

The Gilded Trap - 440SuGiTr

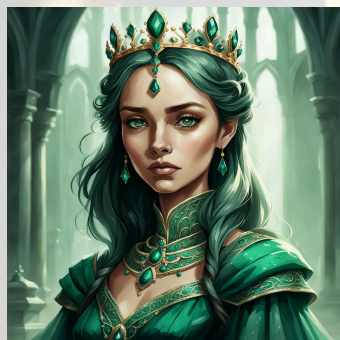
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Queen Maribeth has always been beloved by her people and its not just the way that she rules the kingdom or her beauty but by how she supports them out of the kingdom's coffers. She never asks for taxes or tithes but instead uses what she receives from other kingdoms, nobles and well wishers on her birthday to fund the coffers for the next year.

However, not everyone thinks well of the queen and her methods in funding the kingdom. With her life in peril and the party hired to protect her will they rise to the occasion and protect a beloved monarch or will they fail and be held accountable for more than just failing a job, but failing a kingdom.

DM: (A unhappy vassal disguised a magic extra-dimensional space as a regular bag so that when it's placed within the queen's donation chest, a yearly charity event, it rips her into another plane of existence (the astral plane).)

The party had been included as the increased security for the queens charity ball. This ball coincided with her birthday where she accepted donations of any kind to fund her charitable work for the kingdom's people for the next year. The royal guard, knowing of an attempt on Queen



Maribeth's life was likely, had hired reputable adventurers as additional security and urged the queen to reconsider the event. But she insisted on holding the usual festivities.

Despite the guard and party's vigilance, disaster struck when a noble, Sir Roderick's gift, a bag made from

Lamia hair, triggered an explosive magical rift. The force pulled the Queen, her guards, and the chest of gifts into another swirling vortex. As chaos erupted and suspects were detained, the party faced the grim reality of their failure. Without knowing the exact location in the astral plane where she was taken, the Queen might never return, and their reputation as her protectors was irrevocably tarnished.

DM: (Sir Roderick is innocent and explains when questioned that a vassal of his had given him the bag, Refer to **440MoQuPa**. Failure for this could limit the party's ability to get work in the future which, goes without saying, is not good.)

The guard and royal wizards determine very quickly the origin of the item and that Roderick is not guilty. Roderick insists on assisting the party in rescuing the queen but an old war wound doubles him over in agony. He insists he can help in other ways though as he moves towards the royal library.

The party joined Roderick in the Library as the other nobles, wizards and guards all recalled the times that he had taken his duties as general so seriously that he had stormed the astral plane in the name of the kingdom.

The party finds the old warrior pawing through books on the astral plane until he notices the party at which he beacons them over.

'Have you ever been to the Astral plane? The old texts mention that there is a way to return by a divination ritual that will locate and try to guide the person back to the material plane in...'

he paused for a moment looking nervous and hesitant, 'basically the same area, give or take a mile or few hundred...' he paused again. 'If you can cast the ritual then we are all set - if not my house sorcerer is powerful enough to cast it. Whoever activates the ritual must keep it going until the queen is safe and they will need to remain here. So tell me adventurers, what is your plan?'



DM: (The party is likely to get the house witch, Freja, to stay behind and keep the ritual active. She can get to the capital by the next day which gives the party the rest of the day and night to learn about the astral plane, to prepare for planar travel and to prepare for anything else that may come their way. Refer to **440TuMaRo**)

In the morning the party watched Freja, the witch, perform the divination ritual to locate the queen. Among Roderick's belongings that she had brought with them that they thought may be useful in the astral plane the party found another means to enter the astral plane. Roderick repeatedly warned the party about finding the correct puddle, the native portals from the Astral plane to the material plane in which to return, as the astral plane connects to other more dangerous realms. Freja's chanting stabilised the portal, and Roderick reminded the party to be cautious of predators. With supplies in hand, they prepared to enter the astral plane, determined to find the queen.

DM: (Here we pick a colour and just go with it. Green is easy and so is a light blue. The idea behind this is that they have a means to exit the plane and get a few items that may be useful once in there. However they will need to use their skill and knowledge to succeed. Refer to **440WeAsAc**.)



Stepping through the portal, the party found themselves suspended in an otherworldly expanse, where gravity held no dominion. Wisps of silver and lavender clouds swirled around them, casting an ethereal glow throughout the visible landscape. Fragments of ancient buildings, remnants of forgotten civilisations or cities, drifted lazily through the astral sea. The silence was deep and all consuming, broken only by the distant hum of arcane energies. As the party floated amidst the ruins and clouds, their senses were overwhelmed by the nothingness and surreal qualities that the plane held for them.

DM: (If the party has been to the astral plane before, change the description to be subtly different and change the perspective to 'Like before the astral plane was surreal and still so foreign to you'.)

It was not long until the party found the first evidence of Queen Maribeth's explosive emergence into this plan. Chunks of the gilded palanquin in which she was sitting as well as the gifted donations that she had received lay floating in the air and with the silence closing into them the distant sound of shouting and combat could be heard.

Rushing through the Astral plane wasn't as easy as it was on the material plane but the shouts drew them to a rubble strewn section of the cloudy plane of existence. Two familiar figures could be seen surrounded by dozens of assailants who attacked with precise and practised movements.

DM: (Refer to the next page and to **440ThCIAsPI**, the challenge rating here is very challenging. This is mainly due to the number and the tactics of the creatures, Berbalang's, which are aberrations that prefer to attack the party with spectral duplicates of themselves. Refer to **440FrEnMe**, These creatures are all enthralled by higher powers like the Gith or Mindflayers and if the party is high enough level adding in a moderately challenging encounter with one of these boss-like foes and the Berbalang would be a entertaining battle.

Once the party has finished with this encounter they follow a tug on their consciousness with a feeling that it's leading them in the direction back to where they came. This is of course the work of Freja's ritual. As they move through the plan again they are followed and attacked by smaller parties of the same creatures and potentially the one that is responsible for entralling them. They locate the 'puddle' back to the Material plane after about four hours of travel and another one or two small (trivial-moderate) encounters.)

