

# ARCA



**MANAGING EDITOR:**  
James Introcaso

**PRODUCTION AND  
PLAYTEST DIRECTOR:**  
Lars Bakke

**EDITORS:** Sadie Lowry,  
Hannah Rose

**AUTHORS:** Willy Abeel,  
Gwendolyn Marshall, Mike  
Seeley, Sally Tamarkin

**GRAPHIC DESIGN/  
LAYOUT:**  
Jen McCleary

**COVER ART:**  
Henrik Rosenborg

**TITLE LOGO:**  
Tom Schmuck

**ACCESSIBILITY  
CONSULTANT:**  
Chris Hopper

**COMMUNITY  
COORDINATOR:**  
John Champion

**CUSTOMER SUPPORT:**  
Bobby McBride

**SPECIAL THANKS:**  
Spencer Hibnick

**MCDM CONTRACT  
QA SENIOR TESTER:**  
Spencer Hibnick

**TESTERS:** Nathan Clark,  
Cassandra “Dig” Crary,  
Alecson de Lima Junior,  
James Dewar

**INTERIOR  
ILLUSTRATIONS:**  
The Big and The Small:  
*Gustavo Pelissari*  
Botanical Undead:  
*Nick De Spain*  
*The Afterparty:*  
Characters:  
Zuzanna Wuzyk,  
Environment: Faizal Fikri

**CARTOGRAPHY:**  
Miska Fredman

**MCDM IS:**  
Lars Bakke: Development &  
Production  
Jerod Bennett: Technology  
Grace Cheung: Art  
Matt Colville: Writing &  
Design  
Anna Coulter: Production &  
Operations  
Nick De Spain: Art &  
Art Outsource Management  
Jason Hasenauer:  
Art & Art Direction  
James Introcaso: RPG Line  
Developer

**PLAYTEST  
COORDINATORS:**  
Aaron Flavius West  
AJ Metzger  
Alex Hencinski

Bennoni Thomas  
Clayton Salamon  
Harley Kewish  
Janek Dalkowski  
Madeleine Bray  
Nick Pierson

**PLAYTESTERS:**  
Alex Adkisson  
Andrew Macdonald  
Anna Guimarães  
Avalon Willowbloom  
Brandon Alan McClenahan  
Casey Williams  
Daniel Lane  
Eric Sawchak  
Félix Gauthier-Mamaril  
Gabriel Sortica Reichmann  
Guilherme da Silva Moser  
Hazel Margaris  
Isaac  
Jaycey Reinhold  
Joel Russ  
Jolene Cotnoir  
Kristoffer Mejborn Eliasson  
Leonardo Vechi  
Luiz Felipe Kormann  
Meg Hanna  
Misrak Berhe  
Nasse Williams  
Nicholas Renzetti  
Nick Rice  
Nick Rowland  
Onslaught Six  
Phillip Ada  
Roman Penna  
Thomas Hill  
Vince Porter  
Vinícius Bellé  
William Pfeiffer

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# THE AFTERPARTY

A MYSTERY ABOUT LEAVING HOME ... AND NOT LEAVING HOME.

by Sally Tamarkin

PEOPLE HAVE A TENDENCY TO GO AWAY ... AND I MISS THEM. AND SOMETIMES ... I WISH I COULD JUST MAKE THEM STOP GOING AWAY.

—DAWN SUMMERS (*BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER*, “OLDER AND FAR AWAY”)

A farewell gala goes awry in *The Afterparty*, a mystery adventure about a twisted wish and a party no one can leave. The characters race against the clock—and a pernicious fey force—to prevent everyone from being trapped forever. This adventure is balanced for four 3rd-level characters, but the final encounter can be adjusted for bigger or higher-level parties (see “Confrontation with Mire”).

Before you get started, talk to your players about the safety tools you’ll use (I suggest checking out [RPG safety tools](#) and [RPG consent checklist](#)) and make sure everyone has the same expectations for the tone and themes of the adventure. *The Afterparty* includes a pivotal moment in which the GM (temporarily) restricts the players’ agency, more than is usual in typical tabletop roleplaying games. While the text provides suggestions for helping the players still feel like they’re driving the story, some players may not be comfortable with any removal of agency, which is totally fine—an alternative path is also provided (see “Alternate Path” under “A Time for Toasts”). Clearly explain this aspect of the adventure and ask your players how they feel about it and whether they’d prefer the alternate path.

## BACKGROUND

Aurelius Wray turns twenty at midnight tonight. Like their mother and their grandfather before them, Aurelius will set out at dawn on the first day of their twentieth year to begin what everyone expects to be a decorated military career, leaving behind Wray Manor and their beloved Wray Basin, the wetland just beyond their back door. Duke Cornelius Wray, Aurelius’ grandfather and only father figure, is throwing a farewell gala and invited his most influential friends and associates.

But one detail makes this farewell gala a little different than those of generations past: Aurelius dreads the idea of military service. They know they’ll miss their home and loved ones desperately, and Wray Basin has become the young noble’s favorite place to ride, collect plants, and think. While exploring the basin recently on their horse, Nibbles, Aurelius met a beautiful stranger named Fen, who introduced himself as a local birdwatcher and naturalist. In their conversation, the young noble confessed a wish to stay home—to never have to leave Wray Basin.

Unknownst to the naïve Aurelius, the enchanting birdwatcher is an illusory visage of the green hag Mire, who lives deep in the basin. Eager to sow chaos and misery, Mire delightedly interpreted the wish literally and cursed the farewell gala: no one at Wray Manor can leave.

# SYNOPSIS

The characters arrive at the party either as guests or as security-for-hire. In chapter 1, they gather information about Aurelius and Wray Basin, then discover that a magical compulsion has trapped everyone inside the manor. In chapter 2, the duke offers the characters a hefty reward for figuring out why no one can leave. The characters investigate the manor, question Aurelius, and break the curse. In chapter 3, the characters and Aurelius head into the swamp to confront the hag.

## NEXT-DAY OBLIGATIONS

No matter which hook you choose, have each player come up with at least one thing their character must do the next day—something they can't miss. Maybe they promised they'd deliver someone's medicine, provide help or protection, or meet with an informant. This commitment twists the knife when the characters realize they can't leave the manor. If you are playing this adventure as part of an ongoing campaign, the next-day obligations can be tied to the big bad—the clock is ticking and they have to get back out into the fight right away!

## KEY NPCs

The following NPCs play pivotal roles in solving the mystery.

### AURELIUS WRAY

Aurelius (they/them, age 20, human) is soft-spoken and contemplative. They spend their free time journaling or wandering Wray Basin, riding Nibbles, collecting plants, and watching for swamp birds. In most social situations, Aurelius is inattentive, preoccupied with a plant they recently collected or notes they need to make about their findings. But tonight they're more distracted than usual; their deployment is hours away, and they're terrified. Aurelius has only shared their fear with two people: their Aunt Frances (sister of the duke) and Fen.

### DUKE CORNELIUS WRAY

When his beloved daughter and son-in-law died, Cornelius (he/him, age 75, human) brought their child Aurelius to Wray Manor and raised them. The duke, while not unkind, is a stern disciplinarian who believes in tradition, upholding the family name, and teaching hard, character-building lessons. He is now retired from the military but considers his time in the service the most important and influential chapter of his life, one that primed him for a successful future. Success is all he wants for his directionless, daydreamy grandchild—well, that and for the Wray line to continue its tradition of decorated military service.



## ELLIOTT

Elliott (she/her, age 55, human) is a career butler who takes running Wray Manor seriously. She is snobby and looks down on anyone who isn't a noble. The butler doesn't dislike Aurelius, but feels burdened by their presence—they track in swamp mud, generate an astounding amount of laundry, and require the grooms to ready Nibbles for excursions at all hours. Elliott will be relieved when Aurelius leaves and she can reallocate the staff and resources to other things.

## FEN/MIRE

Like many a green hag, there's nothing Mire (he/him, hag) enjoys more than causing chaos, especially if that chaos leads to suffering. And nothing will cause such delicious suffering as using Aurelius to unwittingly bring chaos and fear into their own household. Once misery is rampant, Mire will magically harness it to corrupt the basin, warping the flora and fauna and twisting the land into a hellscape.

As Fen, he is a handsome young man around age twenty with floppy blond hair he tosses out of his face often, a smattering of freckles across his nose, and a lopsided smile. He is always barefoot, his pant legs rolled up to his knees so they don't get wet in the swamp, and he wears a fine cloak the color of chocolate.

When the illusion fades, Mire is tall and gaunt. His green-tinged skin is always a little damp, his coarse brown cloak becomes worn and tattered, and his laughter is cruel. Since taking up residence in Wray Basin, Mire amuses himself by making Aurelius suffer. His latest gambit is one of his favorites—tricking a mark into expressing a desire, then granting the wish in the most literal and demented of ways. The hag awaits the exciting finale of this dirty ploy, but he also enjoys how the curse undoes Aurelius.

## FRANCES WRAY

Cornelius's younger sister, Frances (she/her, age 72, human), is a free-spirited sailor who sails her pleasure craft, *Sappho's Embrace*, all over the world. Although she's always traveling, Frances stays in constant touch with Aurelius, stopping in ports just to pick up her mail and post letters to them. She thinks that her brother's fixation on the Wray military legacy is absurd, but has long given up on changing his mind and won't intervene on Aurelius' behalf. Still, she offers Aurelius love and support, and has come to town for their farewell gala.

## STORY HOOKS

Pick one of the following story hooks to guide the characters into the adventure.

**Manor Security.** The duke has hired the characters as guards for the evening for 50 gp each. The characters report to Elliott, the head of the household.

**Invited Guests.** Characters with one of the following backgrounds are invited to the gala as guests: charlatan, city watch, entertainer, or noble. Characters with other backgrounds are guests of invited characters. Alternatively, decide with the players why the characters have been invited (likely because they are local celebrity heroes).

## CHAPTER I: THE GALA

When the characters approach Wray Manor, read or paraphrase the following boxed text:

Welcome to the grand home of the Wray family: Wray Manor. It stands before a swampy wetland known as Wray Basin. Around the estate, the rich smell of wet earth fills the air. At the front door, a footman with a waterlily pinned to his chest welcomes guests with a wave and nod of his head into the manor's grand hall. When guests enter, they are handed beautiful ivory goblets of fragrant red wine. Jaunty musical stylings of a string band flow from the next room, as well as the clink of goblets, laughter and conversation, and the footfalls of household staff serving food and drink, emptying ashtrays, and aiding nobles.

The duke spared no expense for this event. He's uncorked his rarest vintages, served food and drink on dinnerware emblazoned with the Wray waterlily sigil, and hired the critically acclaimed string septet, Lyre, Lyre. His two hounds, Violet and Corky, are freshly groomed and wear kerchiefs with embroidered waterlilies around their necks as they greet guests for pets.

Toasts will begin at midnight, and in the tradition of Wray farewell galas, will continue until all those who wish to toast have done so. Once the toasts are done, likely around dawn, Aurelius will leave the manor with the guests following behind, who will see Aurelius off as the carriage takes them away, signaling the end of the party.



Elliott greets the characters in the grand hall (area M1). After orientation, the characters are free to explore the manor and mingle with key NPCs.

Unless noted otherwise, the guests use the **noble** stat block and the staff use the **commoner** stat block. Violet and Corky use the **mastiff** stat block.

## ELLIOT'S REQUESTS

The characters get the following orientation from Elliott, who tells them everything they should (and shouldn't) do at the party and provides the following instructions:

### TALK TO AURELIUS

Elliott requests that the characters speak to Aurelius so the young host is seen hosting as expected, saying:

“The child is more sullen than ever, gods know why, and I won't have them dulling what could be a fine affair on account of their moods. I presume they're not looking forward to the toasts—that child hates being the center of attention. Sometimes I wonder if they're a Wray at all.”

### ENGAGE MS. WRAY

The duke's sister, Ms. Frances Wray, is in town for the party and has been known to rile up otherwise polite guests with her rowdy, high-stakes poker games. Elliott asks the characters to engage her, which shouldn't be difficult—she is quite chatty—and steer her toward activities more befitting a party guest, sister of the duke, and person of her age, such as talking, dancing, or a harmless parlor game like Wray Wroulette (see “Appendix: Wray Wroulette”).

## OBSERVE THE RULES

Elliott asks the characters to obey the following rules during the party (and to enforce these rules if they were hired as guards).

**No Second Floor or Cellar.** Guests are free to move around the first floor, but the second floor and cellar are off-limits. If the characters were hired as security, Elliott adds, “This also goes for ... the help.”

**No Rear Gardens.** Elliott explains that the rear gardens about Wray Basin, and although the gardens were young Aurelius' favorite place, she discourages visiting them after dark, as “sojourns near the basin tend to be sodden, mushy affairs that result in great muddy messes.”

Characters who succeed on a DC 10 Insight (Wisdom) check know there's more to Elliott's instruction about the swamp than she lets on. With convincing roleplay or a successful DC 18 Persuasion (Charisma) check, which is made with advantage if the character making the check succeeded on the Wisdom (Insight) check, Elliott reveals that for the last ten or so days, she's been hearing noises from the swamp as she does her evening chores—giggling, laughter, some squealing. She told the duke about it, but he put off anything “nonessential” until after the gala.

Elliott doesn't know that the laughter and squealing come from Mire, who has been scrying through a special “swamp rock” he gifted to Aurelius when they met in Wray Basin. Aurelius keeps the pebble on the desk in their room, and through it, Mire has watched them, soaking in their despair as they pace, weep, and stare longingly out the window, dreading their departure.