

THE WEIGHT OF THE COURT

Adapted from the Reynard Cycle



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DESIGNER'S NOTE

This quest is adapted from the Reynard Cycle, a body of medieval allegorical fables originating in 12th-century France and the Low Countries. In the original texts, Reynard the Fox is a trickster, a liar, a seducer, and the most intellectually honest creature in a court full of pious frauds. He is summoned before King Noble to answer charges brought by Isengrim the Wolf, and the stories that follow concern themselves with the distance between justice and the law rather than with justice itself.

This quest uses those materials as a skeleton. The characters, the setting, and the specific plot are original. The source informs the moral architecture: no faction is clean, no resolution is without cost, and the player's choices carry weight precisely because there is no correct answer.

The quest is designed to be dropped into any feudal or pseudo-medieval setting. The animal characters can be rendered as anthropomorphic beasts, as humans bearing animal epithets, or as humans outright, and the politics will hold regardless of presentation. Compatible systems include D&D 5e, Pathfinder 2e, and any system with robust social mechanics.



BACKGROUND

Reynard is a fox of considerable reputation and considerable enemies. He is an advocate, a moneylender, a fixer of inconvenient problems, and an occasional guest at courts where his presence is tolerated because his usefulness outweighs his embarrassments. He has, over the course of a long career, seduced the wife of Isengrim the Wolf, stolen property that Isengrim claims as his own, humiliated Isengrim's son at a tournament through a proxy scheme, and, most recently, left Isengrim bleeding on a road outside the capital after a contract dispute turned violent.

Isengrim has finally done what everyone said he would do: he has brought charges before King Noble's court. The charges are theft, assault, defamation, and an older count of adultery that the statute of limitations has not quite extinguished. The trial is set for three days hence, and Reynard, who has been summoned, has characteristically not yet arrived.

The players enter the capital on the day before the trial. Both sides want something from them before the proceedings begin.

WHAT THE PLAYERS DO NOT KNOW YET

The Truth About Reynard

Reynard is guilty of most of what he is charged with. The theft was a repossession, as Isengrim borrowed money from Reynard three years ago, defaulted, and refused to acknowledge the debt. The assault was a response to Isengrim hiring men to ambush Reynard on the road. The adultery charge is accurate. Reynard did not start the war between them, though he has conducted it without mercy.

The Truth About the Court

King Noble is a man of considerable political intelligence whose moral energy has grown thin over a long reign. He wants this resolved without embarrassment to the crown, and the court has tolerated Reynard for years on the

The Truth About Isengrim

Isengrim is a bannerman of the court with legitimate grievances and a history of using the legal system as a weapon against anyone who has ever crossed him. He has brought these charges not because he expects justice but because a public trial will ruin Reynard's reputation regardless of the verdict. Three of his four witnesses are paid.

The Truth Nobody Knows

Among Isengrim's paid witnesses is a genuine one: a grain merchant named Aldric who was present when Reynard's men burned Isengrim's storehouse, an act carried out by one of Reynard's subordinates acting without authorization or

understanding that Reynard solves problems it cannot address through legal channels. A conviction would be politically convenient; an acquittal would be personally satisfying, as Noble dislikes Isengrim considerably, though it would carry costs of its own.

knowledge. Reynard has said nothing about this because acknowledging it would require explaining why he cannot control his own people.



QUEST HOOKS

There are several ways the players might become entangled in proceedings that are, on the surface, none of their business.

Hired by Reynard

Reynard arrives in the capital the evening before the trial, several hours after he was expected, and immediately begins looking for capable people who are not known to be in his pocket. He needs the paid witnesses identified and, ideally, turned before morning. He will pay generously and explains that he cannot use his own people for this because half the court is already watching them. He is charming, direct about the fact that he is guilty of some of what he is charged with, and declines to ask the players to do anything illegal, limiting his request to finding out what he already suspects.

Note: *Reynard as quest-giver subverts the typical patron dynamic. He is honest about his guilt, which makes him more trustworthy than almost everyone else in the scenario. Players who take his coin are complicit in his defense without necessarily endorsing him.*

Hired by Isengrim

Isengrim's steward approaches the players at their inn with an offer: a missing piece of evidence, a ledger that Reynard stole during the road incident, is believed to be somewhere in the capital. Find it before the trial and bring it to Isengrim's counsel, and there will be a reward. The steward does not mention that the ledger contains records Isengrim himself would rather not see entered into evidence, as he needs it precisely because he cannot predict what Reynard will do with it.

Note: *Isengrim's book is structurally deceptive without anyone lying outright. The ledger exists and Reynard does have it. What the players discover when they find it is the complication.*

Ordered by the Court

If the players have any standing with the local lord, a guild, or a religious institution, they may receive a quiet request from the King's chamberlain to observe the proceedings and report on anything that appears to be witness tampering or jury intimidation. The court already suspects both sides of misconduct and wants independent eyes. The players will be present as witnesses whose account carries weight, rather than as official investigators whose involvement would complicate the proceedings.

Drawn In by Accident

The players witness, the evening before the trial, Isengrim's men attempting to intimidate the grain merchant Aldric outside a tavern. Whether they intervene or merely observe, Aldric recognizes that they have seen something he would rather not have seen. He comes to them later that night, frightened, and offers them what he knows in exchange for protection through the trial and safe passage out of the capital afterward.



KEY LOCATIONS

The Court of King Noble

The great hall where the trial will be conducted: tiered galleries, a raised dais for the king, and an open floor where the advocates argue. The space is designed to be legible from a distance, with everyone visible to everyone else, which means it rewards performance and punishes hesitation in roughly equal measure. Words spoken here carry weight beyond the proceedings themselves, and factions in the gallery will remember what was said long after the verdict.

The Fox and Lantern Inn

Where Reynard is staying, having taken the entire upper floor under a false name that fools no one. The common room draws people who are either in Reynard's confidence or attempting to appear so, and information circulates quickly through it, though its accuracy varies considerably. The innkeeper, a badger named Grum, has heard enough over the years to be genuinely useful to the players if they earn his trust rather than simply asking.

Isengrim's Manse

A borrowed townhouse near the court district, loaned to Isengrim by a lord who owes him a favor. His witnesses are housed here under instruction not to leave until the trial. The house is guarded by local hire rather than retainers, which means the guards can be bribed or bluffed with appropriate credentials. The paid witnesses are in separate rooms and have not been told what the others will say.

The Archive Quarter

Where the ledger is believed to be hidden, in the keeping of a notary named Sibylle who does work for both sides of the dispute and has, over the years, developed the habit of declining to ask questions about the documents she holds. She is pragmatic rather than corrupt, and she will not hand over documents without a compelling reason, whether that takes the form of a Persuasion check, a legal argument, or evidence that her own name appears in the ledger.

NOTABLE NPCS

Reynard

A red-furred fox of middle age, lean and well-dressed in a way that suggests money spent deliberately rather than inherited, he speaks in complete sentences and listens with the careful patience of someone who has learned that most people reveal everything they intend to conceal if you simply give them time. He is guilty of most of what he is charged with and entirely unbothered by the fact, operating on a theory of justice that holds that Isengrim started the war between them and that the court is a stage on which one performs rather than an institution through which one seeks redress. He will tell the players only what is useful to him, though what he tells them will be true.

Aldric the Grain Merchant

A human of no particular standing who was present during the storehouse fire through misfortune rather than design and has spent the time since living with the weight of what he witnessed, uncertain whether the truth is more dangerous than silence. Courage is not his first instinct, though he is capable of it under the right conditions, and the right condition is someone making it credible that speaking will not cost him more than it saves. His testimony is the only piece of evidence in the trial that is both genuine and capable of changing the verdict outright.

Isengrim

A grey wolf, broad and formally dressed, carrying the manner of a man who has spent decades in rooms where his size was the first thing anyone noticed and who has never quite adjusted to rooms where it is not. His grievances against Reynard are genuine, his methods for pursuing them considerably less so, and his hatred is personal before it is legal, rooted in the public embarrassment Reynard has caused him before people whose opinion he values, which he considers a far worse injury than any theft of property. He is aware that three of his witnesses are paid and aware that this represents a risk, a calculation he made deliberately and intends to manage.

Sibylle the Notary

A precise, middle-aged woman who has made a career of knowing where documents are and keeping that knowledge to herself. She considers herself a neutral party, charges both sides equally for her discretion, and has maintained this position long enough to have accumulated leverage she has never needed to use. She has her own copy of the ledger, a fact she has told no one, and she will deal with whoever makes a persuasive case that dealing is in her interest.

King Noble

A lion of considerable political intelligence whose moral energy has grown thin over a long reign. He has no interest in convicting Reynard, whom he finds genuinely useful, and equally little interest in a public acquittal that would embarrass the court by suggesting it cannot hold its own officials accountable. What he wants is a third option, which is partly the reason he sent his chamberlain to engage independent observers, and he will reward whoever produces one.

Grum the Innkeeper

A badger of advanced years who has been running the Fox and Lantern long enough to have served Reynard's father on at least one occasion. His relationship with Reynard is commercial rather than personal, built on the recognition that Reynard is good custom and reliable enough in his payments to justify the occasional inconvenience. He knows more about the capital's informal networks than anyone who is not operating inside them, and he will share what he knows for the price of a meal and the understanding that he was never asked.



PLAYER ACTIONS

The players have the evening before the trial and the morning of the proceedings themselves to act. Below are the primary avenues of approach and what each produces. Read all sections before running the quest, as players may combine approaches or discover connections between them.

INVESTIGATING THE WITNESSES

Isengrim's manse holds three paid witnesses and one genuine one. If the players attempt to reach them through bribery, disguise, social infiltration, or a direct approach to the guards, the following applies.

CHECK	RESULT
Deception DC 13	The players pass as court officials verifying witness arrangements. They gain access to the witness wing and can speak to each witness privately.
Persuasion DC 15	A guard with misgivings about the arrangement can be turned. He will tell the players which witnesses arrived with Isengrim's steward and which came independently.
Investigation DC 12	Observation of the manse's exterior reveals that three of the four witnesses arrived in Isengrim's carriage. The fourth, Aldric, arrived alone on foot and has not been seen leaving.
Intimidation DC 17	A paid witness, once isolated, can be frightened into withdrawing testimony through the credible implication that the court already knows what they were paid, without any requirement for physical threat.

FINDING THE LEDGER

The ledger is in Sibylle's archive, though she will not confirm this without reason. It contains Isengrim's original loan record with Reynard, evidence of three payments Isengrim made before stopping, and, most damaging, a record of a payment Isengrim made to a man who was later arrested for arson. The connection between that payment and the storehouse fire is not explicit in the document itself and requires a DC 14 Investigation check, or an arcane or divine spell that detects intent, to make clear.

CHECK	RESULT
Persuasion DC 14	Sibylle agrees to confirm that she holds documents relevant to the case, but will not produce them without a legal argument or personal incentive.
Insight DC 12	The players sense that Sibylle is uncomfortable being asked about this particular ledger, in a way that suggests she has read it and understood what it contains.
History DC 15 or Investigation DC 16	Cross-referencing the ledger's arson payment with court records identifies the man as Isengrim's former steward, convicted four years ago and never publicly connected to Isengrim.
Arcana or Religion DC 13	Any spell or ability that detects truth or intent reveals that Sibylle has already made a second copy of the ledger for her own protection, a fact she has disclosed to no one.



SPEAKING WITH REYNARD

Reynard will meet with the players at any point and answer direct questions honestly, within the limits of what he has chosen to know. He is aware of the paid witnesses and aware of the ledger, though his knowledge of Aldric is incomplete: he knows a genuine witness to the fire exists somewhere in the capital, but has been unable to identify who it is or what they intend to say.

Note: *This conversation is the moral center of the preparation phase. Reynard is a careful narrator rather than a truthful one, in the sense that he will confirm his guilt on charges where he is guilty, contextualize each charge, and tell the players what he wants from them. Whether context constitutes justification is a question the players will need to answer for themselves.*



THE TRIAL

The trial is a structured social encounter rather than a skill challenge, proceeding in three phases: the opening statements, the examination of witnesses, and the verdict. The players can intervene at each phase depending on what they have learned and what they have done.

PHASE ONE: OPENING STATEMENTS

Isengrim's advocate presents the charges in full. Reynard, who is representing himself, responds with a brief statement that acknowledges certain facts, disputes others, and manages somehow to make Isengrim sound petty for bringing them to trial in the first place. The court settles into an uneasy uncertainty while Noble watches both parties with the careful attention of a man who has not yet decided what he wants to happen.

Player intervention at this phase is limited: they may pass notes to either party, create distractions, or speak if they have been granted standing as witnesses. A DC 13 Persuasion check from a player with court standing can introduce a point of procedure that forces a delay, buying time for any investigation still outstanding.

PHASE TWO: WITNESS EXAMINATION

This is where the preparation from the previous evening pays off. Each witness the players have turned, frightened, or replaced with Aldric changes the course of the examination. Run each witness appearance as a brief social encounter with consequences.

CHECK	RESULT
Paid witness unprepared	Gives vague testimony that Isengrim's advocate struggles to sharpen. Investigation DC 11 from any character in the gallery reveals inconsistencies in the account.
Paid witness turned	Recants under examination. The court erupts. Isengrim's advocate scrambles to recover while Noble calls a recess to restore order.
Aldric testifying freely	Confirms that the fire was set by Reynard's man acting without Reynard's order, which collapses the assault charge entirely and visibly rattles Isengrim's camp.
Ledger entered into evidence	The arson connection becomes a matter of public record. Isengrim finds himself answering questions rather than pressing them, and the crowd in the gallery begins to shift.

PHASE THREE: THE VERDICT

Noble delivers a verdict based on the weight of evidence presented and, frankly, on what is most politically manageable. The players' actions during the previous phases determine which of the four endings is available.

ENDINGS

Ending One: Reynard Condemned

If the players did nothing, took Isengrim's coin and declined to investigate further, or failed to turn any witnesses or produce the ledger, the paid witnesses hold and the charges carry. Reynard is convicted on the assault and theft counts and sentenced to exile, which he accepts with visible amusement before departing the city within the hour, having arranged before the verdict was read for a significant portion of Isengrim's outstanding debts to be called in simultaneously. Isengrim wins the trial and immediately begins discovering what winning costs.

Note: *The ending that looks like a failure has more to it than the verdict suggests. Reynard was guilty. The court functioned, however imperfectly. The consequences for Isengrim are delayed but real, which rewards players who pay attention to what happens after the verdict rather than treating it as the conclusion.*

Ending Two: Reynard Acquitted

If the players turned the paid witnesses, produced the ledger, or secured Aldric's testimony, the charges collapse. Reynard is acquitted on all counts, and Isengrim is censured for witness tampering and ordered to repay the legal costs. He does not accept this quietly: within a week, two of the turned witnesses are found to have left the city very suddenly, and a third has reconsidered his statement. The court declines to reopen the case. Reynard sends the players a generous payment and a brief note: *'The court is a stage. You understood that.'*

Note: *This ending rewards thorough play without pretending that justice was served in any clean sense. Reynard was guilty of certain things he was acquitted of, and the system bent around the evidence rather than toward the truth.*

Ending Three: The Court Destabilized

If the ledger's arson connection is made public and tied to Isengrim clearly enough that Noble cannot ignore it, the trial stops being about Reynard. An investigation is opened into Isengrim, the proceedings are suspended, and Reynard is released pending the resolution of the larger inquiry. The outcome satisfies no one: Reynard walks free without a verdict, Isengrim faces scrutiny without a conviction, and Noble is furious at whoever complicated what should have been a manageable afternoon. The players have made enemies on both sides of the dispute and have, in all probability, come closest to doing something genuinely just.

Note: *This is the hardest ending to achieve and the most thematically honest, as well as the most disruptive to the players' relationship with the court, which carries consequences through any ongoing campaign.*

Ending Four: The Private Settlement

If the players bring Reynard and Isengrim into the same room with evidence that neither of them wants made public, a private settlement becomes possible. Both parties agree to drop all claims, repay certain debts, and treat the matter as closed. The trial is called off on a procedural pretext. Noble is grateful. The players collect payment from both sides and the trust of neither. Aldric gets his safe passage out of the capital. The truth is buried, cleanly and permanently, and no one goes to exile or prison.

Note: *Settlement is the politically successful ending and the morally murkiest. The players resolved the dispute without resolving the underlying questions. This is appropriate, as The Reynard Cycle never resolves them either.*



QUEST REWARDS

Rewards vary significantly by ending and patron. The following represent possibilities rather than guarantees.

From Reynard (if acquitted or settled)

- Substantial gold payment, 400-600gp depending on the complexity of assistance rendered
- A letter of introduction to one of Reynard's contacts in another city, worth considerably more than it appears
- Reynard's personal seal, which opens certain doors and creates complications at others

From Isengrim (if convicted or settled)

- Payment for retrieval of the ledger, if delivered as agreed
- A land grant in a territory where Isengrim has influence, politically valuable and practically complicated in equal measure
- Nothing, if the players acted against him, though retaliation will not come immediately

From the Court (if stability maintained)

- A formal commendation from the King's chamberlain, useful as social currency in future dealings with the court
- Access to the court archive for one inquiry, which is how the chamberlain settles debts of this kind
- An invitation to return, as Noble remembers people who make difficult problems manageable

Quest Items

- Reynard's Seal: grants advantage on Deception checks in trade or financial contexts
- The Ledger: functions as blackmail material against Isengrim in any future social encounter
- Sibylle's Copy: a duplicate of the ledger that Sibylle will hand over in exchange for safe passage out of the city, should the situation deteriorate around her

LINGERING CONSEQUENCES

Whichever ending the players reach, the following conditions persist into any ongoing campaign.

- Reynard keeps careful accounts of people who helped him and people who chose otherwise. He is patient rather than vindictive, but the accounting is thorough and patient.
- Isengrim has allies within the court who will take note of the players' involvement, a development that carries no immediate danger and becomes significant the moment the players need something from the court.
- Aldric, if protected through the trial, becomes a reliable contact in the grain trade, with working knowledge of which merchants are solvent, which are fronts, and which roads are currently safe.
- Noble will extend no further invitations to players who did not serve his interests, though he will extend no obstruction either. Having been present in the court is a different condition from never having been there, and it will matter eventually.