

SPREADING POISON

Scenario Elements

- A corrupt city watch captain
- The captain's thugs
- A vengeful merchant
- Poisoned meals
- A rare and highly illegal poison
- An absent apothecary

Easily adapted to

- Cyberpunk
- Grim and Gritty Fantasy
- Pulp
- Sci-fi
- Swashbuckling
- Traditional Fantasy
- Western

Tags

- (MR) city
- difficult choice
- intrigue
- investigative
- politics
- villain

A corrupt city watch captain has been running a protection racket, shaking down merchants and administering savage beatings if they don't pay up. Recently, a merchant rebuffed the captain's cronies, turning down their offer of "protection," and in retaliation they beat the man's wife to death. The merchant is out for vengeance—against the corrupt captain as well as the watch as whole for not bringing the captain to justice. Though not an apothecary himself, he's adept with poisons, and he has begun poisoning watch members.

There have been several poisonings already, and if there are too many more the city will find itself in a crisis, with not nearly enough watch personnel to keep the peace. There's no apparent motive for the crimes, and there are no connections between the watchmen; many are well-respected, and none were involved in killing the merchant's wife. Additional deaths can be used to modulate the pacing of the adventure, giving the PCs breathing room or raising the stakes.

This adventure opens with an investigation of a crime scene. The cause of death is obvious, as is the vector: the watchmen's dinner. The PCs can bring a sample to an apothecary to identify the poison; it turns out to be rare and highly illegal, calling all apothecaries in the city into suspicion.

Visiting a few of their shops will turn up an apothecary who recently disappeared. The merchant bought the poison from him in secret, and as soon as the apothecary saw how it was being used he fled the city. Clues in his shop lead the PCs to the guilty merchant. When the party arrives on his street, they find the captain and his thugs shaking down another shop. If they confront the watchmen, they're warned off; a fight may break out, but fighting the watch should have consequences.

When the PCs meet the merchant, he breaks down and confesses his crimes. He pleads with them to see his side of the story, and to help him bring the captain to justice—even if it means that he himself is executed for his crimes. The nature of the finale will depend on your group, but in general, a good-aligned group will want to see justice served across the board. Exposing the captain will force the watch to punish him for his crimes, but can also reveal corruption further up the chain of command (leading to follow-up adventures).