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The Carnival of Broken Dreams

A Folk Horror & Social Commentary adventure for Fate's Edge

Tiers: I–III • Length: 3–6 sessions • Themes: Temptation, public goods, predatory spectacle

What this is

A traveling night-market of tents, music, and miracles glides the trade-roads between Silkstrand and Thepyrgos. It grants wishes—precisely—and charges a price in things people didn't know they valued. As the Desire Index rises, a town's intangibles unravel: lullabies vanish, bell-rights lapse, markets drift off schedule. The party can expose terms, retune the engine, or divert its appetite before the carnival moves on.

This module leans on core Fate's Edge procedures:

- Position & DV: earn leverage first (permits, bells, seats), then roll.
 - Clocks: visible pressure on community, appetite, and exposure.
 - SB spends (on 1s): crowds shift, contracts “correct,” law turns mid-scene.
 - Diamonds: codified outcomes (e.g., Witness Seal, Stage Permit) that move Position without a roll.
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Where it fits (Setting)

- Silkstrand bridge-wards crave spectacle and short-cuts to prestige; Diamonds like Bellmark, Stage Permit, and Witness Seal reflect local bureaucracy and show-rights.
 - Thepyrgos law-by-bell and stair-rights make crowd scenes volatile; a single peal can flip Position or freeze a performance.
 - Patron Orbit (Lore): The carnival often courts Livaea (Desire) devotees and accepts etiquette enforcement by Mab's envoys—neither must be the villain. Treat them as cultural gravity and flavor, not rules engines.
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Adventure Summary (at a glance)

Act I — Firelight

Parade arrives; a “free wish” hooks an important NPC. The party sees a miracle, then the missing price.

Act II — Mirrors & Ledgers

Investigate tents, negotiate terms, steal leverage from the Ledger Wagon, and win Diamonds to constrain predation.

Act III — The Calliope Heart

A public performance powers the engine. Break one pillar—Rhythm, Mask Index, or Ticket Chain—to starve it or retool it.

Core Clocks (start values)

- **Desire Index** [6] – local wish-rate and price magnitude.
- **Community Unraveling** [6] – customs, names, and bonds fray.
- **Carnival Appetite** [8] – grand act when filled.
- **Spotlight Heat** [4] – how targeted the party is by staff.

Tick examples

- Desire Index: each granted wish (+1), heavy crowd teaser (+1 if unopposed).
 - Unraveling: any wish taken without informed terms (+1), public goods priced (+1).
 - Appetite: each botched sabotage the engine can “eat” (+1), retuning misfire (+1).
 - Heat: public confrontations, breaking taboos, or humiliating staff (+1).
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The Desire Tax (custom procedure)

Idea: Every fulfilled wish costs something the wisher didn’t know they valued. As more wishes accrue, the Desire Index rises and prices escalate.

Per Wish (run this)

1. State the desire. Tag: Need, Ambition, or Indulgence.
2. Set the base price. Choose/roll on Taxable Intangibles (below).
3. Apply rate. Tax Magnitude = 1 + Desire Index. Scale the loss accordingly.
4. Resolve. The carnival fulfills; the price disappears from the wisher or town.
5. Advance clocks. Desire Index +1; Unraveling +1 if terms weren’t fully understood; Appetite +1 on greedy staff actions.

Taxable Intangibles (d10)

1. Private memory
2. Unconscious skill
3. Social grace
4. Local luck/wind

5. Shared custom
6. Legal right (bellmark/stair-pass)
7. Relationship texture
8. Place-name
9. Future possibility
10. Invisible boundary (e.g., where a river “should” bend)

Fallout thresholds

- 0–1: Rumors, coincidences, sampler wishes.
- 2–3: Faces feel unfamiliar; crowds drift to the midway.
- 4–5: Names slip; permits misread; bells mistime.
- 6+: Foundational loss unless stopped.

Countermeasures

- Informed consent: If the exact price is spoken and voluntarily accepted → reduce Magnitude by 1 (min 1) and don’t tick Unraveling.
- Substitution: PCs may volunteer an equal-value price to block Appetite.
- Audited wish: Present a Witness Seal (Diamond) to force staff to state the exact terms; –1 DV vs carnival staff.

Diamonds (codified leverage)

| [1][1] | Diamond | What it does | Typical Position shift |
|--------|---------|--------------|------------------------|
|--------|---------|--------------|------------------------|

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|--------------------------|---|
| Witness Seal | Compels staff to name the exact price aloud. Controlled → Dominant (social) |
| Stage Permit | One lawful interruption of a live act. Controlled → Dominant (on-stage) |
| Bellmark of Honest Trade | Shields from predatory refinances. –1 DV for term disputes |
| Mirror Warrant | Break a mirror without accruing Heat. Ignore one glamour penalty |
| Calliope Key | Retune the engine’s rhythm for a beat. Group +1 Position vs engine hazards |

Hand out Diamonds as scene goals or rewards for clever prep. They change Position first; then roll.

Sites & set pieces

Firelight Parade (opening)

Mood: Lanterns, brass, thrilled hush.
 Default Position: Controlled (DV 3). Public accusations raise DV to 4.

Beats: Free raffle-wish “won” by a sympathetic NPC; staff “clarifies” nothing.

SB spends (on 1s): Confetti seals a micro-contract; crowd tilts; a bell cue flips the scene order.

Midway of Masks

Try-before-buy illusions “prove” the wish.

- Risk: Each test without refusal ticks Desire Index +1.
- Fail-forward: Small boon gained but a habit is lost (whistling, prayer, smile cadence) until resolved.

House of Honest Mirrors

Shows visitors as they believe themselves to be; mirrors hold their price ledger.

- Position: Controlled (DV 4).
- Action: Break a mirror under Mirror Warrant to read its ledger safely.
- Heat on miss: Mirror shards animate and reassign masks mid-scene.

The Wishwright’s Tent

Velvet-law negotiation.

- Leverage: Witness Seal or Bellmark shifts Position; otherwise staff “assumes the difference.”
- Magic: Divination finds missing clauses but attracts Livaea-touched attendants.

Ledger Wagon (backstage heist)

A traveling records office; prices are written as negative space on vellum.

- Position: Controlled → Desperate if loud (DV 4–5).
- Reward: Copying a ledger grants leverage to unwind a price; the reader temporarily loses a related social grace.

The Calliope Heart (finale)

Engine under the stage with three pillars:

- Rhythm: crowd cadence; break with counter-song (Cantor), bell off-beat, or Calliope Key.
- Mask Index: who plays which role; scramble labels or sanctify a mask.
- Ticket Chain: consent tokens; reroute or void them with contract sigils.

Break any one pillar to starve the engine or change its appetite.

NPC Roster

Maestra Pann (Ringmaster) — velvet coaxing, bell cues, spectacle first.

- Wants: Growth, clean shows, no scandal.
- Moves: Change the beat; elevate stakes; flatter a rival into compliance.
- Tell: Two-finger bell count before a hard turn.

Mr. Vellum (Ledger-Clerk) — papery whisper, ink under nails.

- Wants: Balanced books (ethos of fairness... on their terms).
- Moves: “Correct” a contract; split a cost between bystanders; misfile your name.
- Tell: Checks quill nib before lying.

The Cotton Witch (Livaea-touched) — sugared lips, cravings-as-magic.

- Wants: To feed your appetite until you consent to anything.
- Moves: Offer a sweeter “trial”; mirror your desire; name your envy aloud.
- Tell: Hums when you hesitate.

Harlequin of Courts (Mab’s Envoy) — etiquette duels as combat.

- Wants: Order, pretty rules, public victories.
- Moves: Demand apology; set a forfeit; bind you to a bit of theatre.
- Tell: Bows before cuts.

Ticket Twins (Ushers) — synchronized blinks, bright patter.

- Wants: Throughput, safety theatre.
- Moves: Reassign seating; isolate meddlers; “check” tokens that edit consent after the fact.

Add one local anchor NPC (Bellwarden, Market Matron, or a child prodigy) to personify the stakes.

Procedures & guidance

Position & DV (quick ladder)

- Dominant: Tier+2 — permits in hand, crowd yours, law on your side.
- Controlled: Tier+3 — proper intros, stable ground.
- Desperate: Tier+4+ — taboo broken, wrong place/time, Heat high.

Use Diamonds to change Position before rolling. Reward prep with downshifts.

SB spend menus (sample)

Parade Grounds

- Free wish “won” by an allied NPC → Desire Index +1.
- Crowd surge separates PC from their leverage.
- Confetti-contract sticks to a sleeve: tear it = social harm.

Backstage

- Ledger page sticks to a shadow: lose a habit until returned.
- A bell cue retimes the scene: +1 DV until the beat is broken.
- Mask roles swap: allies briefly count as “audience.”

Act structure (with beats)

Act I — Firelight (1–2 sessions)

- Hook via raffle-wish to a sympathetic townie.
- Identify the Desire Tax through consequences.
- Win first Diamond (Witness Seal) in a fair-game contest or etiquette duel.
- Clocks: Desire Index 1–2; Unraveling 1; Heat 1.

Fail-forward examples

- Calling out the price in public: you force a lesser cost to be named, but it latches onto a bystander unless countered.
- Breaking the line: you reach the tent; a child slips toward a booth you shut down.

Act II — Mirrors & Ledgers (1–3 sessions)

- House of Honest Mirrors → Wishwright's Tent → Ledger Wagon heist.
- Earn Stage Permit or Mirror Warrant.
- Decide whether to regulate, starve, or divert the engine.
- Clocks: Desire Index 3–4; Unraveling 3–4; Appetite 3–5; Heat 2–3.

Fail-forward examples

- Mirror smash: gain a ledger shard; your reflection walks off (lose a habit) until reunited.
- Retune calliope: DV –1 but Appetite +1 (the engine takes a taste).

Act III — The Calliope Heart (1 session)

- Public show as ritual; break Rhythm, Mask Index, or Ticket Chain.
- Choose an ending and settle prices.

Endings

- **Expose & Regulate:** Carnival stays but all wishes require informed, spoken terms. Unraveling clears; Livaea's devotees take interest in you.
 - **Starve the Engine:** Break any pillar; tents collapse; debts become letters and must be hand-delivered back.
 - **Divert the Appetite:** Offer a greater, voluntary group vow; the carnival leaves on a promise and returns when it matures.
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Magic & Talents (table-facing prompts)

- Cantors: Lead counter-cadence; −1 DV vs crowd sway. Risk: echo-choir ticks Desire Index.
 - Runekeepers: Stamp fair-contract sigils; negate one clause (Obligation may rise if Courts are offended).
 - Invokers: Call a neutral market spirit to enforce equivalence; it tithes your luck.
 - Casters: Euclidean wards block mirror tricks; wards hum appetites that draw the Cotton Witch.
 - Summoners: Bind a “lost-and-found” spirit to return a price; it pockets a token from you.
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XP milestones (suggested)

- Name a Price (publicly, precisely): +6 XP
 - Save a Wisher (undo a price without harming others): +8 XP
 - Backstage Leverage (copy/steal ledger): +6 XP
 - Retune the Engine (break a pillar or reduce Desire Index to 0): +10 XP
 - Community Heals (clear Unraveling before departure): +12 XP
 - Session Base: +6 XP per session for exploration, roleplay, and setbacks
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Random tables

d6 Midway Booths

1. Guess-the-Secret (mirror reads you)
2. Cotton Alchemy (flavors as feelings)
3. Fortune Stair (mini-stair-right lottery)
4. Prize Hook (catch your “best self”)
5. Lantern Maze (lefts are regrets)
6. Mask Painter (face becomes contract text)

d6 Crowd Moments

1. Chant swells off-beat
2. Bell rings early
3. Child returns with a stranger’s voice
4. Vendors swap prices mid-sentence
5. Duel of apologies erupts

6. Parade pauses; all eyes on you

d6 Prices That Hurt Just Right

1. The last note of a cradle-song
 2. Market wind that smells of dye
 3. The shortcut only you knew
 4. Your knack for remembering faces
 5. The right to ring the bell once
 6. The name of the street you grew up on
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Session 1 quickstart (3 hours)

1. Cold Open (15 min): Parade arrives; raffle-wish triggers.
 2. Investigation Beat (45 min): Midway of Masks or Honest Mirrors.
 3. Pressure Beat (30 min): Public call-out; win Witness Seal.
 4. Choice Beat (30 min): Who to help first; start or cool a clock.
 5. Climax (30–40 min): Mini-debate or mirror heist.
 6. Fallout (10 min): Hand out a Diamond; foreshadow the Calliope.
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Safety & tone

- This arc spotlights exploitation and “price of desire.” Use upfront consent tools. Swap any personal-price beats for harmless-but-meaningful community intangibles (songs, routes, customs) when that serves your table.
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Printables (drop-in)

Clocks

- Desire Index [] [] [] [] [] []
- Community Unraveling [] [] [] [] [] []
- Carnival Appetite [] [] [] [] [] [] [] []
- Spotlight Heat [] [] [] []

Diamonds (handouts)

- Witness Seal Stage Permit Bellmark of Honest Trade Mirror Warrant Calliope Key
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Ties & follow-ons

- Silk & Velvet Arc: Bell-law and etiquette duels at the carnival foreshadow Crimson Masque.
 - Steps Into Sorrow: If a town loses its lullaby or street-name, those shards can seed sorrow-echoes on the Bridge or in Seven-Sorrows.
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Running note

Keep rolls scarce by rewarding preparation with Position shifts. Spend 1s to move the crowd, “correct” papers, or hit a new bell cue that alters scene order. The carnival is a machine for desire—let the party decide whether to smash, regulate, or re-aim it.