



PART 2: CONFRONTING THE BEAST

Estimated Duration: 90 minutes

Before the characters begin searching the gardens, randomly determine where Éloïse is currently located. Wherever Éloïse is, omit the listed encounter and skip to the encounter: **The Beast**.

The characters can choose a location at random, or they can try to look for clues to find Éloïse or “the beast” by making a DC 20 Wisdom (Survival) check. On a Success, the characters are able to determine Éloïse’s actual location. Otherwise, they follow the clues to a different location determined randomly. If the characters examined the letter fragments in Éloïse’s Quarters, they receive a +2 bonus for each letter they were successfully able to piece together. They also gain a +2 bonus for each garden encounter they’ve already completed. If the characters have already completed the encounters at the three locations where Éloïse is not, any further searching leads to her actual location.

SETTING: GARDENS

Outside of Éloïse’s château, the landscape of Belletristia is a carefully cultivated French or English style decorative garden. Aside from the many tree-lined paths and flower beds, there are large ornamental features including the locations listed. Though the garden gives the impression of order, the rules that hold sway in Belletristia weaken the further one ventures from the château, and every so often a rogue story from the library will come to life at the outskirts. Due to recent events, four such stories are currently on the loose.

STORY OBJECTIVE B

The characters need to locate the missing Éloïse. Before the characters begin searching the gardens, randomly determine which of the locations (G1–G4) Éloïse is currently at. Wherever Éloïse is, omit the listed encounter and skip to the “the beast” encounter at the end of this part.

The characters can choose a location at random, or they can try to look for clues to find Éloïse or “the beast” by making a DC 20 Wisdom (Survival) check. On a Success, the characters are able to determine Éloïse’s actual location. Otherwise, they follow the trail to a different location determined randomly. If the characters examined the letter fragments in Éloïse’s Quarters, they receive a +2 bonus for each letter they were successfully able to piece together. They also gain a +2 bonus for each garden encounter they’ve already completed. If the characters have already completed the encounters at the three locations where Éloïse is not, any further searching leads to her actual location.

AREA INFORMATION

The area has the following features.

Paths. Narrow paths made of smooth cobblestones traverse most areas of the garden. In some remote areas, only dirt paths exist.

Walls. Garden sections are divided by three-foot-high stone walls, hedges that are a foot thick and anywhere between two and ten feet tall, and cedar trees planted in close rows. These are meant to provide visual division more than physical, but can provide cover in a pinch.

Flora. There are trees, shrubs, and flowering plants from all manner of climates, from tropical amaryllis,

bougainvillea, and hibiscus, to temperate thistle, fireweed, and chicory, desert sagebrush, even caribou moss, and rarer plants from all corners of the multiverse. Some grow in intricate swirls, others at strange right angles, but the overall effect is harmonious.

Fauna. As with the flora, there are birds of all climates from cockatoos and birds of paradise to puffins and arctic terns, as well as a large and prominent flock of peacocks. The varied birdsong will also occasionally swell into a literal choral symphony, and characters might recognize a popular concerto or two emanating from the trees. There are rabbits, hedgehogs, and other small animals, but very few large quadrupeds.

Weather. The garden is generally temperate, neither too hot nor cold, but individual areas will vary. The sky defaults to a sunny late afternoon, but rain showers and even storms appear suddenly during moments of tension.

G1. GROTTO

Part of the garden dips down abruptly, and a small grotto bores into the rocky cliff face. A constant trickle can be heard from thin streams of water that flow out of the sheer rock on either side. They form a shallow, placid pool around the opening, though it can be easily crossed.

As characters approach, a **Bullywug Knight** leaps from the grotto's opening. She introduces herself as Constance Antoinette Genevieve Ha-Ha de Rathe (cone-STANS AHN-twa-net zeh-nuh-vee-EV AH-ah du RAHT), on an urgent mission from His Royal Highness Louis le Grenouille Verte XV (loo-EE luh gruh-NOY vairt canhz). She orders the characters to stand down and drop their weapons until she can ascertain their intentions.

If the characters acquiesce with her demands and explain themselves simply, she apologizes and lets them move on without further incident. She has no knowledge of the beast, though. If the characters are hostile, rude, or repeatedly get her name wrong, the knight attacks.

G2. MONOPTEROS

On a gently sloping hill sits a small structure. Columns support a weathered azure dome not more than fifteen feet across, but the interior is otherwise open to the elements. Scattered around it on the sides of the hill are statues of monsters and humanoids in various states of disrepair. Upon close inspection, though, the wear and tear on these statues and the monopteros itself seem to be intentionally applied as part of the decorative effect.

The interior of the monopteros, the columned pavilion, is haunted by a **Flameskull**. As the characters approach, it screams in an unearthly voice: "Who dares disturb this graveyard of memory! Do you come of your own free will, or were you compelled?"

If the characters give any answer to the effect that they are both compelled and acting of their free will, then the Flameskull will mutter, "Very well, then I leave you in peace." It will not attack, but it has no information about Éloïse or la Bête. At any other answer, the Flameskull accuses the characters of being liars and attacks.

G3. PALLADIAN BRIDGE

The even terraces of the garden give way to a still lake. A narrow area is crossed by a lone bridge of Palladian design; thick stone arches rise from the water to form the main structure, and square pillars support a tiled covering.

Underneath the bridge dwells a **Water Weird**, which attacks anyone who steps foot on the bridge. When this happens, the water of the lake suddenly swells around the piers with tempestuous fury, and a serpentine form sculpted from the water itself crashes through the columns.

The Water Weird can reach anywhere on the bridge itself, but cannot venture out of the water, and it does not pursue characters elsewhere in the lake, remaining always by the bridge. Once the characters determine that Éloïse is not anywhere in the area, simply avoiding the Water Weird is sufficient to complete the encounter.

G4. PARTERRES

Within a copse of tall trees, in an open plaza, the cobbled pathways and neat flower beds suddenly mingle. It's not immediately noticeable at ground level, but the flowers and hedges are arranged here in intricate patterns as if embroidered, with fuchsia, vermillion, cyan, and goldenrod emerging from the celadon leaves. As the characters enter, read or paraphrase the following.

Suddenly, the colors seem to burst out of the flower patterns as three pixies fly about in an energetic dance, hurling insults at one another. Once they notice your presence, their ire seems to turn outward. "You invited these cretins and not I?" accuses one. "No, it was you who snubbed me with these fools!"



Each of the three **Pixies** feels it was rebuffed by the others, but the capricious creatures will quickly turn their anger towards the characters if they don't attempt to calm tensions, summoning two **Needle Blights** as well. Once the characters realize the issue, they can appease the pixies by inviting all of them to the Salon, or making some other peace offering.

ENCOUNTER: THE BEAST

This encounter can occur in any of the garden locations above. Read or paraphrase the following.

Before you is a creature with bestial features: shaggy fur, immense claws, protruding fangs, and twisting horns like those of a ram. This creature is adorned, though, in some sort of... ball gown? Yes, the yellow hues blended with the brown fur in the shadows, but it is clearly a ball gown adorned with pearls and ribbons, in good condition and apparently tailored to this creature's exact measurements. What's more, once you see the beast's face, behind the fur and fangs are a pair of bright, lucid, inquisitive eyes. The beast smiles somewhat sheepishly and says in a singsong voice, "excuse me, you've caught me at something of an impasse. I am Éloïse du Chândliet, at your service."

CREATURE INFORMATION

The beast is actually **Éloïse du Chândliet** (see the stat block in the **Creature Statistics** section). She was born with lycanthropy, which her parents blamed on some ancient curse in the family line. They kept her condition hidden, as she has continued to do. Her efforts were not flawless, and legends of "the beast" have plagued Belletristia since the beginning of the domain. However, something has changed with the Fleur de la Lune that is preventing her from returning to her eladrin form. She takes the characters' questions, and can give a general narrative of the events leading to her flight.

- She discovered the Fleur de la Lune some weeks ago in this very spot. Its power was limited at first, only affecting a small area. As it bloomed, its influence grew to encompass her entire realm, only limited by the protective case (now shattered) which she devised. She came back to the spot to see if she could find a way to reverse the process herself with no luck.
- She suspects the Duc is behind the theft of the Fleur, but is not certain (characters who recall his lapel can confirm this for Éloïse). If the Fleur could be recovered, along with the fragments of the case in the Library, she could repair it enough to end her transformation.
- She is too afraid to return in her present form. That she has hidden it for so long, that she dares not face what the opinion of the salon would be at her condition; the general consensus in the salon has been that *IF* the beast is real, it must be a dangerous monster that lacks reason.

ÉLOÏSE DU CHÂNDLIET

CG eladrin (female) mage

Éloïse du Chândliet (eh-loo-EEZ doo shahn-dlee-EH) is an amber haired and hazel eyed eladrin and the ruler of Belletristia. She has been a lycanthrope since birth, but this secret does not hinder her fashion sense, and she is always dressed in the latest styles.

- **What They Want.** She fears for the safety of her realm, which is currently threatened by her inability to transform.
- **Inquisitive Philosopher.** This eladrin lady has an unquenchable thirst for new ideas. She loves nothing more than a lively debate, and has been known to change sides on an issue mid-sentence in its pursuit.

DEVELOPMENT

Éloïse asks the characters to help her by returning to the château, where they can either recover the Fleur de la Lune to end her transformation, or else convince the salonniers in a formal debate that "the beast" can still be a reasonable creature. If they cannot help her, then the domain might be in trouble; already, the stories from her recent letters have started taking form in the garden, and more will do the same as long as Éloïse is stuck in this form, until all of Belletristia is undone.

