boat was capsized by a colossal wave.

**Tracking Mega.** Isoniana Folli (NG female gnome **commoner**) has been getting plenty drunk since her arrest. When the characters find her at the Temple of Suen, she's singing old shanties with Coinminer. Isoniana doesn't know anything about the orc's escape. She's just frustrated that her ship is still in lock-up. With drunken giggles she'll ask if the characters can loan her 500 gp to get her ship out of impound.

## 11 - GRYTIAS' FALL

Fifteen years ago, five ivory dragons fought on behalf of the northern armies during the Attack of Regrets. Four of the dragons were killed south of the Obsidian Plain by Dinzer warblimps. But the fifth, a one-eyed grump named Grytias, turned his attention to Castlegrasp. Dozens of Castlegraspians Stonearms fell to the beast's breath during the battle. Finally, a knight named Thawab El Khouri saddled a griffon and flew directly towards the beast. Grytias' caught El Khouri's mount in its jaws, but El Khouri was able to dodge its teeth and cling onto the dragon's dewlap. El Khouri stabbed Grytias through the neck with his spear, and in seconds, the dragon turned to stone and crashed into the city's Lower Ward. Sadly, El Khouri perished in the fall, too. The petrified corpse of the ivory dragon remains hunched over the city's southern wall. During the Day of Spoken Regrets in the summer, El Khouri's widow, Zayna, embraces visitors who come to pay their respects to the fallen hero.

## 12 - THE MARCH OF STONEARMS

Castlegrasp was founded upon a granite quarry two hundred years ago. Today, the granite stones pulled from the quarry make up much of the city's walls, buildings, and even the Violet Qsar. But the granite did not come free. Soon after the mine was opened, the earlier Castlegraspians discovered that the terrain was inhabited by earth elementals. The elementals' queen, a might dao named Gasta the Pure, confronted the Castlegraspians, questioning their presence in Central Omeria. The city's founder, Khan Hayyan Harrak I, met privately with the dao. In a move thought unusual by many of his peers, Harrak surrendered his soul to the dao in exchange for access to the granite. Initially surprised by Harrak's offer, Gasta the Pure agreed to the exchange. Not only could the Castlegraspians mine the granite from her kingdom, but she would enchant the stone as well. Thanks to Gasta's magic, no man-made weapon would ever penetrate Castlegrasp's mighty granite walls. In addition, Gasta blessed the first nine Castlegraspians soldiers with her touch; she turned the soldiers' right arms to solid stone. But much to their surprise, they could still move these stone arms as normal. In addition, any bladed weapon they held with their stone arms would petrify any enemy it pierced.

Years later, as the Khan grew ill, he tasked the Nine to bring him before Gasta. As promised, he surrendered himself to the dao. Gasta, cherishing her long, peaceful relationship with the Khan, placed his soul within a sky diamond. She then set the diamond next to her heart, forever keeping him close. Their souls merged and the king and the genie queen became one.

When a Castlegraspians soldier proves his or herself during training, demonstrating immeasurable virtue, they are encouraged to take the March of the Stonearms. The soldier must enter the first mine and seek the dao Gasta-Harrak. From there, he or she must kneel before the dao and offer his or herself to the dao just as the first Khan did two-hundred years prior. If Gasta-Harrak detects the spirit of the Khan within the soldier, they are granted her blessing—an arm of stone. However, if she senses any impurity within the soldier's heart, she commands the earth to devour them.

**Tracking Mega.** More than a few Castlegraspians theorize that Mega and his associate escaped through the tunnels within the March. Trouble is, the March is guarded at all times by two Stonearm guards who allow no one to enter. They would have noticed if anyone tried to enter without permission from the Khan himself. Furthermore, the tunnels are incredibly dangerous, filled with territorial elementals and ravenous xorn. It's ultimately a dead end.

### 13 - DOCKS

The epicenter of commerce in Castlegrasp, the docks are alive with the sounds of fisherman shanties, laughing children, gulls, and the crashing of the Omerian's mighty waves. Easily one of the safest harbors in all of central Omeria—if not all of Omeria—Castlegrasp's docks are protected by the undefeated Omerian Navy. Its twenty-four warships have earned the nickname, the Azure Curse. They're fast, tough, and heavily armed, capable of sinking armadas twice their size.

The docks are also the center of operations for the Crystal Toad, where their three merchandise runners smuggle illegal products into the city. Stavros Nanakos (NE male Knotsider human **spy**) oversees the operations on behalf of his father, Daevid. Stavros has seen the inside of Castleburg's Dungeons on more than one occasion. Fortunately for the young noble, his father is an important player in local politics. Still, Captain Allah is determined to see young Nanakos entered into the Yard of Deterrents.

**Tracking Mega.** Stavros Nanakos has earned quite a bit of coin from Mega's escape, mostly from bounty hunters that have heard rumors that he can smuggle people out of town. His reaction is the same each time. First, he acts like he doesn't know what the bounty hunter is talking about—he does this in front of guards so he doesn't get roughed up by the bounty hunters. Then, once the bounty hunter leaves, he tracks down the bounty hunter in the city. "Listen," he says each time, "I didn't want to say too much because there were too many people listening at the time. But I'm not the one who got him out. But I might know who did." Of course, that

information comes with a price: 50 gp. Once paid, he points the bounty hunter in the direction of Light Beyond the Hills in the Low Ward (Area 16). Stavros has no idea whether or not Light was involved but dislikes Light, so he has no issue sending hotheaded bounty hunters the devilkin crimelord's way.

### 14 - DEK BAZAAR

In Castlegrasp, a mercantile lifestyle is more than just a way to earn a living; it's a competitive sport of sorts. Seven mercantile houses call Castlegrasp their home. And while the seven are fierce competitors, they also respect and admire one another.

Each day when Naeyer's eye banishes the twin moons, the seven houses play what they call "The Big Game." Once the shops open in Dek Bazaar, it's a race to 7,777 gold coins. As the day progresses, the vendors shout their numbers so the housemasters can hear. The housemasters then mark their earnings in chalk on a large column of slate at the center of the bazaar. Once a house reaches 7,777 coins—typically in the early afternoon—the gamekeeper rings the bell, double-checks the numbers, and announces the winner. While all seven of the houses have shared one or more turns as The Big Game's winner, by far, House Ibn Al-Hasan has claimed the most victories. Ibn Al-Hasan trades in wine.

**Tracking Mega.** The Bazaar is a fascinating place filled with the most diverse collection of Castlegraspians and Central Omerians. While the characters are in the bizarre, read the following:

The energy in the bazaar is mesmerizing. Everywhere you look, transactions are made, jokes are told, children play, vendors argue—this is no doubt the heart of the city. But you notice something unusual, too. About ten feet from you, a blackbird sits on the roof of one of the stalls. While your eyes may be playing tricks on you, it seems like the bird's eyes are glowing red. After a moment, the bird takes off, flying to the east.



The moment the characters got involved with the bounty on Mega, the Black Bird tasked one of his birds to keep a close eye on them. At this point in the adventure, the Black Bird is hundreds of miles away from the city, hunting Mega.

## 15 - SWEET OLIVE WARD

The majority of the city's nobles live in Sweet Olive Ward, north of the Violet Qsar. The ward itself was built into a rocky hill from which a cold-water spring gushed. Afraid to spoil the path of the water, Sweet Olive's streets and homes were built around the natural flow. The waters terminate in a waterfall that fills a large well at the southwestern side of the ward. Then, the well's underground streams then flow out to the Bay of Suen and eventually join the waters of the Omerian.

The streets of Sweet Olive Ward are lush with greenery. Sleepy willows, plum trees, and of course, venerable olive trees flank the narrow streets of the ward. Although one of the shadiest areas in the city, it also has the largest security presence. In addition to the usual assignment of Stonearms and city militia, Sweet Olive has its own volunteer defense force called the Blueguard. While most of these young noblemen and women are thought of as "weekend warriors" by Castlegrasp's professional defenses, they have pledged their lives to the protection of the Granite City. During the Attack of Regrets, they joined the Stonearms on the front lines. Seven Blueguard boys died fighting for the City of Granite. The Blueguard's leader is a retired Stonearm named Safura El Khouri (LG female Ditimayan human **knight**). Her brother was the great dragonslayer, Thawad.

## 16 - THE LOW WARD

The newest section of the still-growing Castlegrasp exists just beyond its southern gates. Many of the locals have dubbed the low ward "the Oven" as it catches the heat waves rushing up from the Obsidian Plain to the far south. As such, it's home to the city's growing devilkin population. Still untrusted by many Castlegraspians, the devilkin (called "tieflings" by northerners) have eked out a comfortable existence in the City of Granite. Despite the constant racism most Castlegraspian devilkin face each day, they are loyal to their home. Recently, the Low Ward celebrated the induction of the Stonearms' first devilkin, Ember in the Dark (LG male devilkin knight).

Unfortunately, Low Warders are frequently exploited by a despicable devilkin crimelord named Light Beyond the Hill (LE male devilkin bandit captain). Light, who masquerades as a simple baker, extorts and torments his brethren. When Light is crossed, he doesn't go after the one whom he felt wronged him. Instead, he removes the heads of one of his enemy's family members and leaves it for his enemy to find.

Ember has tried, repeatedly, to bring Light to justice. Unfortunately, he is alone in his war against Light and his gang.

**Tracking Mega.** Stavros Nakanos (see Area 13) keeps sending bounty hunters to question Light Beyond the Hill as to the whereabouts of Mega. Just this morning, a dwarf bounty hunter attacked Light in broad daylight. Light escaped, but two of his men were injured in the attack. Since the incident, Light has locked himself in his home in the Low Ward. However, anyone that starts questioning where Light is located in the Low Ward will draw the attention of four tiefling thugs. The thugs are not kind to curious adventurers. Light was not involved in Mega's escape.

## 17 - TIGER BOROUGH

There is a legend that Khan Hayyan Harrak IV once went for a walk in the lands south of Castlegrasp unarmed and without his guard. Three miles from the city, the Khan heard a low growl from behind a group of boulders a few feet in front of him—a hungry tiger. Khan turned and ran. Alone and without a weapon, he knew he was likely doomed. In desperation, he climbed a tall boulder. The Khan could not escape from the boulder and the tiger could not reach him, no matter how hard it tried.

The day turned to night and the desert grew cold. Eventually, the tiger grew tired and laid its head down.

"Man," spoke the tiger in perfect Omerian Common. "Why do you stay on top of that boulder? I wish to catch you so I may feed you to my children."

"Tiger," the Khan answered back, "I am the king of a great city and I must return to my people and ensure their prosperity. If you eat me, I cannot do this."

The Khan and the tiger knew they were at an impasse. They remained silent for a short time after that. Eventually, Naeyer's eye reappeared in the sky. The tiger, even hungrier than before, sighed, "If you remain on that boulder and I remain here, then surely both of us will die. Then my children will die. And your people will not know prosperity."

"Yes, that is correct, tiger."

"Then we must make a deal. Allow me to bite off one of your legs and feed it to my children. I will then let you ride on my back to your city."

The Khan considered the tiger's proposal. Finally, he nodded, "Very well. You may bite off my right leg. After all, I have two. Am I so greedy as to desire both?"

Slowly, the Khan lowered himself from the rock and approached the tiger. As they agreed, the tiger bit off the Khan's right leg and brought it to its children. Once its children were fed, it picked up the Khan and placed him upon its back. Then, the tiger raced the Khan back to Castlegrasp.

The Stonearms raised their spears at the sight of the tiger and the wounded Khan. But the Khan protested, "No. The tiger and I made a deal. I upheld my end of the bargain and the tiger has upheld its. It is free to go."

The tiger thanked the Khan for his sacrifice and returned to the desert and the Khan returned to the Violet Qsar. From that moment on, the Khan was given the nickname Tiger Four. Following the incident, Tiger Four led Castlegrasp to an era of great prosperity. He also passed an important law: "No tigers shall be killed within three miles of the city. They are our friends."

The Tiger Borough at the heart of Castlegrasp takes its name from this legend. Residents of the ward pay their respects to the legend of the Khan and the Tiger by leaving food at the doorsteps for wild tigers who enter the city. When tigers do enter the city, they do not attack, lending credence to the tale. Quietly, the tigers walk to the borough, eat the offerings, and exit the city as Castlegraspians watch in awe.

## 18 - BARRACKS AND CITY DUNGEON

When the laws are broken in Castlegrasp, criminals are placed in the city's dungeon below the militia's barracks. The leader of the militia, Captain Farida Allah (LG female Ditimayan human **veteran**) personally oversees every arrest and incarceration.

All criminals are given a fair trial by a jury of four representatives and the Khan. Those who are found guilty by the jury, are all given the same punishment: petrification and temporary residence in the Yard of Deterrents.

The Yard of Deterrents is a large courtyard filled with the petrified statues of the city's convicts. Convicts sit on one of the yard's stone benches. Then, one of the Stonearms touches their spear to the convict's spine and, within seconds, the convict turns to stone. The statue must remain in its petrified state until the criminal has served its time, typically a year, but sometimes longer depending on the severity of the crime for which they were charged. Once the time is served, the family of the convict can pay to have he or she returned to flesh. However, if no one claims the body within a year, the stone body of the convict is placed on a cart and delivered to the Petrified Labyrinth where it continues its mission as a deterrent—this time to the armies of the north.

**Tracking Mega.** If the guards and caretakers at the Yard are asked about the blackbirds that appeared the day after Mega escaped, they all vividly recall the event. Literally, hundreds of blackbirds touched down in the courtyard and remained for 10 minutes before flying away towards the east. What made it so unusual was that blackbirds aren't common this far south of the Spine. Supposedly, the blackbirds were later seen at a vineyard east of the city (see Area 21).

## 19 - THE MAKTABA

The outside of this long, narrow building betrays the awe and wonder within. Once one passes through the tall, arched doors of Castlegrasp's main library and scroll vault, their breath is quickly ushered from their lungs. Arranged almost like a honeycomb, the Maktaba is home to thousands of scrolls, texts, and books, some of which predate even the Desolation itself.

The Maktaba is not a public building. To gain access, one must apply for one of the 1,000 available memberships, then go through rigorous background checks and tests of intelligence. Once accepted, one must pay an annual fee of 1,000 gold pieces. Even then, the Maktaba's rules are very particular.

Fortunately, the Maktaba's scholars are willing to perform research on behalf of those with the right amount of gold to spend. The price is steep, of course. Hiring one of the Maktaba's scholars costs 2 gp per day (for a minimum of 10 days), and often, research can take as long as a year. "We are neither cheap nor fast. What we are is thorough," the scholars fond of saying.

**Tracking Mega.** The official historian of Castlegrasp, Fayaaz Salem (LN male Ditimayan human **mage**), works at the Maktaba. If one of the Granite Nine are tracking the orc, he will know the answer. Of course, like the other scholars employed by the Maktaba, he will not answer a question for less than 20 gold pieces.

Once his fee is paid, he answers immediately: it's not one of the Granite Nine, but Ember in the Dark, the newest member of the Stonearms. He left the day after the orc escaped, heading north along the Leash. He traveled light and alone.

## 20 - THE SUNRISE GATE

The eastern gate has multiple nicknames: The Noble Gate, The Purple-Foot Gate, Third's Path, Naeyer's Curse, Little

Naqqad, and, its true name, The Sunrise Gate. Situated east of Sweet Olive Ward, it's one of the most popular gates in the city as it offers Castlegrasp's sister villages, wineries, and desert borne merchants the most direct path in and out of the city.

The nobles of Sweet Olive Ward lobby to keep the gate's exterior free of merchants and homes. Regardless, Naqqadi refugees congregate around the gate, using it as their favorite camping spot. Because it faces the direction Naeyer's eye rises each morning, anyone who stands near the gate can hear Naqqadi prayers at sunrise.

Jaul Serhane (LG male Ditimayan **knight**) is the Stonearm captain of the Sunrise Gate and easily one of the most beloved templars in the city. Jaul doesn't look like a typical Stonearm. He's overweight, balding, and loud. But his heart is as large as the Violet Qsar and his passion is deeper than the Omerian. During the festivals, he loves to dress up as The Tiger and chase the children who dress as the Tiger Khan. He's also a unrequited flirt, and loves to hand all of the women who pass through his gate lilacs.

**Tracking Mega.** The characters may have discovered that the Sunrise Gate was open during the lockdown. Also, it's possible they heard two halfling bounty hunters left through the gate a few days ago. Interviewing Jaul and the guards who work the gate (usually 10 guards at any given time) does not turn up too many leads. Captain Jaul is very forthcoming about any mistakes he makes, and this isn't one of them.

The Naqqadi refugees who gather around the gate similarly have not witnessed anything unusual, although a few do recall the halflings heading up the road, east towards the vineyards.

## 21 - ATTIQ EL AOUFI'S WINERY

"Purple Foot" Attiq El Aoufi (N male Ditimayan human **veteran**) is the wealthiest independent winemaker in Castlegrasp. His vineyard, El Aoufi Msanie Alkhmr, is the best selling Central Omerian wine on the continent. While some of his competitors—especially Ibn Al-Hasan—refer to his wine as "cheap dog wine", El Aoufi's is truly a wine of the people, a bottle of Sweet Fruit Red available for as little as 2 gp at most wine-sellers along the Weysevain. El Aoufi's winery covers nearly 20,000 acres of the verdant belt that borders the Desolation.

El Aoufi enjoys walking around his property, examining the grapes and making conversation with the devilkin pickers. A victim of racism himself in his youth due to his mother's Naqqadi heritage, El Aoufi understands the plight of the Castlegraspian Low Warders.

**Tracking Mega.** The first place that Mega stopped after escaping the dungeon was the vineyard of Attiq El Aoufi. With his *hat of disguise*, Mega took on the appearance of a devilkin calling himself Wave over the Mountain. Mega's doppelganger companion arranged a meeting between Mega and one of the devilkin servants working the vineyard, Tale of the Dragon. The doppelganger remained in the city. Mega acted as Tale's cousin, traveling north from Southern Omeria. As not to draw suspicion to his sudden arrival, Mega remained with Tale and his family for two days. The plan was for Mega to stay with Tale's family for a month until the excitement died down and the bounty hunters were off his trail, then head northeast to Qola. Unfortunately, his plans changed when a flock of hundreds of blackbirds assaulted

Tale's home. Tale, his wife, and one of his children were killed in the attack as Mega escaped. The only survivor was Tale's daughter, Tears in the Rain who has been living with El Asoufi since the strange encounter.

Following the bizarre attack, two halfling bounty hunters named Odeos and Ahmeego (see the section on Bounty Hunters) showed up at the site of the murders suspecting that the attack may have something to do with Mega's escape. The pair also spoke with the guards at the dungeon about the blackbird swarm that appeared there.

**Tale of the Dragon's Home.** The home of Tale of the Dragon is two miles north of the vineyard. The small home, no larger than a room with a connected outhouse and pen for chickens, is in tatters when the characters arrive. The home's windows are smashed open, the door has been pulled from its hinges (and tossed some 30 feet away into the grapevines), and there is blood and bird feces everywhere. The dead bodies of blackbirds also litter the home inside and out. A DC 10 Wisdom (Animal Handling) check reveals that many of the birds died by smashing their bodies against the walls, windows, and doors of Tale's home.

The characters can spend as much time as they like investigating the home and its surroundings. For each hour that the spend searching, have one of the members of the party make a DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check. If the check is successful, they find something stashed in the grapevines: a *hat of disguise*. Mega lost the hat while he was running from the birds.

Without a *hat of disguise*, it would be difficult for Mega to travel along major highways and through large population centers without being noticed.

Speaking with the Staff. Just as the characters can spend time investigating Tale of the Dragon's home, they can talk to the other servants on El Asoufi's property. You can roleplay each individual interaction with the wine pickers, or for each hour that the characters spend speaking with the wine pickers, have one of the members of the party make a DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion or Intimidation) check. If the check is successful, one of the devilkin servants, Grass Between Your Toes recalls that she saw a man running over a hill headed directly north. Shortly after he ran away, hundreds of blackbirds flew overhead in the same direction. When she heard about the blackbirds that destroyed Tale's home, she knew there was a connection, but was too afraid to share it with the other bounty hunters.

**Talking to Tears in the Rain.** The only survivor of the massacre at Tale of the Dragon's home was his 8-year old daughter, Tears in the Rain. Tears was adopted by El Asoufi's daughter, Minhat, and now lives in the estate. Since the event, she has said little. El Asoufi has prevented anyone from speaking to her, excluding the Stonearm, Ember in the Dark who visited two days previous. A character with the noble or folk hero background might be able to convince the El Asoufis to give them access to Tears, but they must pass a DC 17 Wisdom (Persuasion) check in order to do so. Outside of enchantments, there are no other ways to gain access to the girl outside of direct violence. El Asoufi is a capable fighter, and at any time, there are 1d6 + 1 thugs (mostly tiefling) who will come to El Asoufi's aid. El Asoufi only wishes to protect the girl, and believes that all of these lines of questions will only harm her further.

## WHO IS THE DOPPELGANGER?

The doppelganger's name and modus operandi are intentionally left undetailed. This allows you to make them any character that would be appropriate, especially if the characters interact with the doppelganger at some point, and aren't even aware that they are speaking to a doppelganger. Good options for the doppelganger's secret identity include Nadia Mansouri (if the Faux-Nadia survived Chapter 2), one of the guards at the Sunrise Gate, or Stavros Nakanos. The doppelgangers of Omeria often have simple, ironic names, that play into their nature such as Lookalike, Mimic, Parody, or Vista.

While Tears doesn't remember much about the traumatic event, she does remember that Mega (as Wave) could sense something was wrong before it happened. "He just stood up from dinner and ran out the door. Then they came." She also says she remembers seeing a figure in all black standing watching from far away. "His eyes glowed red and he had a big spear that also glowed red and he stood in a tree with giant birds and watched me."

## AREA 22 - SABBAG FARM, THE FARM OF THE PENITENT

Once the daughter of a wealthy trader, Amina Bouzfour (NG female Ditimayan human **bandit**) committed murder seventeen years ago. She was found guilty by Khan Hayyan Harrak IX and sentenced to four years in the Yard of Deterrents. Sadly, once her sentence was up, Amina's family had left the city. There was no one to claim her. Just as she was being loaded onto the statue cart, an aging sunflower farmer named Mutha Sabbag paid her stone-to-flesh fee and gave the young girl a job on her farm. Mutha died two years later and left the farm to Amina. Paying Mutha's kindness forward, Amina spent the last eleven years managing Sabbag's sunflower farm. Using the funds from her crop sales, she purchases expired statues from the Yard of Deterrents, and like Sabbag, gives the restored ex-convicts jobs working the fields.

Bouzfour is extremely intelligent and heavily involved in Castlegraspian politics. She was one of the leaders who pressed for the introduction of a jury to try criminals versus the sole decision being left to the Khan. And while she believes that the current Khan is a fair man as his name implies, she feels that the Eleventh Khan should be Castlegrasp's last and that the city should turn to democracy as many of the northern kingdoms have.

**Tracking Mega.** One of the freed prisoners on Amina's farm, a **krig** named Ilyn Kozer, just started working at Sabbag's three weeks ago. He served a five-year sentence for burglary and escaping custody. Many of the underworld's criminals have since given Kozer the—somewhat unoriginal—nickname The Spider. Not so much for his krig nature, but his status as one of the only people ever to escape the Castlegrasp dungeon. Since Mega's escaped, he's been contacted by a few bounty hunters who consult the man-spider for methods of escape. While Kozer's method of

escape was different than Mega's—and he won't share it to anyone—he did not anticipate the heightened security during the proceeding lockdown. As a krig, he was too easy to find with divination spells, especially since he lacked a magical way to disguise himself. He suspects that Mega used enchantments to make himself look different. Furthermore, he's probably stayed indoors and away from landmarks, knowing that if scrying sensors focus on him they may be able to determine his location by looking around the setting.

### 23 - MANSOURI ESTATE

Baariq Mansouri lives in the Sweet Olive Ward with his third wife Aalia and his three daughters, Nadia, Rashida, and Lina. Mansouri is one of Castlegrasp's most important nobles and politicians. He sits on the jury as a representative for Castlegraspian commerce and has a close, personal relationship with the Khan. Politically and economically conservative, many of Mansouri's campaigns within the city have made him a target for progressives. Although

Mansouri hopes for the continued tradition of Khans and authoritarian rule in the city, he does believe that Fair Eleven should introduce a senate or committee of representatives to "unburden" the Khan with many of the day-to-day decisions. Naturally, he proposes that he should be a member of such a board were it to be formed.

**Tracking Mega.** Of course, Baariq is the one who placed the bounty on Mega's head. As a member of the city's jury, he would have undoubtedly sentenced the orc to a long tenure on a bench in the Yard of Deterrents. Now that Mega has escaped, he only wants death for the orc and has shared his thoughts openly with many.

If Nadia is secretly Mega's doppelganger associate (either in this new adventure or as a carryover from the last), then obviously, she will know Mega's whereabouts. Of course, the doppelganger is extremely good at playing the role of Nadia

Mansouri, and nothing short of magic will cause it to reveal its presence. While Castlegrasp is nowhere near the magical utopia that a place like Oxonburg is, it does have its fair share of mages and creatures who possess truesight. All it takes is one person to notice her true nature.

If the characters discover Nadia's true nature, the doppelganger will trade the information it has on Mega for its own freedom. The doppelganger explains how the entire escape went down (as detailed in the Background section above) as well as the steps they took following the escape and the arrangement with Tale of the Dragon to the east of the city. After Mega connected with Tale, that was the last it saw of Mega. It does know that Mega is headed to the far north, beyond the Spine, to find his brother Gradba. Gradba is rumored to live somewhere on the Qerno Peninsula.

