



Angouluçon





Daria Bolshikh

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Angouluçon
by Daria Bolshikh

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FOREWORD

Angouluçon is an exercise in visual development, created as a part of a Master's thesis project.

I have always found myself fascinated by the rare phenomena of medieval horror. For a genre with such obvious potential, it is severely underused in media, so I took this opportunity to explore it.

Angouluçon was imagined as an RPG that heavily relies on story and choice. The player can pick a background that would define their strengths and weaknesses, as they make their way through the perilous streets of the metropolis. Each of the protagonists also has a unique agenda. Whether it's money, power, glory or simply survival - it's up to the player to choose what decides their actions.

The architecture of Angouluçon was heavily inspired by the gothic period, as well as the works of Pre-Raphaelite painters such as John William Waterhouse. I wanted to portray a city that is fairly young, built by the joined efforts of people of all nationalities and backgrounds. As a result, the Angolusien are fairly diverse and the city is only richer for it.

I had a lot of fun designing and writing characters that inhabit Angouluçon. Hopefully, you'll enjoy reading about them!



On the northern coast of the continent of Épilême, grand and prosperous stands a city. Many a soul calls it home. Most, however, remain oblivious to the dark history of death and greed that began long before the first settlers arrived to inhabit the shore.

As they gathered around the first fires and built their modest huts around an old temple - the word gained life upon their lips. One name, soon to catch like a disease among them.

Angouluçon.





ANGOULUÇON

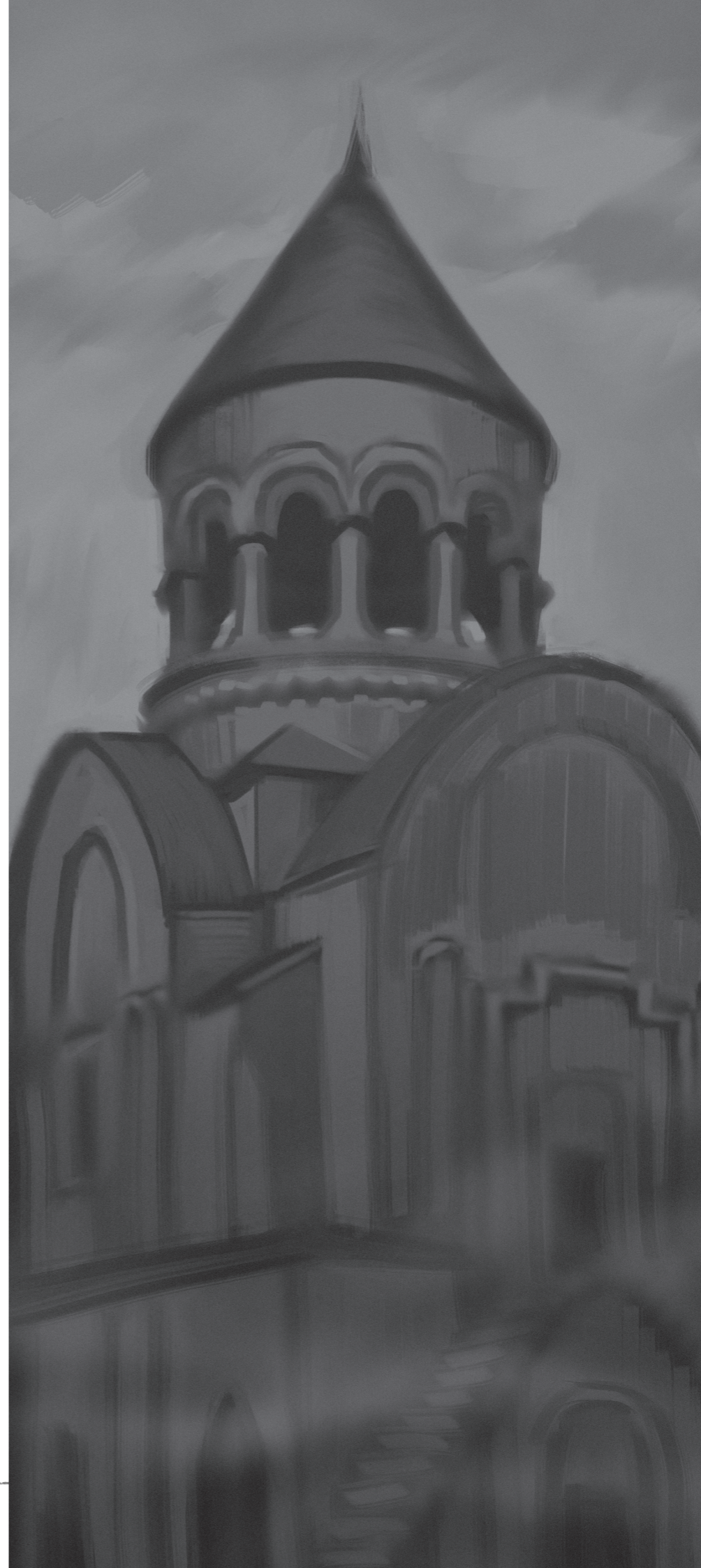
1. Rue de la Falaise
2. Hyacinth Port
3. Iron Ring
4. Angouluçon Castle
5. Marguerite Port
6. Templehill
7. Turnden
8. Soigneux
9. Klosternau
10. Chirteven
11. Kripole
12. Okkovik



Angouluçon is a free city-state on the northern coast of the continent of Épilême. It was constructed in the late third era and was largely unimportant until about five centuries later when the waves of refugees from the Galorian War flocked to the city in search of a new home. Since then Angouluçon has grown to its magnificent size and enjoyed a rather prosperous trade with the nearby kingdoms of Serm, Auberbéliard, and Sar'roze.

Little is known of the city's history prior to the events of the Galorian War and who exactly built it. The rumour goes that at the heart of the city lies an old catacomb, with an ancient king buried within. Some say the first settlement was established by his mourning subjects, who refused to abandon their liege and dedicated their lives to watching over his tomb.

The city has two port districts that are separated by the Qamar river. The Hyacinth Port is dedicated to the import of spices, wines, and textiles, while Marguerite Port is a central hub for fishermen and crop export. Lenient tax laws make Angouluçon the favourite among the continent's merchants which further enforces the city's political power, making it the financial capital of northern Épilême.

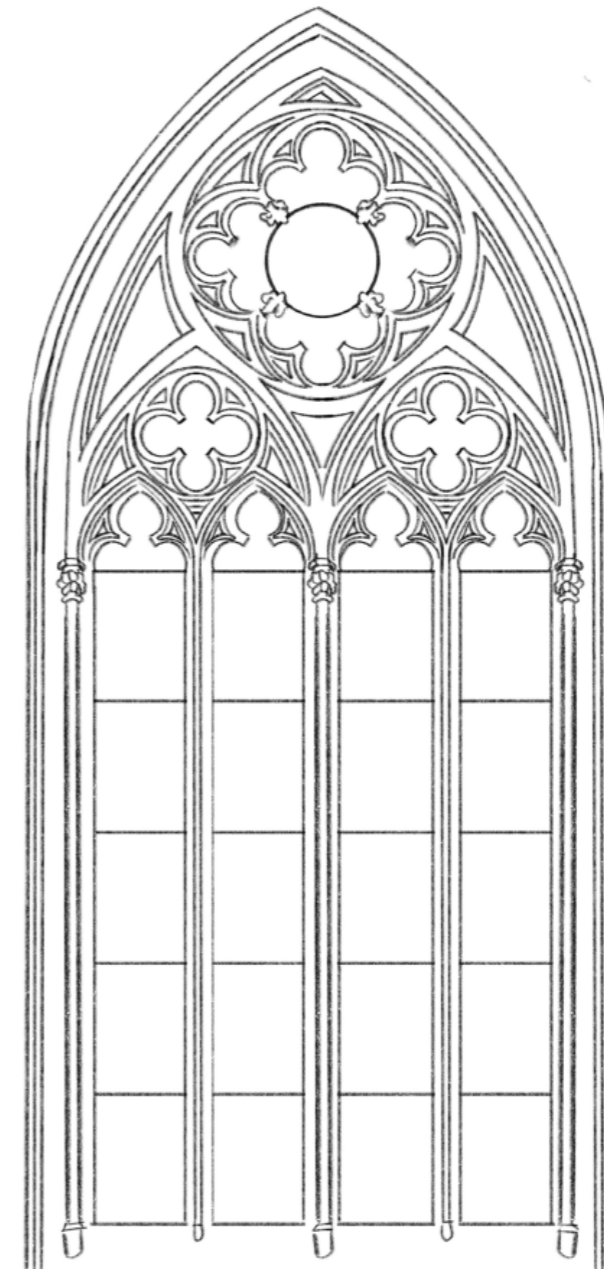


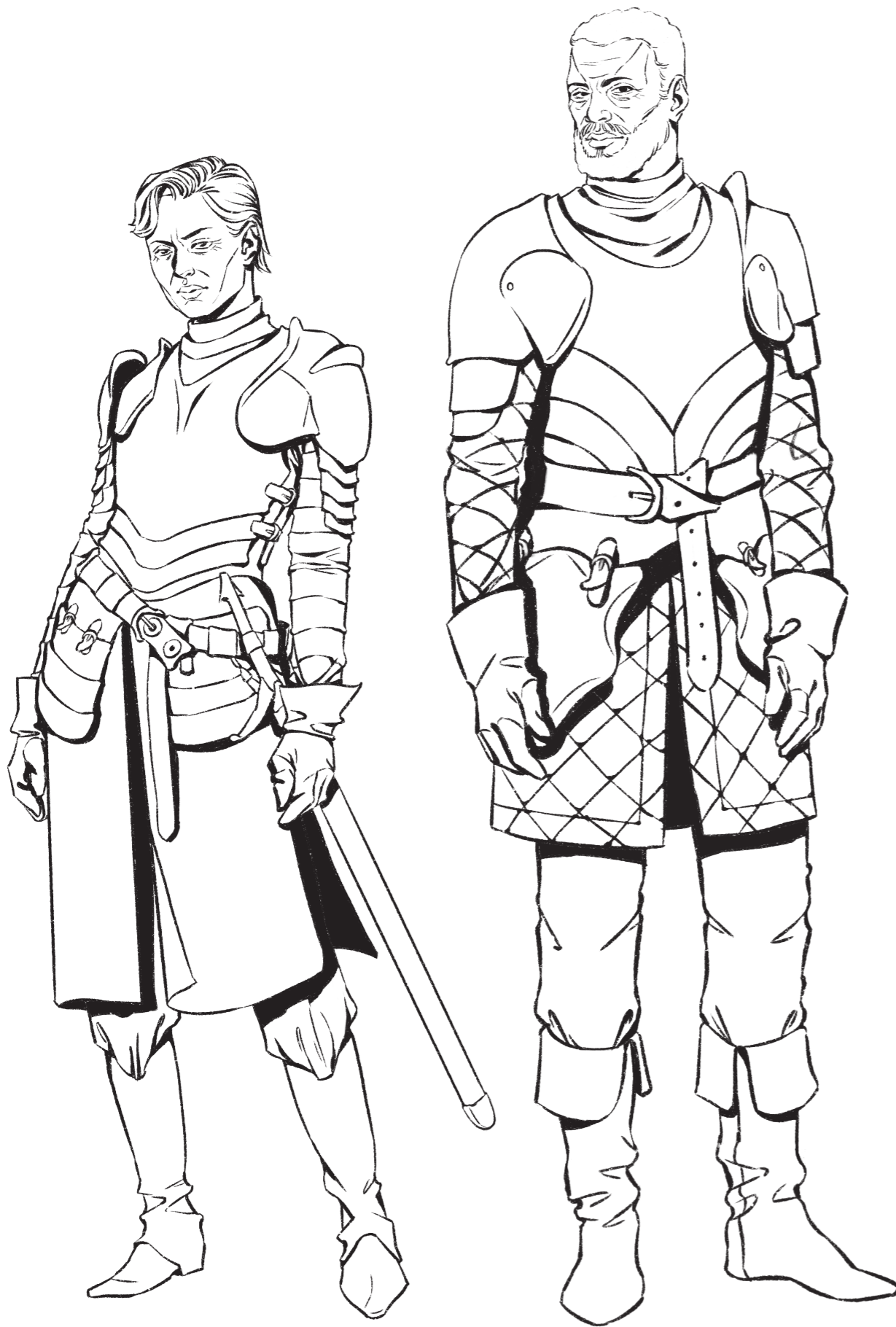
A classic Angoulusien interior. Those who can afford a house on Iron Ring often live quite lavishly, decorating their chambers with the furniture made of the finest imported materials gold can buy. Portraits of the saints, rugs, frescoes - nothing is too much.



To the north of the West Twin Gate stands the magnificent old temple dedicated to the St. Ma'ab, the patron saint of the city. The Angoulusien, who tend to follow the teachings of Trizvezdiism, usually spend their early mornings at their domestic altars.

A knightly Order of Ma'ab is somewhat of a mystery. They claim to dedicate their lives to their worship, but such dedication to a dead saint is highly unusual and is often criticized among the city's nobility, who would prefer the Order's loyalties to themselves. The knights keep to themselves and wear distinct helmets with ornate masks to hide their faces. The Order possesses a certain level of authority but rarely participates in politics. They reside in the Temple Of Ma'ab, where none but the pious Blind Daughters are allowed.





THE KNIGHT

You can still remember the day.

You were barely fourteen years of age. The sun was setting over the Reddnej Mountains, and the first snow was melting on the road to your village. A young Lord was passing through, dressed in gold and furs, he stopped in the local tavern for the night. You remember the innkeeper conversing in hushed tones with the local farmers. It has been a poor summer - the sun burned down the crops, and now people were settling in for a harsh winter. Everyone was hungry, not unlike you. And so, daggers were hidden, and lights dimmed - they plotted to kill and rob the young nobleman, along with his modest retinue.

Even to this day, you do not know what made you act that day. Perhaps you felt it was unjust and merely wanted to prevent bloodshed. Maybe you knew it was a foolish plan and tried to protect your village from the reckoning that would surely follow the Princeling's death. Or it was pure ambition, to rise above your station and win the favour of someone who had the power to change your life.

Nevertheless, you woke the guards up and saved the Lord's life. In return, the nobleman offered to take you in.

As you left your village the next morning, the bodies of the unlucky robbers hung grimly in the main square and dozens of angry eyes burned the back of your head.

Three years would pass. You trained under the men you saved, honing your skills. You've received a modest academic education as well as a martial one. Your Lord's favour has granted you respect among the castle dwellers, and each night you went to sleep with a full belly, quickly forgetting about the ones you've left behind. Soon enough the once cold walls became your home for years to come.

On the dawn of your nineteenth birthday, you were knighted. You swore your vows and stood proudly before your brothers.

It has been over two decades since that day. In that time your renown has grown and there's grey in your hair now. You have fought in two wars, won tournaments, celebrated many a victory, and mourned quite a few friends. While you've always been loyal to your Lord, you haven't always been a chivalrous knight. You've killed men, who have surrendered to you, took more than you needed, and looked down upon those, who were just like you've been once. Pride was no stranger to you.

One day, during a feast, a foreign ambassador makes a joke at your expense. As everyone laughs, he pushes further, bringing up how you grew up in a backwater village, and finishes by saying that nothing could ever make men like you honourable. Perhaps it's the wine, but you notice that your brothers are grinning at you, agreement in their eyes.

You soon find yourself enraged, hitting the ambassador over and over again. As guards try to pull you away, you fight back and it doesn't take long before the swords are out and you've got more blood on your hands. Two of them are wounded, but one lays still before you. He's dead.

The ambassador who insulted you survives, but the negotiations with the neighbouring duchy fall through.

Your fellow knights avoid your eyes and you feel like you're that child again, with angry eyes burning in the back of your head wherever you go.

It doesn't take long before the old Lord summons you. His tone is cold, and he dismisses you. You try to plead with him, but he doesn't listen. There are younger knights at court, from noble families. Your services are no longer needed.

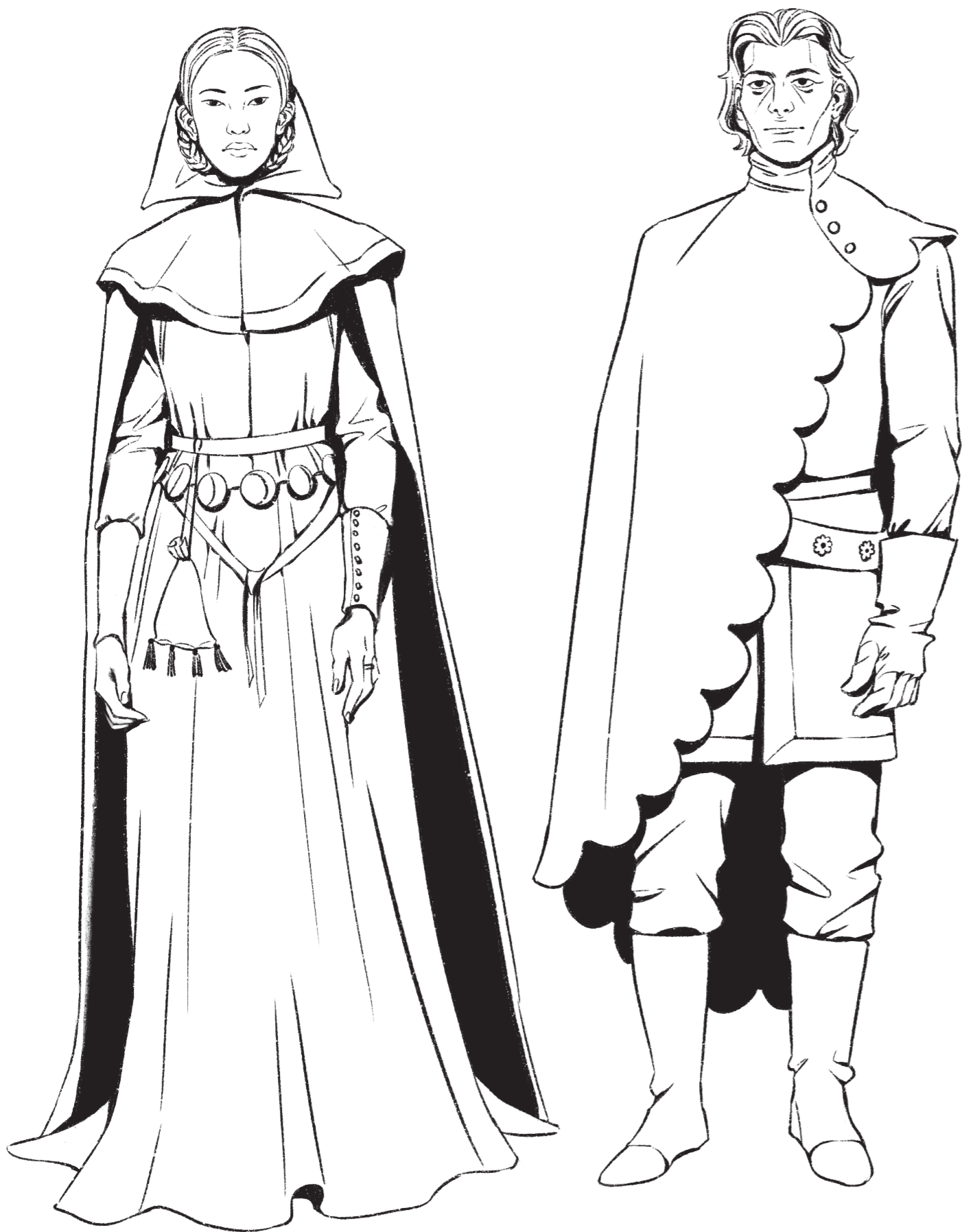
In a day, your life falls apart. You saddle your horse and leave the castle. The road takes you to Angoulême, where you hope to gather your bearings. Or drown in ale.

One sleepless night, wandering the streets aimlessly, you hear a yell. You arrive just in time to see a horrible creature perched atop a baron's bed. Quickly, you draw your weapon and hack the monstrosity, drawing blood. The creature screams and flees.

Invigorated by the encounter, you have filled with purpose again. Hoping to restore your honour, you decide to hunt the beast stalking the streets.

Just as you begin your investigation, however, the Order of Ma'ab orders the city gates shut.

Perhaps the Lord Commander, who so abruptly closed the city, will have some answers?



THE NOBLE

You've never felt hunger before.

You've been peckish, of course. After hours of studying, or a long trip to your family's chateau in the summer. There has always been someone offering you wine, a basket of freshly picked peaches, a plate of honey-glazed ham, piping hot pies, and sweet lemon cakes. You've heard about the hunger from the steward's reports, how when the crops are poor, the farmers don't have enough grain to pay their liege. It has always been somewhat of a mystery to you.

All your life you only ever wanted one thing and one thing only - power. To sit in your father's throne room, and settle the matters of his subjects. The power to finally decide for yourself, to build your legacy.

To never truly know, what hunger really means.

But you're the seventh child to a count. With six older brothers, the chances of inheriting your father's title are close to nonexistent.

So the plentiful feasts are dull to you, the music bores you, and the food tastes like ash. You're to be married off to someone barely important and the older you get the more you find yourself spending whatever family fortune you have with a bottle of liquor for company.

Yet another year passes and it's time to visit Angouluçon, as is tradition for the nobility of your rank. Your father and brothers are busy with state business and you're sent alone.

The city is alive with preparations for the winter celebrations, with other guests pouring into the city. You prepare yourself for another dull season.

One night you attend a masquerade. All the wine and dancing spin your head and you find yourself with a new acquaintance, alone in a dark passage. Strange, you can't seem to recall their name, but you find it difficult to avert your eyes from theirs.

After bumping into each other at a couple of parties they take you to a private soiree, with a local baron introducing his new wine to a group of high-ranking nobles. Everyone cheers and as you taste the wine the room around you goes dark.

You wake up the next morning, with the world around you cold and clear. As you leave your rooms, the morning light strains your eyes. The breakfast is sand in your mouth and nothing on your plate can sate your hunger.

You attend another ball that evening, the music is louder and more off-key to your ears, yet you catch every whisper around you. You're invited to dance and you instantly recognize your mysterious new friend. They say nothing to you, but there's an understanding in their eyes, and it's clear they know.

This goes on for a week. Every night you meet and every morning the world around you gets colder. There is no doubt in your mind that something has changed within you. You share everything with your newfound friend. All your fears and worries and the cold despair you feel when you wake up in the morning, feeling smaller and smaller

every day. Only the presence of your acquaintance seems to calm you. Strangely enough, you can never remember how the evenings you spend together end, but you blame it on the alcohol.

One day you hear maids whispering about a series of murders that shook the city. It's only beggars at first, then merchants and guards are found dead. The city is in shock.

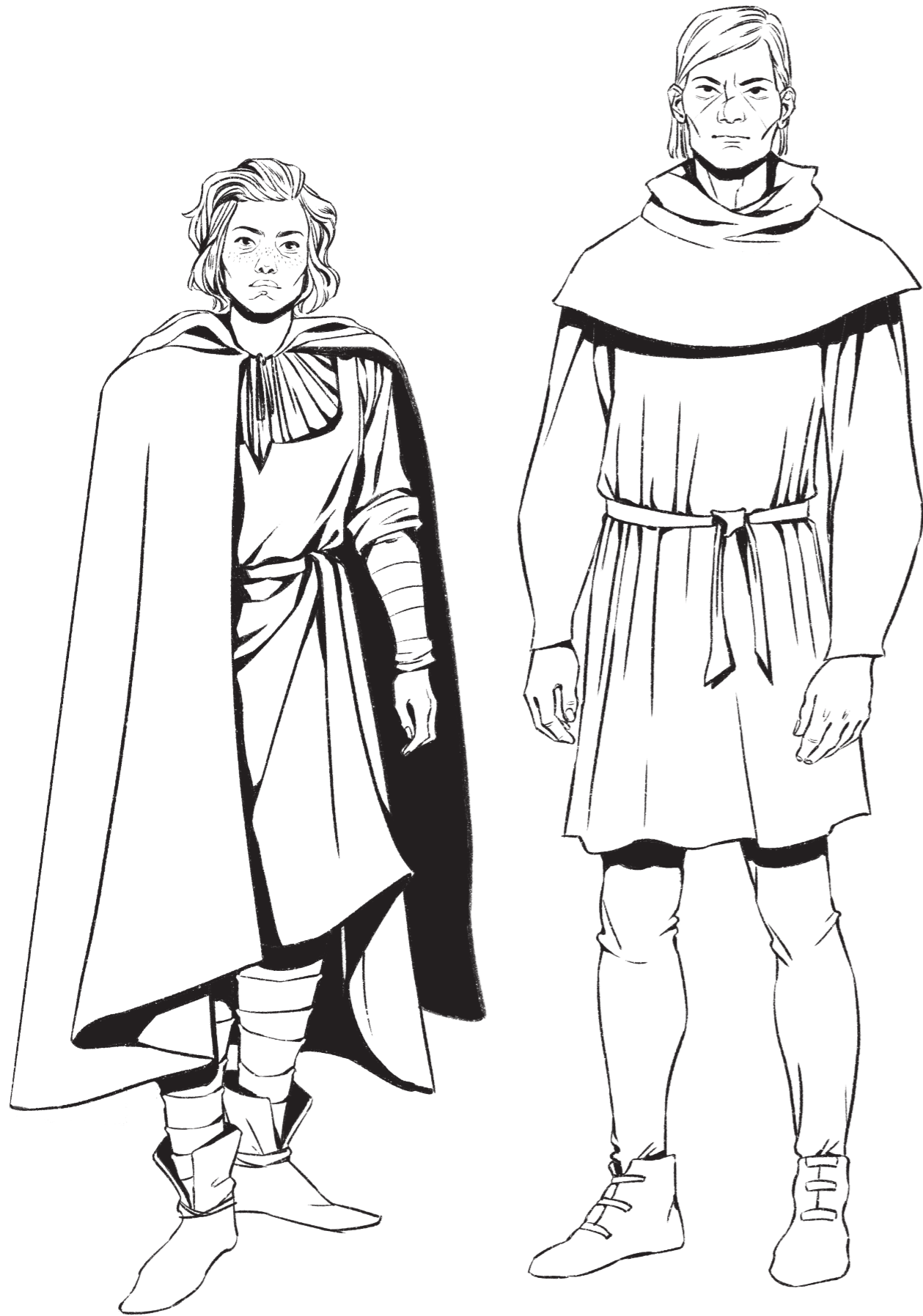
Everything comes into a crescendo when the baron is attacked in his own bed. At that point the nobility demands action and unexpected to all the Order of Ma'ab steps in, shutting the city gates. During the Winter Solstice, Angouluçon is quiet.

There are no parties afterwards. Your friend doesn't visit you anymore and a strange feeling sets in. The world is no longer clear, horrible migraines plague your nights. Desperate for relief you decide to take the matters into your own hands and find out what has happened to you.

You begin your search, but with no recollection of your friend's identity you don't know where to begin. In one of your long nights together they've mentioned something in a hushed tone, with clear fear in their voice: the *Temple*.

That's where you'll look.





THE ORPHAN

The air of the city has changed.

It's not just the cool breeze of autumn, with its closed sky and heavy rains. The rich and powerful have arrived in Angouluçon again to greet the winter, as per tradition, but even their gold clinks are different this time. The cold city walls hum low with quiet excitement. The rats in the sewers run and skitter in unusual patterns. Even the beggars smile in their sleep.

You feel it clearer than anyone. With no name and no home to call your own, you hear and see things about the city, that no one else does. You grew up on the streets, in the filth and the cold. Thrown away at birth you were supposed to die in the city's maw, but you survived. Each night in your sleep you always hear a heart, beating under the cobblestones.

You spend your days searching, begging, stealing what you can't get. Listening to the whispers, you gain insight into what's going on since

there's always someone willing to buy a secret or two. The guards spit on you, but the shadows serve you well.

The remains of a burned house are your shelter. The collapsed beams still remember the heat of the flames. The city folk steers clear, mumbling about a curse, and beggars fear waking up in a collapsed rabble, but you don't care. Each new day is a gift to you, so you know better than to ask for more than you have.

One night, as you rock yourself to sleep, you hear a stifled scream. As you open your eyes you see a creature, dressed in rich silks, tall and monstrous. As it finishes off the unlucky urchin, its eyes meet yours. As you run out, you stumble upon a rotten floorboard and the remains of your home collapse. The enraged howl haunts your thoughts to this day.

Ever since that night, something stalks the streets. Every day the morning sun uncovers a new victim, and you know your turn is soon approaching.

You don't stay in one place for two nights in a row. The rich now keep to their homes, scared of the shadows, so begging is useless. The guard is doubled in the city and the food is harder to steal.

Desperate and starving, you decide to take a risk. When the sun sets, you sneak your way on the construction site for the new church that the rich are building for themselves. As you make your way into the architect's offices, a large shadow crosses your path - the monster you've seen that fateful night looks you straight in the face.

As you're about the scream, a sharp ring of metal pierces the air, followed by a heavy thud - the monstrous head rolls to your feet, spilling blood all over the new floors.

Whether from starvation or shock, your legs give in and your head hits the cold stone.

You awake in the lazaret a day later - some kind soul had brought you into the Temple Of Ma'ab, where the sick and the poor come for

treatment. You're fed and clothed by the blind lay-sisters. No one knows what you're talking about whenever you bring up the monster - no traces of that night are left and the killings have stopped.

Once your body stops aching you are urged to leave the Temple - countless others need help, and there aren't enough nuns to assist everyone. As you wander the temple, something compels you to listen. You put your ear to the stone floors and recognize the familiar rhythm - the heart of the city beats the strongest here. It calls you and pulls you in.

Each night you sneak in to lay on the cold floors, the heartbeat lulls you to sleep.

Until one day, after the Winter Solstice, the main hall is barricaded, with knights of the Order keeping watch day and night.

Something sinister brews in the city. You finally decide to find out what's going on. As you're sneaking out you swipe a Temple signet ring. With most doors open to you, you begin your investigation.



It is a known fact that those, who possess power never tire of seeking more of it.

But what is it about Angouluçon that is so seductive to the nobility? Is it the money? The independence of it?

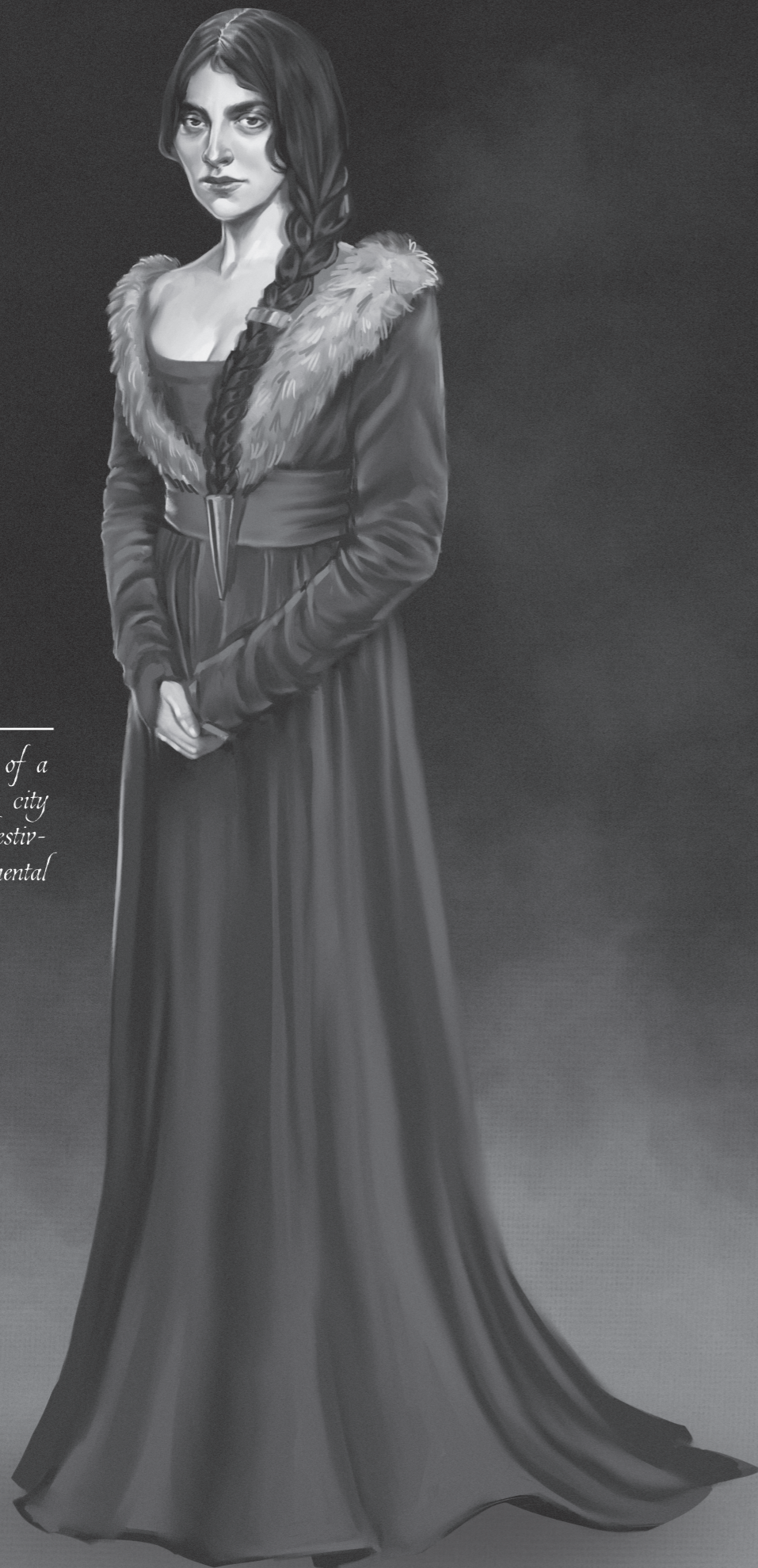
Or perhaps it's something way more sinister?
Something that's above and beyond what gold can buy? Something it's something old and removed far from their grasp that they seek?



Every winter season the rich and powerful of Épîlême gather in Angouluçon to socialize, attend banquets and spend their gold. It's a tradition that was naturally established less than a century ago when the ruling prince at the time had introduced some very lenient tax policies for the import and export of goods through the city's ports. Many of the continent's rulers, wishing to avoid the unnecessary foreign politics and seduced by the exclusive contracts the city offered them, have adjusted their trade routes to go through the City Of Spires. This has marked Angouluçon as the trading capital of Épîlême.

The high influence of the foreign coin has ruled the lifeblood of the city ever since, and so the visiting nobility has soon overtook the Iron Ring - the district that was once occupied by the old and respected Angoulusien families. It's there the aristocrats had built their decadent mansions, that never sleep during the winter months and stay empty and abandoned in summer.



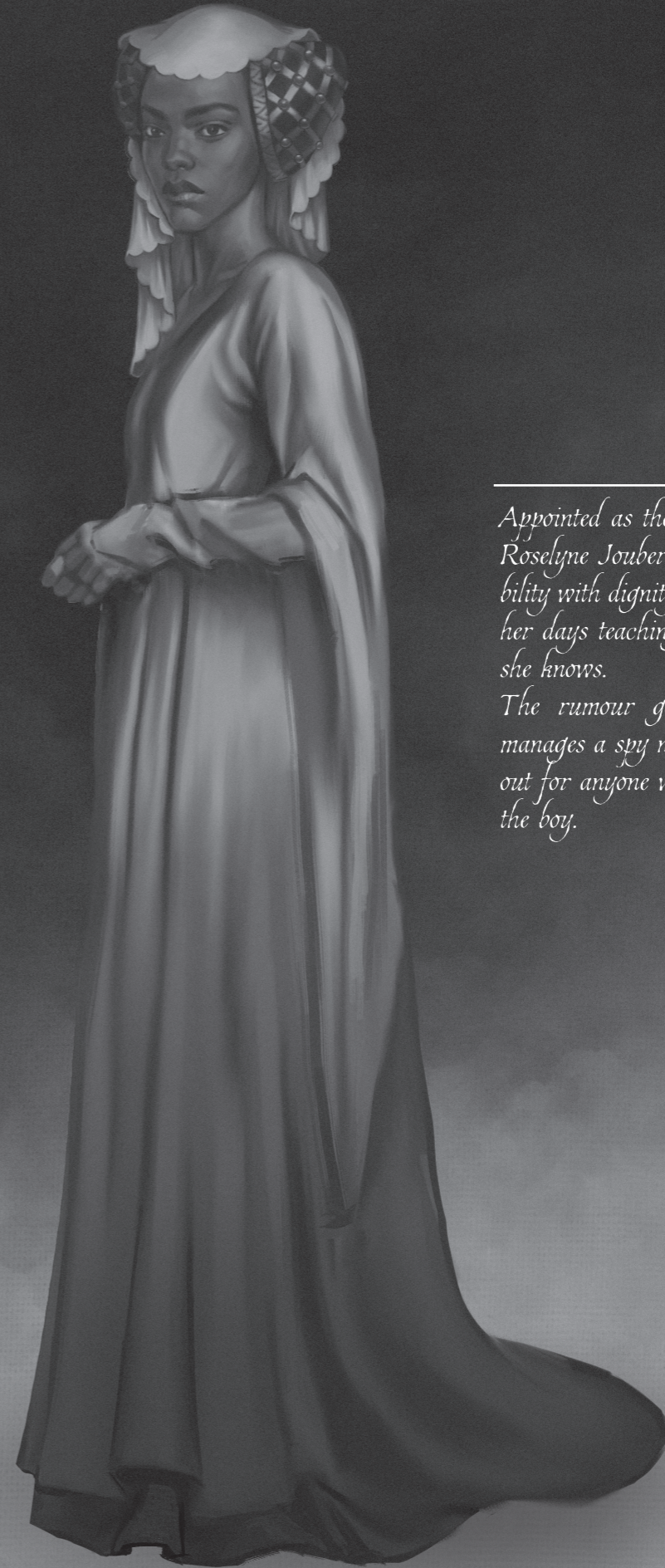


Sylviane Duchemin is somewhat of a mystery at court. She visits the city each year but rarely attends the festivities. Perhaps she's simply sentimental about the Angoulusien winters?



Marc Côté's influence at the court is unmatched. Some say he controls more than half of the Angoulusien trade. However, the man himself never talks about money, preferring instead to collect rumours rather than create them.

Natanaël is rarely seen outside the castle due to his poor health. Many wouldn't know just by looking at him that he is the elected Prince.



Appointed as the Prince's Le Gardien, Roselyne Joubert carries the responsibility with dignity and care. She spends her days teaching Natanaël everything she knows.

The rumour goes that Le Gardien manages a spy network, keeping an eye out for anyone who would seek to hurt the boy.



Many Angoulusien try their hardest to be invited to at least one of the countless parties. There is a rumour that among the richest of guests there is a mysterious circle that holds meetings under the castle grounds. Some say the leaders of the group are privy to the secrets of immortality and are very selective when inviting new members. Such talks are incredibly popular among the lower nobility, who are desperate for power that their dwindling fortunes cannot afford.

While the Angoulusien welcome the wealthy intrusion with open pockets, none of the visiting nobility is allowed in the Temple District, where the Order of Maab has prohibited all visitors with an exception of the poor and the needy. While it raised a couple of brows among the rich, who weren't known for being stingy with their donations, no one argued with the decision. Instead, they've commissioned a brand new church to be built just for them. This further pushed the rift between the well-off and the working class, who were already being forced outside of the city's walls with ever-growing living costs.

Although the visiting aristocrats are free to enjoy their spoils, they shouldn't forget that Angouluçon will have what is owed to her.



L'anneau, a secret lodge of aristocrats, had long ago made note of the strange and dark magic that surrounds the city. They have spent fortunes upon fortunes desperately seeking the truth about the Angoulusien history. But after decades of failed research and wasted gold they now turn their eyes to the Temple Of Ma'ab. One would think the oldest structure of the city would be an obvious target for their search, but nothing is quite as it seems. The ancient walls of the Temple are heavily guarded - and the Order isn't its only protector. It often feels as if the city itself shrouds the Temple in its old magic, discouraging any curious soul from digging in deeper.

It is clear, however, that the patron saint of Angouluçon was no ordinary man. Only the most devout members of L'anneau are privy to the curse of the old Ibban king Maab, whose heartbeat lulls the city into its blissful ignorance. The existence of an elder vampire, resting deep under the cobblestones, is a well-kept secret. Some of the aristocrats, who have acquired a taste for the old blood, seek to find Maab's tomb. What they plan to do with him is unclear, however. But one should always have a solid plan first before they attempt to disturb an old vampire, threatening the Angoulusien with what could be total annihilation.

So the secret society lies patiently in wait, waiting for the opportune moment to finally satiate their curiosity.



It's no surprise that the most influential Angoulusien often find themselves seduced by the cursed and potent blood of vampires.

It starts off as a brief flirtation with the promise of a new kind of power. But the overly ambitious soon find themselves addicted to the bitter taste.

The blood changes humans in the most ghoulish of ways - some are capable of controlling their affliction, while most fall victims to it and soon lose whatever humanity was left in them.

The vurdolaks, as the Order proclaimed the monsters, often roam the streets. They crave more of what they grew addicted to but have to settle for the stale blood of whatever poor mortal crosses their path.



Since the day the first settlers have built their camp around the Temple Of Ma'ab, the population of Angouluçon has always been a melting pot of people from all over Épilême.

Later on, once the Angouluçon was already an established point of interest on the map of the continent, the Galorian wars shook Épilême - the refugees from Serm, Galora, and Auberbéliard arrived at the city in droves, seeking a better future for themselves. Angoulusien, in turn, have welcomed the newcomers with mostly open arms. The Seremese merchants, who brought the gold and their grasp of the Épilême trade soon established the city's strong economical influence. The world-famous masons from Auberbéliard helped strengthen the city's defenses, while a group of Galorie architects has made Angouluçon into the City Of Spires that it is today. Their crowning achievement, however, is the city's castle, where the Council and the Prince reside today, managing the city's business.

But nothing is as perfect as it seems and the city's prospering trade and the influx of wealthy outsiders looking to get a taste of the Angoulusien success have eventually all had their toll on the city's workers and craftsmen. Many of the common folk have been forced outside of the city's gates by the rich and the powerful, who practically invaded the city's central district - the Iron Ring.



Many of those families, who had just a couple of centuries ago arrived at Angouluçon searching for a new home, were now stuck in the city's underbelly, scraping to survive. Nowadays the poor and the sick mostly stick to the Temple District, relying on the charity and protection of the Order Of Ma'ab, who have been overseeing the city long before the first settlers have arrived.

Some say the Order's saintly generosity isn't the only reason why the native-born Angoulusien are drawn to the district. Many of them claim that deep at night when the night covers the streets, the city whispers to her children, and her heartbeat can be felt most distinctly where the Temple stands. Whether just part of folklore or a peculiar trait of local terrain, the newcomers who visit the Temple District often mention feeling an unnerving hum and tend to avoid the area completely.

A devout member of Les Soeurs Sans Yeux, Yvette Geiger is nothing like her sisters. Under her humble demeanour hides an ambitious heart and Yvette dreams it beats along with the cursed rhythm of the city.



Jérôme might be blind now, but his eyes witnessed horrors he can never forget. Perhaps this fragile old sailor isn't quite who he seems?

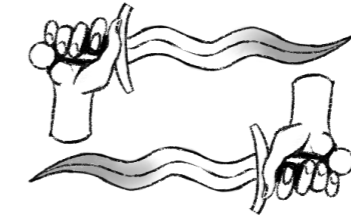


Théo was lucky enough to survive the vurdolak attack and often presents a cheerful personality to those who show concern towards him. Although one can't deny that his recovery is perhaps a bit too swift...



Ninon has always been proud of her steel nerves and good grip on reality. Her calm confidence might appear unsettling to some, but there's no one more reliable than the old midwife.





The Temple Of Ma'ab and its Order have been there long before the city itself was established. No one quite knows how the Temple was built or where the Knights came from, but the few academics who tried to trace the Order's history have been quite firmly discouraged by the Knight-Commander himself.

The knights claim that they dedicate their lives to Saint Ma'ab, a mysterious figure in Trizvezdzim, whose cult is rarely known outside of Angouluçon. It is believed that Ma'ab might be a contraction of "man of Ibba", an old kingdom that once existed where Angouluçon stands now. A common belief among the commoners is that the Order has achieved immortality through their devotion to Ma'ab - a notion that has been denied countless times by the knights themselves.



One of Angoulucon's most influential figures, Arwig leads the mysterious Order and its knights. The only member to ever reveal his face, he is rarely seen outside the Temple walls, spending his days in prayer to his patron saint. Once the city gates are shut, he leads the assault on the vurdalak lair, killing a number of beasts in the process. After the victory, his influence grows even further, earning him the title of the Protector. But with his new-gained popularity, he soon attracts unwanted attention - those in the city unhappy with the Order's command are drawn to uncover its terrible secrets.

Same as with the rest of the knights, Arwig's personal life remains a mystery. No one knows for sure where he comes from and whether he is even Angoulusien by birth. All that is known is that the Knight-commander is or was once married, as he carries a modest silver band on his left hand.





Leovigild is the oldest surviving knight of the Order. He's the only one who still remembers Ibba before Maab's disastrous rule. Surprisingly enough, this does nothing to falter his loyalty to the dead monarch.

Euric was the last to be embraced into the Order. Before the collapse of Ibba, he was Arwig's closest friend and companion. Centuries later his loyalties lie entirely with his Commander - so much so that very little of that old friendship remains.

Thidrek is the cruellest of the knights. He's often absent from the Temple, choosing instead to hunt in the sewers. One could say the old blood is the most potent with this knight, which in turn makes him the most capable warrior in the Order - much to Arwig's dismay.

Anouk often keeps to herself, preferring the company of the Les Soeurs Sans Yeux to her brothers. She is usually the voice of reason, albeit begrudgingly so, and the only knight of the Order whom Arwig considers his equal.



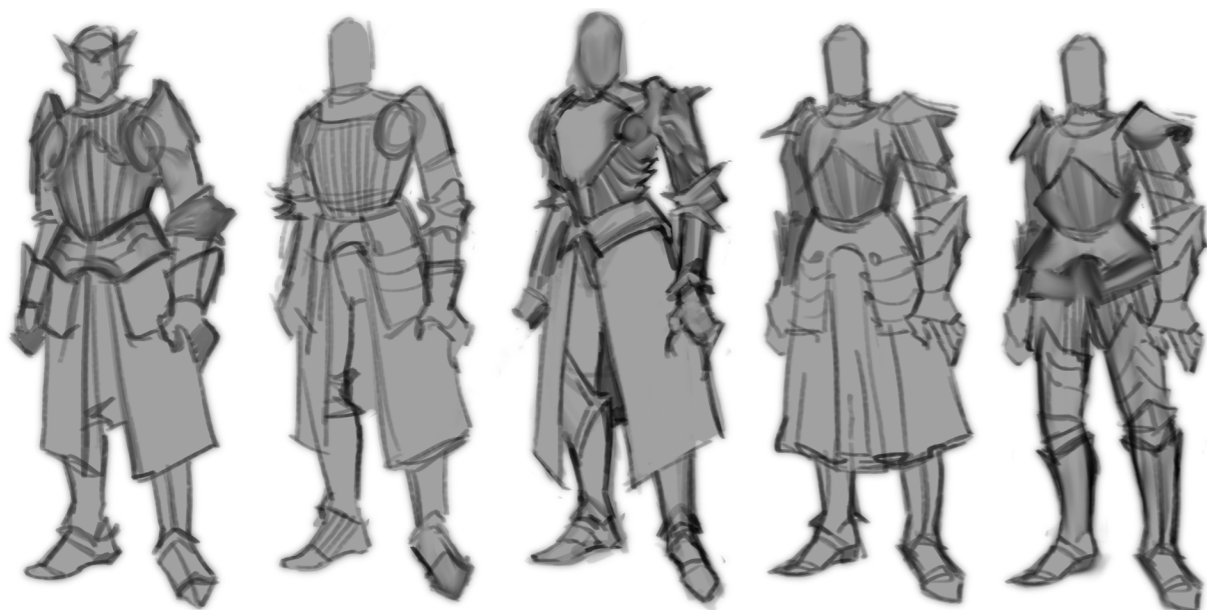
An assortment of masks that serve either to represent the position of the wearer or hide their identity from the curious onlookers.

The knights themselves never reveal their faces in public, explaining it by the oath they solemnly swear upon being knighted. The order is led by the Knight-Commander Arwig, who spends most of his days praying deep within the Temple. To the Council's disapproval, he rarely attends the meetings with the city's officials and never divulges the Order's interests.

The only ones allowed in the Temple's walls are Les Soeurs Sans Yeux - a sisterhood of women, who have all pledged their lives and their eyes to the Saint Ma'ab. They are responsible for the sick and the poor who turn to the Temple for help. Even Blind, the nuns are skilled healers and

While they mostly keep to themselves, rarely leaving the Temple District, the Order's influence over Angouluçon is undeniable, especially among the city's most unfortunate souls, who often turn to the Temple for help. Even the city's Council can't help but acknowledge the Order's authority.

When the gruesome murders flood the streets with blood, the Order orders the gates shut, putting the entire city on lock-down. This sparks anger from the city's upper class and the visiting aristocrats, who have arrived in Angouluçon for their annual celebrations.



Ibban armor variations, circa third era.





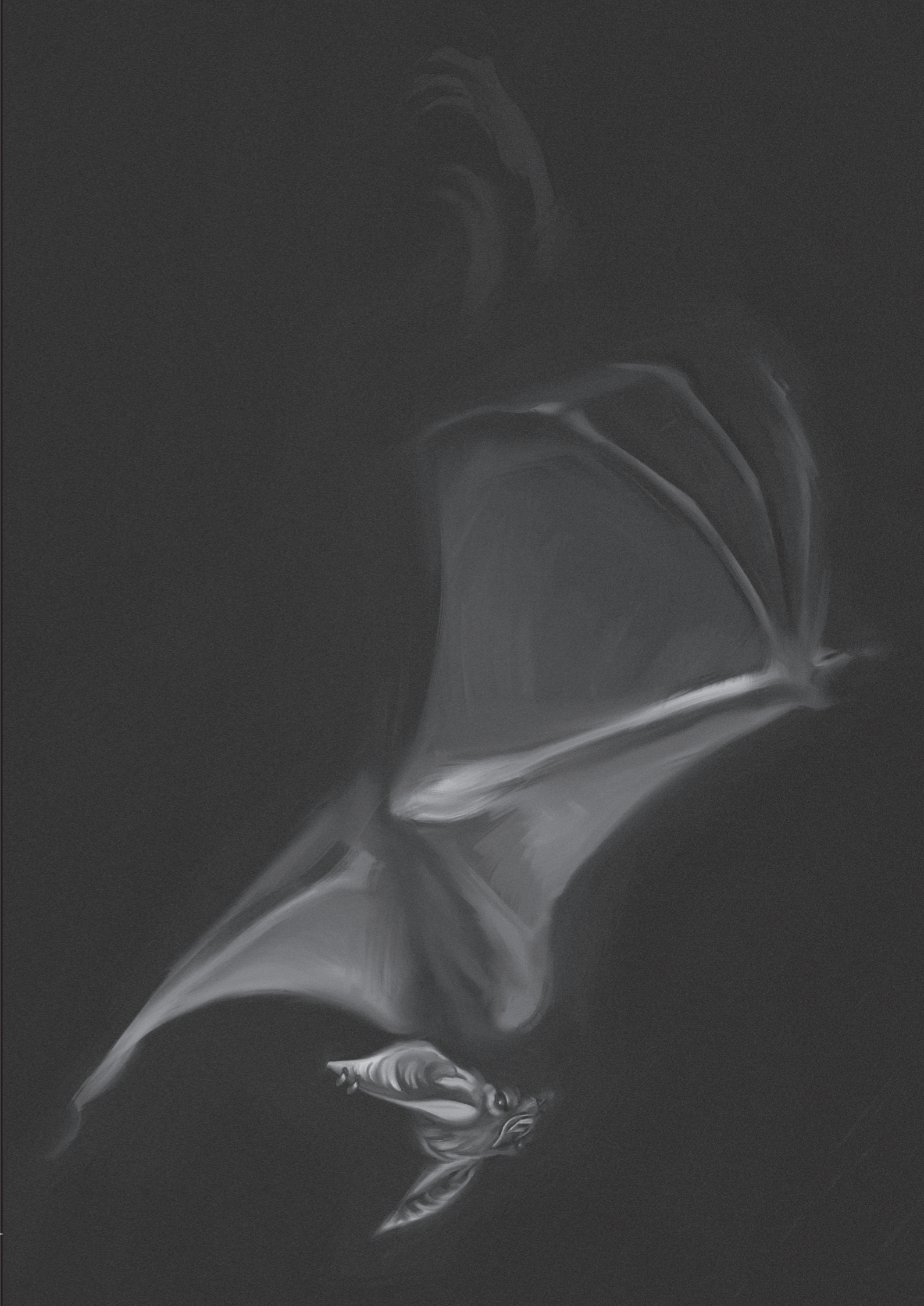
Deep within the rising spires of Angoulucon - under the cobblestone, and hidden among the woven tapestries of the castle chambers - lives a society of another kind.

Ever since men settled onto the buried ruins of the long-forgotten kingdom of Ibba, creatures of the night, young and ancient, would find their way to the tomb of Maab. The heart of the saint, that yet beats underneath the city to this day, calls for all who are afflicted by the curse. Addicted to its hum, vampires live among the Angolusien, weaving their own webs and plotting schemes to further their interests.

It is unclear how deep the influence of the damned runs. If you're perceptive enough, you might notice the subtle glow within the eyes of many a court politician. Take a stroll down the Temple district, the oldest part of the city, and you might feel uneasy at the hungry glances that will be thrown your way.

When the vurdolak attacks shake the city, many of the poor and the unfortunate descend deep within the old sewers. The rumour goes that an old crone offers shelter and protection to all, and the grateful Angolusien came to call her the Gutter Princess. The Order seems to regard the old woman with respect, although it is unclear if the notion is reciprocated.

One figure stands out above the others, however. Having arrived shortly before the gates were shut, a woman, who calls herself Inga, has been seen roaming the city's spires. Her purpose seems unclear, but one thing cannot be denied - the vurdolak attacks have been getting more and more brutal each day she lingers within the city's walls.





A mysterious woman seemed to have slipped into the city shortly before the gates were shut. She was reportedly seen lurking around the Angoulucon's numerous spires as if searching or spying on something. The rumours are that "Inga", as she calls herself, has paid several visits to the Angoulucon Castle.

Any attempt on issuing an order for her arrest under the suspicion of espionage has been firmly shut down by the Prince's Le Gardien - Lady Roselyn Joubert, who seems somewhat protective of the woman.

Any witness accounts of actually meeting "Inga" have been divided. Most who came into contact with her claim they never saw the woman. Others, on the other hand, show signs of fear at the mention of her.



*The cloak clasp in the shape of a crane -
the royal motif of the kingdom of Ibba.*

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