

The Usurper's Gambit

An Adventure for Fate's Edge - Ecktoria

Adventure Overview

Title: The Usurper's Gambit

Region: Ecktoria – Marble, Brass, & Fire

Theme: Legitimacy, bureaucracy, ritual power, imperial decline

Level: Veteran (Tier III)

Length: 4–5 Sessions

1 Premise

Ecktoria, heir to the shattered Utaran Empire, stands on the knife-edge of civil conflict. A charismatic pretender has seized the loyalty of the capital militia, silenced dissenting censors, and begun invoking ancient rites to claim the Mandate of Everflame. Meanwhile, the recognized heir — King Aldric the Lame — clings to legitimacy through law, tradition, and the blessing of the High Temple.

The players navigate a city where every marble colonnade hides a conspiracy, every mosaic conveys a political message, and every oath is engraved in red-lacquered tablets guarded by the Censors. They must decide: bolster one claimant, forge a third path, or engineer a peaceful transfer of power in a system designed to resist change violently.

2 Hook

Choose or roll:

- **The Envoy's Humiliation:** Before the Great Baths of Aurix, the Lame King's Envoy is publicly mocked, their ceremonial staff struck from their hand — a grave insult in Ecktoria. The crowd cheers the Pretender's heralds.
- **A Dead Man's Seal:** A courier collapses into the players' arms with a sealed tablet bearing the mark of a supposedly-dead claimant. If true, a surviving cousin could upend every faction's plans.
- **A Contract Invalidated:** A lucrative patronage contract is voided by a Senate Decree — half the Senate claims the decree is legal, the other half claims the seals were forged.

3 Key Factions

3.1 The Lame King's Line

Not medieval nobility — but **imperial-bureaucratic loyalists**. They adhere to:

- **High Priest of Everflame:** Wielder of ceremonial fire and keeper of coronation rites.
- **Coin-House Factors:** Masters of imperial credit and tax ledgers.
- **Veteran Standard-Bearers:** The disciplined remnant of the old Utaran Legion, clad in lamellar bronze and crimson silk.

Their power is **ritualistic and institutional**. Their weakness: *slow, cautious, inflexible*.

3.2 The Pretender's Cause

Duke Marcus promises a “New Augustan Revival” and wields:

- **Reformist Senators:** Toga-clad politicians seeking relevance in a fading state.
- **Condotta Captains:** Foreign-trained mercenary cohorts who thrive in urban conflict.
- **The New Merchants:** Silk caravans, spice importers, and canal guilds wanting deregulation.

Their power is **popular and military**. Their weakness: *shallow legal standing*.

3.3 The Silent Opposition

They reject both claimants and imagine a return to provincial autonomy.

- **Guild Conspiracies:** Especially the *Marblewrights*, whose control of monuments lets them encode political messages in stone.
- **Shadow Council:** Disaffected nobles who meet in abandoned bathhouses.
- **Regional Governors:** Each with their own armed retinues, quietly waiting.

Their power: **economic sabotage**. Their weakness: *disunity*.

4 Key NPCs

4.1 King Aldric the Lame

A legalist monarch steeped in ceremony, whose limp is from bearing the sacred Everflame during the siege of Ecktoria. Pious, cautious, but deeply principled.

4.2 Duke Marcus the Bold

Glossy armor, public charisma, and immaculate timing. He invokes ancient Utaran military rites — even if he barely understands them.

4.3 Grand Magistrate Valeria Thorne

A razor-edged legal scholar who knows every precedent for imperial succession. Her chambers overflow with red tablets inscribed with shame and honor. She alone can interpret the *Pact of Three Flames*, the ancient document defining lawful coronations.

4.4 High Priest Dominicus

Keeper of the Sacred Brazier. His blessing determines which claimant the people accept as crowned by the Everflame. Torn between stability and renewal.

4.5 The Lame King's Envoy

Masked, elegant, and unsettlingly silent. Rumored to have been a Senator, a spymaster, or Aldric's illegitimate sibling.

5 Key Locations

5.1 The Grand Forum

Not a medieval square, but a marble theatre of politics: multi-level balconies, colored awnings, statues of emperors with missing fingers, and mosaic floors depicting the victories of old Utar.

5.2 Imperial Arena

Still used for trials by ordeal, military demonstrations, and ceremonial oaths. Beneath it lie tunnels once used for exotic beasts — now used for political prisoners.

5.3 Coin-House Floor

A Byzantine-style financial temple. Gold seals, abacus-boards, clerks chanting interest schedules, and styluses scratching into wax tablets. A single misplaced ledger entry can bankrupt a province.

5.4 Censor's Hall

A labyrinth of documents, rank-lists, shame-tablets, and censored histories. Red lacquer glows like dried blood under the lantern light. The Hall's archivists maintain *The Line of Fire*, a genealogical record of every legitimate claimant.

Access is tightly controlled and politically explosive.

5.5 The Fire-Blessed Basilica

The spiritual heart of Ecktoria. The ceiling is a dome of gold and lapis, depicting the Everflame descending upon the First Emperor. The final coronation ritual must occur here.

6 Adventure Structure

6.1 Act I — Cracks in Marble

The PCs witness an event signaling that the Pretender's forces are seizing soft power: forged decrees, altered statues, or militia patrols wearing new colors. They must investigate whether Duke Marcus's claim is real or subterfuge.

6.2 Act II — Shadows in the Censorium

The Grand Magistrate is attacked by masked agents attempting to steal the *Pact of Three Flames*. PCs must navigate the Censor's Hall, uncover forged genealogies, or extract truths from censored archives.

Choices here determine which claimant gains legal ground.

6.3 Act III — Coin, Steel, and Fire

The Pretender blockades the Basilica, controlling the square. Loyalist Standard-Bearers muster but cannot act without legal sanction. PCs mediate, sabotage, or escalate:

- Reveal a hidden legitimate claimant.
- Break the blockade via mercantile leverage in the Coin-House Floor.
- Expose Marcus's forged lineage.
- Convince Dominicus to deny Marcus his blessing.

6.4 Act IV — The Coronation of Ash or Glory

At dawn, the Basilica doors open. The coronation ritual begins. PCs decide which claimant steps forward — or whether the old imperial rites are subverted entirely.

The **Trial of the Everflame** may occur:

- A rhetorical duel before the people.
- A ritual combat under priestly supervision.
- A miraculous display (real or faked).

7 Endings

7.1 Aldric Crowned Lawfully

A stable but static Ecktoria that prizes tradition. PCs may become honored advisors — or tools of a rigid bureaucracy.

7.2 Marcus Claims the Throne

A revitalized but turbulent empire driven by reform. PCs navigate rapid militarization, mercantile upheaval, and foreign ambitions.

7.3 A Third Path

PCs install:

- The hidden claimant.
- A Council of Three Flames.
- Regional autonomy under imperial oversight.

This ending creates future adventure hooks across Ecktoria.

7.4 Ecktoria Falls

If diplomacy, legality, and ritual fail, the city collapses into street warfare. The PCs become the only force capable of rebuilding order — or escaping the ashes.