

Marner: Taxing Times

A One-Round Dungeons & Dragons[®] Living Greyhawk[™] Regional Introductory Adventure set in Ratik

Version 1.0

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Marner may be the capital of a Nation in crisis, but the wheels of bureaucracy grind ever-onwards, and now that the harvests are in, the tax collectors are sniffing around, demanding the Archbaron's share.

The city is packed with people, paying tithes, trading harvests, purchasing supplies for the winter, or simply avoiding their duties. But can you avoid them all? For PCs without a sense of Duty, one will be issued on arrival.

A one-round Regional Introductory adventure set in Ratik for characters level 1 only (APL2).

Resources for this adventure [and the authors of those works] include RTK1-04 The Sparkling Gem of the North [Dan Ramberg and Andy Rothstein], RTK2-01 A Many-Faceted Gem [Andrew Rothstein], and the entire Ratik Website [various authors, particularly James Dempsey and others]. Questions, queries and complaints may be directed to Ben Kemp at benk@vurt.net

Based on the original DUNGEONS & DRAGONS[®] rules created by E. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson and the new DUNGEONS & DRAGONS game designed by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, Skip Williams, Richard Baker, and Peter Adkison.

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If you are planning on playing this adventure, stop reading now. The rest of the information in this adventure is for the DM only. If you read farther than this section, you'll know too much about its challenges, which kills the fun. Also, if you're playing this adventure as part of an RPGA-sanctioned event, reading beyond this point makes you ineligible to do so.

Preparing for Play

To get the most out of this adventure, you need copies of the following D&D rule books: *Player's Handbook*, *Dungeon Master's Guide*, and the *Monster Manual*.

Throughout this adventure, text in ***bold italics*** provides player information for you to paraphrase or read aloud when appropriate. Sidebars contain important information for you, including special

instruction on running the adventure. Information on nonplayer characters (NPCs) and monsters appear in abbreviated form in the adventure text. Full information on NPCs and monsters are given in Appendix 1. For your convenience, that appendix is split by APL.

Along with this adventure you'll find a RPGA Session Tracking sheet. If you're playing this adventure as part of an RPGA-sanctioned event, complete and turn in this sheet to your senior GM directly after play. You'll also find a LIVING GREYHAWK Adventure Record (AR).

LIVING GREYHAWK LEVELS OF PLAY

Because players bring their own characters to LIVING GREYHAWK games, this adventure's challenges are proportionate to the modified average character level of the PCs participating in the adventure. To determine this modified Average Party Level (APL) follow the steps below:

1. Determine the character level for each of the PCs participating in the adventure.
2. If PCs bring animals that have been trained for combat (most likely dogs trained for war), other than those brought by virtue of a class ability (such as animal companions, familiars paladin's mounts) or the warhorse of a character with the Mounted Combat feat, use the sidebar chart to determine the number of levels you add to the sum of step one. Add each character's animals separately. A single PC may only bring four or fewer animals of this type, and animals with different CRs are added separately.

Mundane Animals Effect on APL		# of Animals			
		1	2	3	4
CR of Animal	1/4 & 1/6	0	0	0	1
	1/3 & 1/2	0	0	1	1
	1	1	1	2	3
	2	2	3	4	5
	3	3	4	5	6
	4	4	6	7	8
	5	5	7	8	9
6	6	8	9	10	
7	7	9	10	11	

3. Sum the results of step 1 and 2, and divide by the number of characters playing in the adventure. Round up to the nearest whole number.
4. If you are running a table of six PCs, add one to that average.

Throughout this adventure, APLs categorize the level of challenge the PCs face. APLs are given in even-numbered increments. If the APL of your group falls on an odd number, ask them before the adventure begins whether they would like to play a harder or easier adventure. Based on their choice, use either the higher or the lower adjacent APL.

APL also affects the amount of experience and gold a PC can gain at the end of the adventure. If a player character is three character levels or more either higher or lower than the APL at which this adventure is being played, that character receives only one-half of the experience points and gold for the adventure. This simulates the fact that either the PC was not challenged as much as normal or relied on help by higher-level characters to reach the objectives.

Furthermore, a PC who is four or more levels higher than the highest APL supported by the adventure may not play the adventure.

LIVING GREYHAWK adventures are designed for APL 2 and higher. Four or five 1st-level characters may find the challenge of an APL 2 adventure difficult. Suggest the following to these groups to help increase their chances of success:

1. Enlist a sixth player.
2. Advise characters to buy riding dogs to help protect them and fight for them.

TIME UNITS AND UPKEEP

This is a standard one-round regional Introductory adventure, set in Ratik. Characters from Ratik pay one (1) Time Unit per round, while all other characters pay two (2) Time Units per round.

Adventurer's Standard Upkeep costs 12 gp per Time Unit. Rich Upkeep costs 50 gp per Time Unit. Luxury Upkeep costs 100 gp per Time Unit. Characters that fail to pay at least Standard Upkeep will retain temporary ability damage until the next adventure, must buy new spell component pouches and healer's kits, and may suffer other in-game penalties (or possibly gain in-game benefits) as may be detailed in this adventure.

A character that does not pay for at least Standard Upkeep may also avoid the above-described penalties by living off the wild. If the character possesses four or more ranks in the Survival skill and succeeds at a DC 20 Survival check, the character will heal temporary ability damage as if he or she paid for Standard Upkeep, may refill spell component pouches and healer's kits, and may restock up to 20 arrows or bolts if the character has at least four ranks in Craft

(bowmaking). The player is allowed to Take 10 on this roll.

More information about Lifestyle and Upkeep can be found in the "Lifestyle and Upkeep" section of Chapter 3 of the *Living Greyhawk Campaign Sourcebook*.

ADVENTURE BACKGROUND

Marner, as the capital of the Archbarony of Ratik, is a bustling metropolis with many competing and sometimes conflicting interests. While some basics of Ratik and Marner have been developed, as one of the first new Introductory Modules for the Ratik region, there is only so much 'background' already existing.

PCs are in Marner for their own reasons, and find the place very crowded as it is Tax time, and many of the farmers/country folk have come into town to pay their taxes and make their annual purchases. This is an annual festival/event post-harvest, as the taxes are collected from the recent harvest, and people spend their new-found cash stocking up for the winter.

The module also touches on the following current social issues:

- The conflict between the Guilds and the Ratik Crown and its attendant aristocracy. The guilds resent the authority of the crown and its control on their activities, and the Crown feels the need to control the worst excesses of 'rampant business interests' that sometimes work at odds to the national interests. More than that, it has also become a historic conflict, with the two groups opposing the other 'because they always have'. This tension is shown in the Guilds manoeuvring the PCs to embarrass the Baroness' guard, and the actions of the guild-'sponsored' Cleric in eliminating non-guild artisans, and attempting to steal from an aristocratic house.
- The general distrust that many of the general public have for the current state of the Ratik 'royalty'. This includes the perceived weakness of the Archbaroness after the loss of her husband Alain, the 'outside influences' on the Archbaroness from her own family in the Bone March, and the invalid condition of Baron Lexnol.

ADVENTURE SUMMARY

At the start of **Encounter 1** the PCs are in Marner for their own reasons, and find the place very crowded as it is tax time. As a result, PCs can

only find lodgings in one particular inn/tavern, the Baron's Beard. One evening they are eating dinner at the same table (space being at a premium), and some drunk Baronial Guards (not the Marner Constabulary) pick on them all for a fist-fight. Being adventurers, they should clean them up handily. Astute PCs may detect possible signs of charm person used on the guards.

However in **Encounter 2**, the PCs are then immediately arrested by the Marner Constabulary (using overwhelming force, hopefully no fight involved) and taken to the High Castle. The Guilds (who pay for the Constabulary as a city-wide defence force and 'police force') do this to score points against Sir Ardent Bentner, Head of Security for Marner. They hope to prove that Sir Ardent can't control his guards, whereas the Constabulary can capture people who can take out his guard patrol (nevermind that the guards were drunk and off duty, and the guilds had charmed them into starting the fight, rumour will ignore those bits).

The PCs are brought before Sir Ardent, who is in a flap due to tax time, and needing all the guards he can get hold of. While he is sorting out the PCs' situation (he is called to the case personally due to the 'political' nature of the allegations) Sir Ardent receives instructions from the Archbaroness and he is even more short of men. Seeing an opportunity in front of him, the PCs are immediately pressed into temporary service, ostensibly to pay 'recompense' for the damages they caused, but depending on the PCs' actual actions in the Tavern, he will probably offer to pay for their time. PCs have little choice, but they do have some (they could do 1TU jail time).

During **Encounter 3**, the PCs are sent to 'remind' several individuals that they are late with their taxes. One or two are minor guildsmen, who are extremely reluctant to pay their taxes for political reasons (they are trying to test the Archbaroness' resolve). One or two refuse to pay tax to 'that upstart chit of a little foreigner girl' and want it to go to Archbaron Lexnol directly, and others insist that they're keeping it 'until Alain gets back' so they can pay him themselves. Most of these irate taxpayers can be placated with diplomacy of one flavour or another, and if the PCs can't convince them then it's not their job to recover the money, merely to note the refusal and move on. If the PCs really stuff up any of the negotiations, they are attacked by the taxpayer's relatives or hired goons.

The PCs may also wish to investigate their attackers, and the happenings at the Baron's Beard as part of an optional **Encounter 4**. This

may give them some idea what happened, but will lead to a thorough dead-end in terms of finding the culprit. Fortunately, fate places their nemesis firmly in the PCs threatened area.

Another visit uncovers direct evidence of 'genuine illegal evil-doings' in **Encounter 5**. The PCs come across a shopkeeper who hasn't paid because he and his staff have been killed and raised by a necromancer who is using their corpses to dig underground into the treasure vault of an adjacent minor noble house. The PCs can find clues that the merchant was resisting one of the stronger guilds and that this may have been a move to eliminate some opposition, and either leave a message for other outsiders or score one against the nobles.

After putting the shopkeeper and his former employees out of their misery, the necromancer Cleric of Vecna returns to the shop and surprises the PCs in **Encounter 6**. After defeating her, they may recognise her as the person who instigated the initial fight in the Baron's Beard, which should bring up many more questions than it answers.

The PCs should eventually cross off all the non-payers on their list of taxpayers and return to Sir Ardent with a job at least partly well done. They receive congratulations all round, payment, and the possibility of a future good word from Sir Ardent, although he is not one to hand out his favours lightly.

PREPARATION FOR PLAY

As an intro, minimal preparation should be needed. GMs may wish to know why PCs are in Marner, although there is little need to make up an excuse for an adventurer to be in the capital – some of the better and safer mercenary contracts are arranged here, particularly protecting trips north through the Timberway or south by boat. Any PC who is a resident or native of Marner may circumvent certain local issues, or at least deserve a +2 circumstance bonus to any Knowledge (Local) checks during the module. They are also likely to know at least the basics about Sir Ardent Benter.

Due to the chaos at Tax time, the PCs were not prevented from bringing anything unusual into the city – wolf companions and the like would normally be looked on with trepidation, but if it wasn't for sale the guards and clerks wouldn't have had time to even glance at it. However, animal companions may quickly escalate Encounter 1 from non-lethal to lethal, and should therefore be noted by the GM, and the Player

subtly warned at the start of the fight about the inability of most animal companions to do subdual damage.

INTRODUCTION

The PCs are at an Inn, the Baron's Beard. This is located some distance from the professional and market areas, near the entrance to the Archbaroness' castle and a short distance from the rich areas, though it is itself reasonably priced.

Marner. Gem of the North, Capital of the Archbarony of Ratik, city of a thousand frozen stories, and currently, a very busy place. The short and frantic growing season in Ratik is traditionally followed by an even more frenzied attempt to move the freshly harvested and gathered goods to the people who want them, and to use the money so gained purchase the necessities for the winter. Sadly, with this massive movement of money comes taxes, as inevitably as the approaching snows of winter.

While this would not normally impinge on the activities of adventurers, the influx of people to Marner to buy, sell and trade (and be taxed on it) has severely limited the accommodation in the city. The only available rooms you could find were in the Baron's Beard, a surprisingly up-market establishment near the gates to the Archbaroness' castle, and sandwiched between the market quarter and the band of richer properties that encircle the baronial Castle.

Fortunately, the rates were not overly high, and the rooms included a hearty meal in the price. It is this free stew, bread and mulled wine that brings your disparate group together at the one available table this evening.

Any PCs who are local residents of Marner are likely to be at the Baron's Beard to either meet with adventurers, or to partake of their reasonable dinner prices. One reason the prices are so fair is that the Baron's Beard is the main watering hole for the Baronial Guard. The Archbaron's personal guard manage the Baronial affairs in the city, dealing with property issues, city security and, at the moment, taxes. Being so busy, the Beard is not as full at it sometimes is, and makes a good place for the savvy local to frequent.

To quote the cliché "PCs should describe themselves, and be given a chance to interact." Players should know what this bit is for.

Any PCs actively curious about their surroundings can be informed of any of the following that you as a GM feel appropriate.

- The Baron's Beard is a traditional middle-class drinking and dining establishment. It seems fairly clean and tidy, though of quite some age. The food and drink are pedestrian, but arrive in quantity for a fair price.
- The patrons are mixed, but seem to include a group of at least half a dozen military types in tabards, probably off duty by the way they are putting back the ale. A DC 12 Knowledge Local (Nyron and Environs) check (with a +2 for locals) reveals the uniforms to be Baronial Guardsmen, if a PC specifically asks. The senior guardsman is Sergeant Brak Mastrik, bully and thug, but dangerously charming (DC 20 Knowledge Local (Nyron and Environs) check to recognise him specifically).
- Other patrons include a few small groups of merchants, one dwarf trader, and two 'single women', a stunning blonde and a thin raven-haired lass, talking to the military types.
- The staff includes the ever-cheerful bartender Decan Cooperson, his teenaged daughter Salyarista and her friend Grena Talaster (barmaids) and a female half-orc called Sulina, hired recently to replace a sick barmaid. Be careful not to draw attention to Sulina, who is actually Hioesien, the Cleric of Vecna who is going to cause the PCs so much trouble (see Appendix 1).

Decan Cooperson: male human Commoner 4 (Knowledge Local (Nyron and Environs) +5).

Salyarista Cooperson: female human Commoner 1.

Grena Talaster: female human Commoner 1

Hioesien: female half orc Cleric of Vecna 3; hp 21; Appendix 1.

Sergeant Brak Mastrik: male human Warrior 1; hp 13; Appendix 1.

Baronial Guards: male human Warrior 1 (5); hp 13; Appendix 1.

ENCOUNTER 1: FISTICUFS

Once the PCs have settled in and interacted to their satisfaction, things get serious.

Sulina (Hioesien) casts charm person from a scroll on the senior Guardsman, Sergeant Brak Mastrik. She does this from the kitchen doorway, with full cover from the PCs and the noise of the bar to cover the verbal components (i.e. unless something very unusual is going on, the PCs don't

even get a roll to notice it). She then approaches Brak and convinces him that the PCs have been ogling her and that he should take his patrol and 'teach them a lesson'. The PCs should be oblivious to this unless they are paying specific attention to one or the other, but they may wish to investigate later.

Brak gathers his fellow guardsmen (who are of a similar macho bent to Brak, and largely under his thumb) and approaches the PCs.

The noise of the bar quietens somewhat, as a wall of flesh moves between you and the rest of the bar. The six uniformed and well-muscled men who were previously at the bar now loom over you in a professionally menacing manner. Before any remarks can form, he slurs out "We don't like your kind'a freaky pervert 'round here!"

Brak is quite intoxicated, as are his associates, and will slur his words and stagger, but is still capable of fighting properly. PCs should attempt a DC 25 Sense Motive check to notice that Brak is under the effect of a Charm spell.

Brak and his men will continue to randomly insult and abuse the PCs until the PCs swing first (which is the excuse he's looking for) or somebody says something he could possibly find insulting (and he'll try hard). If the PCs are insufferably calm, he will turn to walk away, and as soon as the PCs look back at their drink he will turn again, fling his drink at a PC, then leap to the attack.

APL 2 (EL 3)

Guardsmen (including Brak Mastrik) (6): male human Warrior 1; hp 11; 11; 11; 11; 11; 11; Appendix 1.

The guards wear tabards over their padded armour, obviously in a uniform, bearing the colours of the Archbaron of Ratik. They have left their swords at the guardhouse, but carry the saps they use to subdue recalcitrants. All appear to be well-built, nondescript Ratik natives. Brak is distinctive only for his CHA 14 and the fact that the others seem to defer to his leadership.

Tactics: Tactics aren't these guys' strong point generally, and heavy intoxication makes it a non-event. They all have a penalty of -2 to Int, Wis and Cha (included in their stats) from their heavy alcohol consumption. They will separate their attacks with at least one each per PC, to get them all involved. They will take advantage of flanking only when it happens by accident, and not try

anything fancy. However, they will all switch their attacks immediately to anyone who begins doing lethal damage. If the lethal damage continues they will surrender once Brak and 2 other of their number are down. If no one upgrades the fight to lethal they fight to the last man (they're guards, they're in the right in their drunken minds).

Note that PCs unequipped with Saps (with which to do non-lethal damage) can take them easily from downed guards, and as a Martial weapon, most fighter-types are already proficient with them.

If the PCs are *obviously* unequipped to handle these NPCs (eg 4 characters with no spells and minimal combat ability), don't stress – play it, and enjoy winning as a GM for once. The saps mean that the PCs won't die, and win or lose the PCs get offered the same job in the end.

A map of the bar is included at Appendix 3. The kitchen entrance leads to a crowded, hot and steamy kitchen inhabited by Decan's wife Hekara, a mean, spiteful and grumpy shrew who stays in the kitchen. She is, however, offended by anyone entering, and will lay into them with a well-wielded frypan from surprise (use the stats for the guards in Appendix 1).

Treasure: None significant beyond their equipment listed in Appendix 1. Besides, all their equipment is Guard issue, and the PCs won't be keeping it anyway. The normal guard equipment is a Chain shirt and longsword with the sap as a backup, but they are off duty and can only take the padded armour undershirt and sap home. They are still wearing their tabards over the top, as this affords them a measure of respect in the streets.

Development: Hioesien will watch quietly from the bar, moving to the kitchen when the fight is over so as not to be visible when the Constabulary arrive. PCs are not supposed to see her, let alone fight her.

The other patrons all keep well away from the fight. The bartender will not interfere – he has a good relationship with the Guard sergeants and knows that someone will be paying for any damage.

PCs running away during the fight will be confronted by the Constabulary waiting outside the inn. No matter how suspicious this may be, the PCs are arrested based on testimony of the other patrons. If they genuinely avoided combat desperately, they may be either taken to the Castle as witnesses, or possibly released to their own devices. You're the GM, improvise, but try and keep them together.

PCs will not have long before the next encounter begins, but any PCs casting Detect Magic before being removed from the bar will detect an aura of Enchantment on Brak Mastrik.

ENCOUNTER 2: SENTENCED TO ... ACCOUNTANCY?

The PCs should get only a few rounds to relax. Before they can start questioning guards, the following suspiciously occurs.

The new quiet of the inn is broken again by the crash of the front door. Clattering through the front portal are over a dozen chain-clad men, tabarded with the City crest, and armed with long sword, long spear, and a righteous attitude. Spreading out in formation inside the door, they shout out "Lay down your arms, you are under arrest!" in a chorus of voices.

These are the Constabulary. This force of men is paid by the 'city' itself to enforce local city laws, such as keeping the peace, issues of theft and fraud, and similar. Unfortunately, being paid by the city effectively means being paid by the Guilds, as these groups are the largest money-makers and thus the largest contributors to the Constabulary. In some parts of the city, the Constabulary are nothing more than Guild enforcers. Unfortunately for the PCs, so are this group. Their speed of attendance is no coincidence - the constables have been waiting outside near the Baron's Beard for an altercation they had been told would happen. Yes, the PCs have been set up. Again. Will wonders never cease?

Constabulary (13): male human Fighter 1; hp 13 x 13; See DMG p117.

PCs shouldn't be attacking these guys - if it's not obvious from the numbers and arms, subtly inform gung-ho PCs that 2 to 1 odds are never good, even for PCs (This would be an EL 8 encounter, i.e. a slaughter).

The Constabulary squad is commanded by Sergeant Unart Etrik. He will take one look at the situation, and (provided the PCs surrender) get everyone tied up (all Constables carry a set of manacles) and hustle them off to the Castle. This includes the Guards, probably to the surprise of the PCs.

Weapons will be collected from the PCs (basic pat-down searches, if PCs attempt to keep

weapons roll Sleight of Hand vs the Constable's Search skill of +2 including relevant modifiers). Anyone injured will be roughly bandaged and brought along

Any attempts at discussion, explanation or conversation will be met with grim looks and the statement that "***You've gotten yourself into a lot of trouble here. Speaking to me won't help you at all. Save your breath.***"

After the PCs have been 'arrested', they are taken away as follows.

You and your former opponents are escorted through the streets heading uphill, eventually marching in close formation through the imposing gates of the Baronial Castle. All around you, servants and Guardsmen alike stare open-mouthed at the sight, as you are frogmarched to what must be the headquarters of the Baronial Guard. The Lieutenant apparently on duty takes a brief look at you, a longer look at your escort, and a long and shocked look at your former opponents, and immediately says "Wait right here, I'll get the Commander."

After a lengthy wait, a middle-aged gentleman strides into the courtyard, trailed by the Lieutenant. Formally dressed in court finery, but of an obvious military bearing, he takes in the situation at a glance and gestures to your captors with a single word, "Explain."

If the PCs DEFEATED the Guards, read the following:

One of the Constabulary sneers "This group" as he gestures towards yourselves "abused your guards until they roused themselves from their cups and attacked. We arrived in time to pull them off your pathetic excuses for guardsmen."

If the PCs did NOT defeat the Guards but were themselves beaten, read the following:

One of the Constabulary sneers "This group" as he gestures towards yourselves "abused your guards until they roused themselves from their cups and attacked. We arrived in time to pull your pathetic excuses for guardsmen off them."

Either way, the gentleman, Sir Ardent Bentner continues on from here:

With an obvious effort of control, the gentleman avoids rising to the insults and replies “Thank you for your intervention. Please tell your Commander that I will be in touch personally.” He waits for the Constabulary to turn and leave the courtyard before turning to his battered troops and snorting in disgust. He barks at them “Confined to barracks one week, docked 2 weeks pay! Dismissed!” They all turn dejectedly and slouch towards what appears to be a guardhouse.

With a shrewd eye, he then takes in your appearance and simply asks “Your side?”

Sir Ardent Bentner (for this is none other) was at a formal court function, and was glad of the distraction allowing him to leave, until he found out what it involved. Sir Ardent keeps a low profile, so only a DC 22 Knowledge Local (Nyron and Environs) check (with a +2 for locals) will warn the PCs they are standing in front of one of the most important officers in the City.

The PCs should give their own side of the story, and each should be allowed to add their own opinions, in their own words – Sir Ardent is an old hand at giving people enough rope to hang themselves. Sir Ardent has quickly assessed the situation for what it is, a chance to set up and embarrass him and his men. Provided the PCs are straight with him, he will believe they are simply patsies (any PCs bending the truth too far should make a Bluff check opposed by Sir Ardent’s Sense Motive +14). However, this is all so public that Sir Ardent can’t simply dismiss it outright.

Sir Ardent Bentner, Head of Security for House Ratik in the City of Marner: male human Fighter 6 / Rog 3 (Sense Motive +14).

As you finish your response to the allegations of the Constabulary, a messenger in Baronial livery runs from the depths of the castle and breathlessly presents a short note to the man in front of you. He has a brief glance before exploding “TWO DOZEN Men?!?”

He stops in place, takes a deep breath, and lets it out slowly. Then, with exaggerated calm, he replies to the messenger “Please inform Her Valorous Prominence that the Knurl ambassador’s honour guard will be ready to depart in the morning.” As the messenger departs with obvious relief, he returns his

attention to you, and appears to make a decision.

Louder than strictly necessary, he announces “For your reckless behaviour, public brawling and assault on the Baronial Guard, you will each be fined twenty crowns, and confined in the custody of the Archbaroness. Move this way.” And he gestures to a nearby forbidding doorway.

All PCs must immediately make a DC 8 Sense motive check. Those who succeed get the distinct impression that what was just said was not for the PCs benefit, but for the ears of someone the man expects to be listening. His eyes are definitely saying the opposite to his mouth, but he is still indicating the entrance into one of the Castle’s outbuildings.

PCs who do not take the hint and try running or fighting will find themselves at the Castle’s gatehouse facing 15 of the Baronial Guardsmen. If they continue, their adventure ends there, and an additional 2 TU must be spent either lying low (if they won) or in the cells (if they lost against the Guardsmen) before safely fleeing the city.

As a note, 1 crown is worth 1 gold piece, thus each PC’s fine amounts to 20gp.

Baronial Guardsmen (15): male human Fighter 1; hp 13 x 15; See DMG p117.

If the PCs follow the man’s directions, they are shown into a sparse but clean cellblock, and after the door is open the man walks into the cell himself, and motions to the PCs to follow. He seats himself on a bunk with his face in his hands, and once the PCs have entered and are comfortable, he looks up and continues.

“I don’t have time, so I’ll be quick. My name is Sir Ardent Bentner, and I work for the Archbaroness Ratik. It looks to me like you have been set up, yes? <pause for PCs cries of innocence> Thought so. This means someone was watching, which was why I had to throw the book at you. However, in here we can talk freely, and frankly I’d much rather have you on my side than against me. You look competent enough, and you roughed up Sergeant Mastrik’s men very thoroughly. Do you want a chance to turn tonight’s loss into a quick gain?”

Pause for PCs response, which should be favourable. If the PCs refuse this offer, they will

spend the night in the cells, and be released he next morning, with their fine mysteriously paid for. They may wish to investigate their 'frame-up', in which case move directly to Encounter 4. If the PCs agree to Sir Ardent's proposal, he continues.

"I'm desperately short of guardsmen, thanks to tax-time and now the squad you've trashed, and I've got to send two dozen more to escort the Ambassador from Knurl out to consult with some company of foreign mercenaries from the far side of nowhere. What I do have is you lot, and a list of 50 or so tax defaulters that need to be reminded that they owe the Archbaroness substantial sums of money. Do you think you'd be up to doing that reminding?"

If the PCs refuse, refer to the comments above. Otherwise, he continues.

"Good. You won't need to force them to hand the money over, although if they do offer then you give them a receipt and bring the cash straight back here. As long as they understand that they can't simply refuse to pay without consequences, that'll do. You can crash in the Guard's barracks tonight, while Sergeant Matrik's men scrub these cells for a few hours, and I'll have the list sent to you in the morning. I can even arrange a fraction of the tax collected to go towards your fine – who knows, if you're very effective you could even turn a profit. Now that's settled, I'll have to at least pretend to get back to this damn party. It comes to something when I envy even your tax-collecting job."

The PCs may take the opportunity to ask a question or two, but Sir Ardent is busy and won't stop around for more than a minute, or for idle chatter. He doesn't know who would have set the PCs up, but he will admit that he's annoyed the Guilds enough times that they're the most likely culprit. He doesn't think there's much point investigating the circumstances, as the Guild tends to be quite thorough in protecting themselves, but the PCs are free to investigate on their own time (but as ordinary citizens, not using Baronial authority).

If the PCs have gotten to this stage, they should get to know one another, because they are now working together. They should settle into their bunks, as they have an early start in the morning.

A few palace staff are sent to fetch the PCs equipment from, the Baron's Beard (and they even settle up the PCs tab and damages, unless they were particularly excessive).

ENCOUNTER 3: AS INEVITABLE AS DEATH

First thing next morning, the PCs are given a long list of names, address and amounts by a servant. The servant can answer basic questions, but not much more. She knows that the PCs are supposed to convince each person to pay up the taxes that are listed – some are from this year, some are older, but all are overdue by at least 2 weeks. She can't say why they haven't paid – it's the PCs job to find out. She also supplies them each with a tabard with the Baronial crest prominently on the front and back.

The PCs should work out what they are going to say and do to recover money. However, they should hopefully remember that they are members of the Law at the moment, and violence is not the answer. Considerations like travelling with a wolf, knocking in full plate and similar issues should be discussed by the PCs as they draw up a 'tax-plan'.

If the PCs are curious as to exactly what taxes are owed, they are mostly 'land taxes' (basically rent) as the Archbaroness owns the city. Other taxes are also included in the sum such as the following:

- "Window Taxes" - a genuine 18th Century tax based on the idea that richer people have bigger houses with more windows,
- the "Wick Tax", collected by the Chandler on behalf of the Archbaroness (similar idea to the window tax, as the rich use many more candles in their big houses, though not as historically accurate),
- the "Apprentice Levy" (busier business will have more apprentices, thus attracting a higher levy);
- Sewer Tax: Marner has significant sewers (built by the Dwarves, but extended by others since), and all houses and businesses that are attached to the sewerage network are charged for its maintenance;
- Well Rates: All of the City's water sources require some level of maintenance that is paid for by the house and business holders. This is inversely proportional to your distance from the well (the closer you are, the more you pay – to stop people sinking new wells). People adjacent to the river pay a reduced levy, but

must still pay a significant sum for river maintenance, etc.

GMs and players are invited (indeed encouraged) to invent their own taxes also – it's a shared world, after all. Some of the amounts for the taxes may appear quite high, but that's because the PCs have got the 'difficult list' of people who have missed a year or two (or more) of taxes.

Many of the citizens on the list have simply been too busy to pay, but many also have various reasons for the delay. How many of these you play out depends on your willingness to improvise and extemporise, the player's levels of interest and general role-playing enthusiasm, and the amount of time you have for the module, however remember to leave time at the end for both fights in encounters 5 and 6. Also, all PCs should roleplay through at least Encounters 3 (a), (b) and (c) as 3 typical taxations. Other alternate scenarios the GM may use if they wish include:

- Old lady Eva Hengerd runs an orphanage, one of the few private ones in Ratick, and she hires out the elder of her young charges for small duties, mainly running messages for a copper or two. She has amassed a fair bit of back tax (125gp) over many years, but is unable to pay because it is all in copper pieces and she has no way of safely moving it all to the tax collectors (that's 250lb in coins!).
- The PCs arrive at the salubrious house of Sorli Gilsire (100gp owed, fur trader from the north) in the richer merchant sector to find a funeral procession with two tiny, child-sized coffins just leaving (Goti and Brosta Gilsire). Do they approach the grieving parents at this time? When? How?
- A middle-aged gnomish bookbinder and scribe (named Artemis Sendant) owes 80gp. Unfortunately his wife Shamil died last year, and she dealt with most of the business side of his work. He has been doing well, but his hearing difficulty has progressed into profound deafness since her death. Even more awkwardly, his common is extremely rusty, and he only reads Gnomish (if one of the PCs speak gnomish, challenge them and make him dwarven). PCs must communicate basically in sign language, unless they think to obtain an interpreter from somewhere.
- A devout Norebo worshiper Dolin Brint (52gp owed) insists on going double or nothing on a coin flip (note that the PCs aren't authorised to wipe his debt).

- An eccentric wizard Batrell Tawyer (135gp owed) in a typical bizarre arcane laboratory keeps asking the PCs to "Hold this alembic" and "Step to the left ... a bit more ... more ... Hold it there, and whatever you do, don't think of monkeys." He is happy to have the PCs there and talking to him, but is far too involved with his experiments and research to even notice what the PCs are saying to him.
- An independent shipowner, Captain Sephas deCarabas owes 27 gp on import duties. He is in port and sailing on the incoming tide, but has a problem with his topmast, and is too busy to come down and see the PCs. Someone is going to have to climb all the way to the top to explain things to him while he is splicing the mainbrace (repairing his main mast – brace – using rope – splicing).

ENCOUNTER 3 (A): A MATTER OF PRINCIPLE

The PCs find their way to the Foreign Quarter, across the river in the eastern side of the city, and the establishment of gnomish chandler (soap and candle maker) Jelof Stind. Stind has a thriving business, is an industrious worker, but lacks anything resembling a spine. He has wanted to join a guild, to be a member of their 'elite', although he is despised by the stronger members. However, they have made him an offer – if he refuses to pay his taxes for two years, he will have proved himself worthy. Stind was reluctant, but they offered him some 'protection' to assist him – two burly thugs. Unfortunately, these thugs' real job is to keep an eye on Stind and make sure he doesn't 'stray', mainly by intimidating him. This is bullying in the extreme, but Stind is a professional victim. The guilds are doing this to try the Archbaroness' patience, and see how far they can push her given her lack of forceful command.

The PCs confront Jelof Stind (a small, thin and 'stringy' gnome, who is permanently greasy thanks to his career) in his shop. The 'protection' is pretending to be apron-clad workers, but not doing a good job of it.

When confronted about his tax debt (some 180gp), Stind's reply is "***The Baroness can have her blood money when she pries it from my cold dead hands! Her oppression of the professionals in this city is nothing short of criminal!***" Sadly, Stind has prepared this response, but not really considered where to go next, assuming that this display of strength would

frighten off the taxman. The PCs are probably less impressed.

Stind will respond to diplomacy with fairly incoherent bluster of a similar vein. Threats and anger have always worked on him in the past, and he's worked up just enough courage to try it on the PCs, but has no experience of intimidation from the intimidator's side, only being intimidated himself. He will often glance at the 2 thugs, but never refer to them or comment on them in their presence (and they in turn won't leave his presence voluntarily).

If intimidated or threatened, Stind will break down fairly quickly, but he will not actually agree to pay his taxes with the thugs in the room, pleading that he can't, and "it can't be done", all the while desperately trying to indicate to the thugs without alerting them. They can be intimidated to leave, especially if deliberately outnumbered, but will play the macho game as long as they can to stay in earshot of Stind. Once alone and broken, Stind will admit to the whole situation, and name Wyvel Bazzik, Guildmaster of the Shipwrights Guild as the person who 'convinced' him to make his stand.

There is no way the PCs will get anywhere near Bazzik (he's in Shiptown for a start, over 10 miles away, and is the kind of important personage who won't bother with adventurers), but reporting this to Bentner's Guards will get the PCs a gentle pat on the back later.

If the PCs wish to deal with the thugs more directly, they can be provoked into attacking by direct insults and threats, but not much else (they are not bright enough to recognise anything subtle or veiled). Physically removing them from Stind's presence will also provoke a fight, but removing Stind while hefty PCs block the thugs will not do so.

APL 2 (EL 1)

Guild Thugs (2): male human Warrior 1; hp 12; 12; Appendix 1.

For PCs and/or GMs who prefer to use dice, a DC 20 Diplomacy check would be needed to convince Jelof Stind to agree to cough up the cash (which is basically every copper he currently has to hand, so he will ask for several weeks to pay). Fortunately, Stind is so used to being browbeaten that if the PCs instead try and Intimidate him, he has a -8 penalty to his modified level check to resist (d20+ HD + Wis Mod + modifiers to saves against fear, see PHB p76).

Jelof Stind, chandler: male gnome Expert 2; hp 9; (Wisdom Modifier -1)

ENCOUNTER 3 (B): YOU'RE NOT THE BOSS OF ME

The next stop for the budding taxmen is in the noble quarter, at a well-to-do house flying a complicated noble flag. A DC 18 Knowledge (Nobility and Royalty) or Knowledge Local (Nyron and Environs) check will show the crest to belong to a distant member of House Bredivan, the southernmost Noble House in Ratik, and one that is regularly beset by orc and gnoll attacks due to its spread out nature and distance of the Loftwood from Ratik's core. Knowing that Sir Engerd Kebet is a retired veteran of several wars and even fight alongside Archbaron Lexnol would take a DC 21 Knowledge (Nobility and Royalty) or Knowledge Local (Nyron and Environs) check. The house is large and well furnished, though the PCs will only see that through the windows, as they are led around to the servants entrance and allowed to speak to the butler Jaamez, who will "Inform Sir Engerd of their presence".

Sir Engerd Kebet is a mature, blustering human, from his walrus moustache and ruddy face to his gammy leg ("old war wound you know!") and spit-polished boots. He will initially refuse to see the PCs (as 'servants') but provided they persist he will eventually come down to speak to them.

Take a deep breath, start ranting loudly, and don't stop till you collapse. Sir Engerd will start off with comments about how 'that young chit of a girl Evaleigh' is ruining the country, in his day when Lexnol was in charge you didn't get orcs raiding your lands' and move on to the poor condition of the city, the uppity nature of the guilds and even the poor weather these days. His central theme is that Evaleigh isn't a patch on Archbaron Lexnol, and he wouldn't pay Evaleigh taxes as she would probably squander them or send them home to her father the Count of Knurl (who will also get a serving from the opinionated Sir Engerd).

The PCs best option is to make something up. If convinced that the PCs are actually collecting for the Archbaron (he suspects that Evaleigh is hiding Lexnol or somehow causing his condition, and is certain that Lexnol is fit to command) then he will agree to pay up. Similarly, if a persuasive argument that his taxes will be used to hire more military to protect his home estates on the southern border of Ratik, he will cave in.

If the PCs play hardball or are stoic but not diplomatic, he will soon lose his patience and order his gardener and footman to throw them out. Both of these gentlemen, hired for their muscles

and not brains, will follow orders enthusiastically, roughing up the PCs in the process. If they submit, the encounter ends and Sir Engerd's purse remains firmly closed. However, if the PCs stand up to the hired help, and especially if one of them can disable one or both of them using martial force Sir Engerd will reassess the PCs standing. ***"If the Archbaroness is willing to hire stout people like you, then maybe someone has shown her a bit of reason. Hmmm.... Maybe my taxes will be spent properly. Jaamez! Open the vault and get me the diamonds!"*** The PCs are paid Sir Engerd's back-taxes there and then, and leave carrying over 1000 gp in small diamonds.

APL 2 (EL 1)

Servants (2): male human Warrior 1; hp 12; 12; Appendix 1.

For PCs and/or GMs who prefer to use dice, a DC 20 Diplomacy check would be needed to convince Sir Engerd to pay up. Other PCs could also aid this roll using a DC 10 Knowledge (Nobility and Royalty) check. Otherwise, he can be sufficiently bamboozled by a PC winning a contest of their Bluff against Sir Engerd's Sense Motive of +0, provided the PCs are happy to lie to a knight of the realm.

Sir Engerd Kebet: male human Fighter 4; hp 32; Sense Motive +0.

ENCOUNTER 3 (C): GONE BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

The list that the PCs are probably getting annoyed at by now leads them to another rich neighbourhood, to the luxurious home of Mrs Mona Castiger overlooking the sea. A DC 17 Knowledge (Nobility and Royalty) or Knowledge (Local – Nyron and Environs) check against (or a DC 13 Gather Information check before going there) will reveal that Ms Castiger is the rich widow of Rudven Castiger, the previous Guildmaster of the Gemcutters guild (before the current incumbent, gnome Lymon Gemsplitter). A successful PC will also know she has two single daughters, of slightly beyond marriageable age (30-ish).

If the PCs present themselves respectfully and are moderately well dressed, they will be invited into the parlour, where Mrs Castiger and her two daughters Miriella and Helva. The Castiger women will naturally gravitate to males, with high

or luxury lifestyle, with high charisma, and Ratik locals. The more marriageable they are the better Mrs Castiger will warm to them, especially if they let her know that they are available.

Mrs Castiger was (and still is) a social climber. She has always had hopes of marrying her daughters off to someone important, but fate intervened. They were introduced to society in CY 577, and Mr Castiger used much of his money and influence to get Miriella and Helva close to Lord Alain Ratik, future Archbaron. Just when they thought they were going to be able to marry their way to the top, Alain was engaged to Lady Evaleigh. Their spirits were buoyed when Evaleigh was kidnapped, then fell again when she was rescued and married. Mrs Castiger moved her sights to other eligible nobles, but there was one fatal flaw – the girls had fallen in love with Alain, and sabotaged other attempts to set them up with nobles. Shortly after this, Mr Castiger died in mysterious circumstances, and dashed any hopes of marrying their way into a title. Since then, the girls have done little but pine for Alain. Their sorrow doubled in CY 586 when he fell in battle, but the whole family decided that Alain could not be dead, and have maintained hope for him ever since. This hope, irrational though it might be, was given a boost by a rumour that spread through Marner in 592 CY that Corble Minker, Squire of Alain, had survived and returned bearing news that Alain was alive. Many questioned Minker's sanity (and rightly so), but the Castigers became convinced that it was true, and have held a hope alive ever since. Somehow, in the way of many widows somewhat separated from society, that if Alain were to return, he would instantly see that Evaleigh was not fit to be the Archbaroness, and that either Miriella or Helva would become the next wife of Archbaron Alain.

Boring and tedious though that all is, it is the primary topic of conversation amongst the Castigers, as soon as anyone mentions anything that can be remotely turned towards that topic of conversation. It is their fixation, and they will milk it for all they are worth. Mona Castiger would like to marry one of her daughters off to someone wealthy and preferably noble, to at least have some security, but as they are over 30 this is becoming increasingly difficult (also aided by the fact that both wish to wait for 'their True Love Alain'). Mrs Castiger will be reluctant to talk business, but eventually if the PCs force their way into the conversation, Mrs Castiger will admit that she doesn't want to give Evaleigh any more money, as she will 'just waste it' (they have convinced themselves that the Archbaroness is

incompetent, which is why Alain will get rid of her when he returns...).

The best way to get the back-taxes owing (over 250 gp) is to convince her that doing so will somehow help their chances with Alain. This included suggesting that the money may be needed to mount a rescue mission for Alain, or to locate his former squire again, or that Alain would be disappointed if he returned and found the Castigers had been avoiding taxes. Similarly, other nobles may think tax avoidance a sign of poverty, cutting their marriage chances. If convinced in such a way, she will promise that one of her men will be up the next day with the money.

The one thing that will cause trouble is to insist that Alain is dead, or to support Evaleigh in any way after they have been 'told' of her incompetence by Mrs Castiger. If the PCs do so, the Castigers immediately summon their footmen, and have the PCs forcibly thrown out. PCs delaying their departure in any way will be set upon bodily by these two hefty gentlemen, who have no love for the Archbaroness' lackeys (mainly because they have to put up with the Castigers' ramblings constantly, and the PCs' presence has assured them no respite for weeks).

APL 2 (EL 1)

Footmen (2): male human Warrior 1; hp 12; 12; Appendix 1.

For PCs and/or GMs who prefer to use dice, a DC 20 Diplomacy check is sufficient to extract the promise of payment out of her. Other PCs could also aid this roll using a DC 10 Knowledge (Nobility and Royalty) check to suggest other potential husbands, or DC 12 Heal check to note and carefully skirt around the troubled psyche of the Castigers. The PCs may wish to lie their way out of it with a Bluff check, opposed by the Castiger ladies' Sense Motive checks below – at least two would have to be fooled for this to work.

Mona Castiger: female human Aristocrat 5; Sense Motive +6

Miriella Castiger female human Aristocrat 3; Sense Motive +4

Helva Castiger female human Aristocrat 3; Sense Motive +3

ENCOUNTER 4: DETECTIVE WORK

The PCs may decide to investigate the incident at the Baron's Beard that got them into so much hot water, either out of curiosity, revenge, or because they didn't accept Sir Ardent's offer and are now down 100gp each.

The logical place to start would be the Baron's Beard. Most patrons saw little, being occupied with their own affairs, but feel free to improvise something amusing. The patrons included a few small groups of merchants, one dwarf trader, and two 'single women', a stunning blonde and a thin raven-haired lass. They have some useful information about the half-orc (see below), but would take a DC 14 Gather Information check to find (+2 for Marner natives).

The staff would be a better bet. They include the ever-cheerful bartender Decan Cooperson, his teenaged daughter Salyarista and her friend Grena Talaster (barmaids) and Decan's wife Hekara, a mean, spiteful and grumpy shrew who stays in the kitchen most of the time. All are helpful, especially to well-tipping patrons.

If asked, the staff will remark that Sulina, the half-orc serving lass, was present that evening, but has not been seen since she left for home that night. Sulina was quiet, kept to herself, and was a little odd, but a diligent worker. As for her actions that evening, firstly refer to the description of actual events in Encounter 1, although none of them actually saw her casting the spell from in the kitchen doorway. Additionally, the following can be gathered from various people:

- Decan and Hekara recall Sulina paying close attention to the guardsmen, probably because she expected them to pick on her. She spent most of the fight in the doorway to the kitchen peering out. Otherwise, no strange behaviour.
- Grena and Salyarista remember Sulina had poor complexion and dressed plainly in lots of black. She was grumpy, and didn't want to know anything about boys at all. She was very interested in Brak Matrik and the other guards all evening, even though Grena had warned her that Brak was hers. She was carrying around a big roll of paper all evening.
- The 'single ladies', who will only give their names as Candy and Saffy, (unless the PCs get very friendly with them), will recall Sulina distinctly, though won't be inclined to provide information unless well paid (1 gp each) or are able to flirt with an attractive, apparently available, male. They had been ignoring the half-orc all evening while they chatted up the guards, until just before the fight. She came

out of the kitchen doorway, walked straight up to Brak Mastrik, and whispered in his ear, then pointed to the PCs' table. Brak stood up and said to her **"Don't you worry, we'll see about that!"** He then got his men up and walked straight over to the PCs, at which point the fight started. They are understandably upset at the situation.

Asking the staff will reveal that Sulina was hired recently to replace a sick barmaid, Liasta Cobble. The day after Liasta reported ill, Sulina came to the tavern looking for temporary work while she settled into the city. Thinking the coincidence lucky, and the half-orc remarkably charming for her people, he hired her immediately. PCs will probably investigate this.

Liasta, a strong-minded and self-confident woman, was walking home after work at the Beard to the Foreign Quarter across the river. It's normally a safe trip, although the Foreign Quarter has some dodgy parts. However, this time she was attacked not 2 blocks from the Beard, and her 8cp in tips was stolen - she struggled, and received a knife wound to the leg for her troubles. She knows little about her attacker, who grappled her and dragged her into a dark alley mouth. Strangely, the attack was entirely silent, even her own cries made no noise. Her attacker was large and muscular, but hooded and operated easily in the near-darkness of the alleyway. She has stayed home recovering since then. No amount of witnesses questioned will reveal any more details about the assault – Hioesien planned it well.

Tracking down Sulina / Hioesien is not an easy task. She is keeping a deliberately low profile. By the time the PCs start to look for her she is staking out the sailmakers shop from Encounter 5 and 6, and living in an ask-no-questions inn in the Foreign Quarters. PCs wishing to find her should make Gather Information checks, with an initial DC of 24, decreasing by 2 for every day after the first assault. PCs would obviously receive a -4 penalty without a detailed description of Sulina (i.e. from the staff), and locals would again get their +2 circumstance bonus. Success will indicate that she has been seen at the upper end of the Professionals quarter. If the PCs think to ask what she has been doing, she has been purchasing shovels and picks, and occasional food (for 1). Another Gather Info check (at +4 from when they made it last time) or a determined plan to stake out the area will indicate that she has been seen going in to see Milin Anghild the sailmaker.

Treasure: The investigation gains the PCs nothing directly, apart from the ability to find Encounters 5 and 6. However, it does change the Conclusion slightly. Sir Ardent will still see the PCs, but mainly to reward them for their revelation of the plot against the noble house. If the PCs then present him with evidence regarding the charming of Brak Mastrik, he will also drop the charges of affray, and refund the PCs their 100gp fine.

Development: If the PCs are not working for Sir Ardent, their success in this adventure will change the conclusion slightly (see above under Treasure). Otherwise, knowing what happened in the Baron's Beard will not affect the PCs overall level of success, just their satisfaction at wrapping up a few loose ends.

ENCOUNTER 5: ANYBODY HOME?

A stop on the PCs extended audit of Marner takes a turn for the worse, as they stumble across something unsavoury.

In short, Hioesien, a Cleric of Vecna, has been hired by individuals claiming to work for the Guilds. 3 days ago, she killed a sailmaker who had been refusing to pay his guild dues (he ironically objected to the more violent practices of the guild enforcers) and also his family and apprentices. She then raised them as undead using several scrolls, and has had them tunnelling into the basement of the adjacent noble house. She is only half way there, but is planning on stealing the treasures of their vault and vanishing, framing the sailmaker for the theft. All this is part of the plan from the Guilds (to harm the nobles, and make them more suspicious of non-guild members), and would have worked too if it wasn't for those meddling PCs.

The PCs are trying to locate Milin Anghild, a sailmaker working on the 'rich' edge of the professionals district (owes 30 gp). They attend his shop, a large, sturdy 2-storey wooden structure (shopfront and residence for several people above the shop), and find it closed. This is odd behaviour for mid-day during the week, especially on a bustling street. Immediately noticeable oddities include the following:

- Any characters or animal companions with the Scent Ability can automatically detect the smell of a significant amount of old blood (several days old) despite there being no shop nearby likely to use blood. Anyone smelling specifically at the door will notice this also (Milin's apprentice was killed just inside the

door, and the pool of blood was never cleaned up).

- A spider web has been spun over the doorway that is at least 2 days old.
- What is visible of the small shopfront inside through the grimy window shows a box of brass grommets (metal rings) spilled over the floor. A DC 10 Spot check will show the PC looking through the window a dark stain at the base of the door inside.
- The door is locked, however the blinds on the inside of the windows are not closed (as would be normal practice to deter thieves if leaving home).

If PCs don't get the sledgehammer hints, a cooper across the street by the name of Ikan Cooper will let the PCs know **"If'n he's in the hanging room, he won't be hearin' you. Go round the back and check the big doors."** This helpful soul knows only a little more – Milin's family (wife, mother, adult daughter and son) live with him over the shop, and he employs 2 apprentices, none of whom have been seen from for 3 days. This is not normal, but Cooper has had no reason to be suspicious until the PCs start asking. He has been too busy to watch the shop, but can't specifically recall anyone entering in the last few days.

PCs moving round the back to an alley way between the shop and the back of a nearby noble house are faced with two more doors (see map at Appendix 4), an ordinary seeming side door and a large sliding door apparently leading on to a workshop area. The workshop door appears unused for weeks, a DC 15 Search check or DC 15 Survival check by a character with the track feat will show regular use of the side door, including use earlier that day. Detect Evil or Undead will reveal the undead in the workshop, while a DC 15 Listen check will alert listeners to several beings moving within the workshop.

All 3 doors are locked with simple locks (DC 20 Open Locks), can be forced with a DC 18 Strength check, or attacked (Hardness 5, 15 hp). Eyebrows will be raised if the PCs force the doors, but no-one will interfere, providing they are wearing their official tabards.

A brief search starting from either front or side door will reveal the shop, a small workroom and storeroom, as well as the living area upstairs to all be deserted. Signs of struggle and blood traces indicate that several people have died here 3 days ago. No signs however indicate that the bodies ever left through the front or back doors

PCs can't fail to notice the locked door to the workshop. Again, it is locked with a simple lock (DC 20 Open Locks), or it can be forced with a DC 18 Strength check, or attacked (Hardness 5, 15 hp). Opening either workshop door reveals a large area 35' by 40', and three stories (nearly 30') tall. Since the building is only 2 stories tall, the third story is dug into the ground. Along the roof are beams, ropes and tackle for hanging and shaping the huge sails needed for the largest of ships. More pertinently for the PCs, the floor of the workshop contains several undead, apparently involved in an excavation. They have dug a tunnel into the underground wall of the basement, heading to the west (under the rear alley, in the direction of the adjacent noble estate belonging to Sir Timoci Vakai, if the PCs ask).

Only 4 of the undead are visible at the moment – 2 skeletons and 2 zombies – while the others are working down the tunnel. They are dressed as commoners, one of them was apparently an old lady. The undead won't instantly attack, and will continue to mine while the PCs plan. However, as soon as a foot is placed on the floor of the hanging room, they will turn and attack. Similarly, they will immediately respond to any attack.

APL 2 (EL 3)

Human Warrior Skeleton (3): hp 9, 7, 5
Monster Manual 226

Human Commoner Zombies (4): hp 16, 16, 15, 15; *Monster Manual 266*.

Tactics: You're talking mindless undead here. However, replace the skeleton's scimitar with a club (same To Hit and Damage, but crits only on a 20) as they are only armed with simple mining tools. The undead swarm up the stairs towards the PCs, to hack and rend. Treat the steep (10' high) stairs as difficult terrain, i.e. double movement costs, no running or charging on them.

The stairs also give the person higher up the +1 bonus to hit from height advantage. The undead are as hampered by a battle on the stairs as the PCs, but they don't have the luxury of planning. If the PCs wish to destroy the stairs, they would have to destroy at least 2 adjacent steps to prevent the undead getting to the PCs, each with Hardness 5 and 10 HP. Leaping off the landing is a 10' drop doing 1d6 non-lethal damage (DC 15 Tumble or Jump check to negate this damage).

Turning should prove the key here, if the PCs have a cleric with them. However, remember that a turning cleric needs "Line of Effect" to the undead, meaning that any undead still in the

tunnel when the Cleric turns will not be repelled. The cleric will probably have to make at least 2 attempts to turn, as the remainder of the undead will take at least a round to get out of the tunnel.

Treasure: The undead have no treasure personally, and the available cash in the shop has been taken by Hioesien. Also, PCs with any conscience won't steal from a family that has met with this unfortunate fate.

Development: It's a rare group of PCs that will ignore a mob of undead, but if they choose to do so, they are likely to cause more trouble than they've avoided. Unfortunately, Hioesien the cleric returns shortly after the PCs arrive (she had popped out for lunch). If the PCs leave someone on watch, they are attacked by Hioesien – she will capture if possible (for interrogation), but kill if needed. She will then order the undead to hide in the rafters and the tunnel, cast Desecrate on the area, and ambush the PCs when they return. The best the PCs could get as assistance is a small squad of 4 Baronial Guards, who will be sceptical at best (use stats from Encounter 2). Any Constabulary the PCs try and recruit find will simply laugh at them, especially if they give the address – Milin Anghild is known as a trouble maker to the guilds.

If the PCs lay an ambush for the Cleric, they may do some damage up front, but attacking her will automatically trigger the undead to attack, giving the PCs 2 simultaneous encounters to overcome. She arrives 10 minutes after the PCs find the undead, and unless the PCs have re-locked the doors behind them, she knows they're there and arrives prepared. Good luck with that – they'll need it.

ENCOUNTER 6: HAVEN'T I SEEN YOU SOMEWHERE BEFORE?

The PCs should defeat the undead with relative ease. However, they are not off the hook yet. Shortly after that battle finishes, Hioesien arrives back at the shop. Ask the PCs what they are doing immediately after the fight, and try and lull them into a false sense of completion. However, after about a minute of non-combat actions after the fight, get them to re-roll initiative. This means that spells with duration in rounds have worn off, though any spell over a minute in duration is still active. This is enough time for PCs to pull themselves together and heal up, gather together the undead's weapons, or for a few PCs to

examine the tunnel, which is 30' long, low, very rough, and unstable,

Hioesien has the keys (and a recently purchased sweet pastry), and will notice immediately if the doors have been left unlocked, or if the PCs have been very thorough in their searching of the building. If so, she will take her potion of Owl's Wisdom, cast Protection from Good and Entropic Shield, enter the workshop and begin casting Summon Monster II. Otherwise, she will walk in on the PCs and achieve mutual surprise. She will then go for Summon Monster II to give her time to cast Protection from Good, drink her potion, and then wade into battle.

If the PCs have set a watch outside for anyone coming back, they must make a contested roll (their hide check vs Hioesien's +2 Spot check) to avoid tipping her off that the shop is being watched. If she does spot them, then the PC must similarly make a Spot check vs Hioesien's +1 Bluff to see that she was originally intending to go to the shop. She will then enter via the rear alley way. If this too is covered, she will buff up round the corner and take out the sentry before turning to the PCs inside. If the PCs have someone listening or waiting at doors it's only a DC 10 Listen check to hear her stopping to unlock the doors. If the PCs haven't locked up the doors behind them, she will immediately notice that it is unlocked and start casting quietly (DC 12 Listen to hear her casting on the other side of the door, +1 pre 10' distance from the door).

Allow PCs an DC 19 Int check to recall her from the Baron's Beard tavern (Encounter 1), although achieving a DC 15+ will give the PCs the nagging feeling they've seen her before.

APL 2 (EL 3)

Hioesien: female half-orc Cleric 3; hp 21; Appendix 1.

Tactics: Despite being a Cleric of Vecna, Hioesien's half-orc heritage kicks in at times, including combat. She would prefer to magic the PCs in support of her summoned monster, but its duration of 4 rounds means she will have to wade into combat fairly shortly afterwards anyway. She will fight to the death, crying an invocation to the Lord of Secrets as she dies. Unfortunately for the PCs, her Diehard feat allows her to operate at negative hitpoints, doing a move action or a standard action every round (though standard actions lose her 1hp). She dies at -10 hp.

Treasure:

APL 2: Loot: 35 gp; Coin: 150 gp (assorted Black onyx gems worth 900 gp total); Magic: +1 *buckler* (98 gp each), +1 *Chain Shirt* (100 gp each), *Scroll of Animate Dead* (52 gp each)

Development: PCs may wish to ask for assistance from the proper Guards after this, and good for them. They will move in, clean everything up, and sort out the details (isn't it good being a contractor sometimes?).

Searching Hioesien will reveal all her equipment, and her stash of Onyx (DC 13 Spellcraft check to determine it as a component for Animate Dead). PCs who make a DC 15 Craft (Gems), Profession (Gemcutter) or (Miner), Appraise or similar check can determine that these are Ratik-mined Onyx, from the Dwarven mines in the Rakers (though no specific Clan can be determined). Also amongst her possession is a piece of parchment with a few irrelevant scrawlings ("get milk" etc.) – any spellcaster who examines her gear can identify it as a 'used' scroll.

A small pencilled note on the outside of the scroll (where it would be visible when rolled up) says "Mastrik, Baron's Beard". If studied closely with Detect Magic, it radiates the faintest trace of Enchantment magic (this is the Charm scroll used on Brak Mastrik in Encounter 1, and would be useful evidence if the PCs needed to clear their names).

PCs may wish to conduct more investigations of their original setup. If so, go to Encounter 4. Hioesien will reveal nothing really useful, whether interrogated after death or if captured alive. Her faith in the Lord of Secrets will keep her silent until she can be killed by an assassin, when she is out of the PCs' care. She didn't know the identity of the person who hired her (although she did try to find out, and failed), however she knew they were important in the Guilds somehow. She picked the PCs as patsies because they were handy – the main target was Sgt Mastrik. Her scrolls were supplied by her church, and the Onyx as part payment for her work.

Interrogation: Capturing Hioesien should be difficult, as she intends to fight to the death, and has the Diehard feat to ensure she goes out battling. If she is captured, she would die rather than reveal her secrets – being a priestess of the Lord of Secrets can do than to you. She will not respond to interrogation apart to make veiled threats that her "Lord and Master" will visit terrible vengeance upon them. If imprisoned overnight (such as to allow a wizard to memorise Charm Person) then an agent of her employers will

smuggle in some poisonous leaves through the window, and Hioesien will have consumed them overnight.

If the PCs are particularly resourceful, all they can get out of Hioesien is as follows:

- She was sent here by her high priestess from Greyhawk City. She suspects it was after a request from someone from outside Ratik.
- She was met by a person who took pains to hide their identity, and instructed to charm Brak Mastrik and embarrass the Baronial Guards. She suspects this person was a guildsman, and she has a long list of subjects (mostly guildmasters and senior guild enforcers) that she has been narrowing down, but hasn't got enough contacts locally yet.
- After completing the first job she was paid in Onyx gems by the same individual and given the second job, to use the non-guildsman Milin Anghild to damage Sir Timoci Vakai, the noble living next door. It was Hioesien's plan to use the undead and tunnel into their vault, animating them with scrolls she brought with her.
- She doesn't know much more than that – she has been used by everyone as a patsy, and while she actually knew this, she thought she could find some dirt on her employers for the Whispered One.

CONCLUSION

PCs should complete their taxation house calls later that day, and report to Sir Ardent Bentner. In the evening, they are shown into a sparsely appointed office, with good quality but not expensive furniture – unbecoming of a man in Sir Ardent's position. He offers them simple wooden chairs, and listens attentively to any report they want to make. He then leans back, steepled his fingers, and regards the PCs closely before continuing.

"It seems you've exacted your own justice, which is rare around here, but reassuring. I've not been able to get a coherent story out of Mastrik, which leads me to think that he wasn't himself when he attacked you – even his muddled head needs a good reason before starting a fight with armed adventurers. If you've got any leads I'll see if they can be followed up, but it looks like the Guilds have covered their tracks very well this time. They're learning."

Sir Ardent sighs deeply before continuing. "Your commission has paid for your fine – here's your change." He flips you a small bag of coins before continuing. "Don't get in any more trouble with my guards, and watch your backs with the Guilds. They may not know who thwarted their plans, but if they find out they won't be sending you flowers." He glances at a tall stack of papers on his desk before concluding "Well done. Show yourself out." As you depart, you pass his secretary entering with a meal on a tray. For you, this adventure is over. However, some have to live this life of intrigue constantly, no matter their own wishes.

Characters who took up Bentner's offer of employment and did not disgrace themselves or Bentner will receive the **Respect of Sir Ardent Bentner** benefit on their AR.

Conclusion:

APL 2: Loot: 0 gp; Coin: 20 gp; Magic: 0 gp

The End

EXPERIENCE POINT SUMMARY

To award experience for this adventure, add up the values for the objectives accomplished. Then assign the experience award. Award the total value (objectives plus roleplaying) to each character.

Encounter 1

Experience objective 90 XP

Encounter 3(A)

Experience objective 30 XP

Encounter 3(B)

Experience objective 30 XP

Encounter 3(C)

Experience objective 30 XP

Encounter 5

Experience objective 90 XP

Encounter 6

Experience objective 90 XP

Discretionary roleplaying award 90 XP

Total possible experience: 450 XP

TREASURE SUMMARY

During an adventure, characters encounter treasure, usually finding it in the possession of their foes. Every encounter that features treasure has a "treasure" section within the encounter description, giving information about the loot, coins, and magic items that make up the encounter's treasure.

The loot total is the number of gold pieces each character gains if the foes are plundered of all their earthly possessions. Looting the bodies takes at least 10 minutes per every 5 enemies, and if the characters cannot take the time to loot the bodies, they do not gain this gold. If you feel it is reasonable that characters can go back to loot the bodies, and those bodies are there (i.e., not carted off by dungeon scavengers, removed from the scene by the local watch, and so on), characters may return to retrieve loot. If the characters do not loot the body, the gold piece value for the loot is subtracted from the encounter totals given below.

The coin total is the number of gold pieces each character gains if they take the coin available. A normal adventuring party can usually

gather this wealth in a round or so. If for some reason, they pass up this treasure, the coin total is subtracted from the encounter totals given below.

Next, the magic items are listed. Magic item treasure is the hardest to adjudicate, because they are varied and because characters may want to use them during the adventure. Many times characters must cast identify, analyze dweomer or similar spell to determine what the item does and how to activate it. Other times they may attempt to use the item blindly. If the magic item is consumable (a potion, scroll, magic bolts, etc.) and the item is used before the end of the adventure, its total is subtracted from the adventure totals below.

Once you have subtracted the value for unclaimed treasure from each encounter add it up and that is the number of gold pieces a characters total and coin value increase at the end of the adventure. Write the total in the GP Gained field of the adventure certificate.

Loot = Looted gear from enemy; Coin = Coin, Gems, Jewelry, and other valuables; Magic = Magic Items.

Encounter 6:

APL 2: Loot: 35 gp; Coin: 150 gp (assorted Black onyx gems worth 900 gp total); Magic: +1 *buckler* (98 gp each), +1 *Chain Shirt* (100 gp each), *Scroll of Animate Dead* (52 gp each)

Conclusion:

APL 2: Loot: 0 gp; Coin: 20 gp; Magic: 0 gp

Total Possible Treasure

APL 2: Loot: 35 gp; Coin: 170 gp; Magic: 250 gp; Total 455 gp (max 450gp) each.

Special

Respect of Sir Ardent Bentner: Your success while working for Sir Ardent Bentner has earned his respect. You have earned an influence point with this member of House Ratik.

ITEMS FOR THE ADVENTURE RECORD

Item Access

Normal item access for Introductory Module, i.e. Core access items as per the Living Greyhawk Campaign Sourcebook.

ENCOUNTER 1: FISTICUFFS

Baronial Guards (including Sgt Brak Mastrik): Male Human Warrior 1; CR1/2; Medium Humanoid; HD 1d8+5; hp 11; Init +1 (+1 Dex); Spd 30 ft; AC 12, touch 11, flat-footed 11; Base Atk +1; Grp +3.

Atk + 3 melee (1d6+2 Non-lethal, sap)

Full Atk + 3 melee (1d6+2 non-lethal, sap)

SA none; SQ none,

AL LN; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will -1; Str 14, Dex 13, Con 14, Int 8(10), Wis 8(10), Cha 9(11) (numbers in brackets represent their normal stats, however they are all the worse for alcohol, which is included in their other stats)

Skills and Feats Handle Animal +4, Jump +6, Listen -1, Ride +5, Spot -1; Power Attack, Toughness.

Languages Common, Dwarven,

Possessions padded armour (technically, the undershirt for a chain shirt), sap, 9 gp, 13 sp, 13 cp.

Physical Description: Sergeant Brak Mastrik - Ht: 5' 5", Wt: 145lbs, Hair: Red, Eyes: Brown, Age: 25.

ENCOUNTER 3: AS INEVITABLE AS DEATH

Use the following stats for all three optional encounters in sections (a), (b) and (c) of Encounter 3.

Guild Thugs / Servants / Footmen. : Male Human Warrior 1; CR1/2; Medium Humanoid; HD 1d8+5; hp 12; Init +2 (+2 Dex); Spd 30 ft; AC 14, touch 12, flat-footed 12; Base Atk +1; Grp +5.

Atk + 6 melee (1d6+4 club)

Full Atk + 6 melee (1d6+4 club)

SA none; SQ none,

AL LN; SV Fort +4, Ref +2, Will +1; Str 18, Dex 14, Con 14, Int 9, Wis 10, Cha 11

Skills and Feats Handle Animal +2, Jump +4, Ride +4, Swim +8; Power Attack, Toughness.

Languages Common,

Possessions mwk leather (Leather apron / Gardening gear / leather armour), mwk' Club, 11 cp.

Physical Description: Hulking, brutish thugs, with one eyebrow and 2 brain cells each.

ENCOUNTER 6: HAVEN'T I SEEN YOU SOMEWHERE BEFORE?

Hioesien: female Half-Orc Cleric 3; CR 3; Medium Humanoid; HD 3d8+3; hp 21; Init +0; Spd 20 ft.; AC 17, touch 10, flat-footed 17; Base Atk +2; Grp +5;

Atk +6 melee [1d4+3, masterwork Dagger] or +5 melee touch [spell effects] or +2 ranged touch [spell effects]

Full Atk +6 melee [1d4+3, masterwork Dagger]

SA Turn Undead (Hioesien can Rebuke or Command or destroy undead 4 times per day); SQ darkvision 60 ft. and half-orc traits;

AL NE; SV Fort +4, Ref +1, Will +5; Str 16, Dex 10, Con 13, Int 8, Wis 15, Cha 13.

Skills and Feats: Concentration +7, Listen +2, Spot +2; Endurance (First), Diehard (Third).

Languages: Common, Orc.

Spells Prepared (4/4/3; base DC = 12 + spell level): 0—[create water, inflict minor wounds, detect poison, purify food and drink]; 1st—[bane, cause fear, entropic shield protection from good*]; 2nd—[desecrate*, hold person, summon monster II (Large Fiendish monstrous Centipede)].

*Domain spell. Deity Vecna; *Domains:* Evil (Evil spells cast at +1 caster level), Magic (can use Spell completion items as a Wizard of ½ Clr level).

Possessions: +1 Chain shirt, +1 buckler, mwk dagger, *potion of Owl's Wisdom*, *Scroll of Animate Dead*, wooden holy symbol of Vecna, 900gp worth of black Onyx gems, sweet pastry.

Power-Up Suite: (If prepared for 3 rounds – *Owl's Wisdom*, *Protection from Good*, *Entropic Shield*); +2 to save DCs for spells (14+ Spell level), +2 to her Will save (+7); +2 Deflection bonus to AC (AC 19, touch 12, flat-footed 19), immune to non-evil summoned creatures and to mental influence; All ranged attacks have a 20% miss chance.

Physical Description: Ht: 5' 6", Wt: 162lbs, Hair: Black, Eyes: Dark Brown, Age: 17. Darkly fascinating and magnetic, especially for a half orc.

For the sake of simplicity, the stats for the Fiendish Monstrous Centipede summoned by Hioesien are included below, including the changes from the Fiendish template. For full details, see *MM p286 and p108*. Additionally, the Centipede stays for **four** rounds, due to the +1 CL to Evil spells from Hioesien's Evil domain.

Fiendish Monstrous Centipede, Large: CR 1 (summoned); Large Magical Beast (Fiendish); HD 3d8; hp 13; Init +2; Spd 40 ft.; AC 14, touch 11, flat-footed 12; Base Atk +2; Grp +7;

Atk +3 melee (1d8+1 Bite, plus poison);

Full Atk 3 melee (1d8+1 Bite, plus poison);

Space/Reach 10 ft. /5 ft.; SA Poison bite, 1d4 Dex damage, Fort DC11, Smite Good 1/day for +3 Damage; SQ Darkvision 60 ft., vermin traits; Resistance 5 - Cold and Fire; Spell resistance 8;

AL NE; SV Fort +3, Ref +3, Will +1, Str 13, Dex 15, Con 10, Int 3, Wis 10, Cha 2.

Skills and Feats: Climb +10, Hide +6, Spot +4; Weapon Finesse (Racial bonus)

Smite Good (Su): Once per day the creature can make a normal melee attack to deal extra damage equal to its HD total (maximum of +20) against a good foe.

Special Qualities: A fiendish creature retains all the special qualities of the base creature and also gains the following.

—Darkvision out to 60 feet.

—Resistance to cold and fire 5.

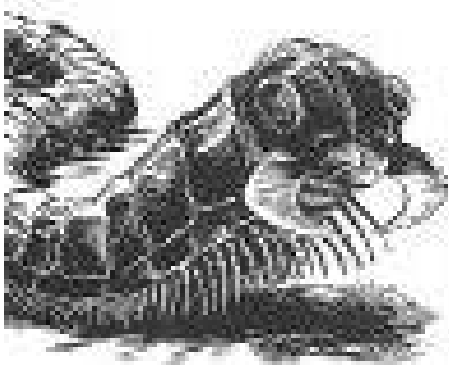
—Spell resistance equal to the creature's HD + 5 (maximum 25).

Vermin Traits:

—Immunity to all mind-affecting effects (charms, compulsions, phantasms, patterns, and morale effects).

—Darkvision out to 60 feet.

Physical Description:

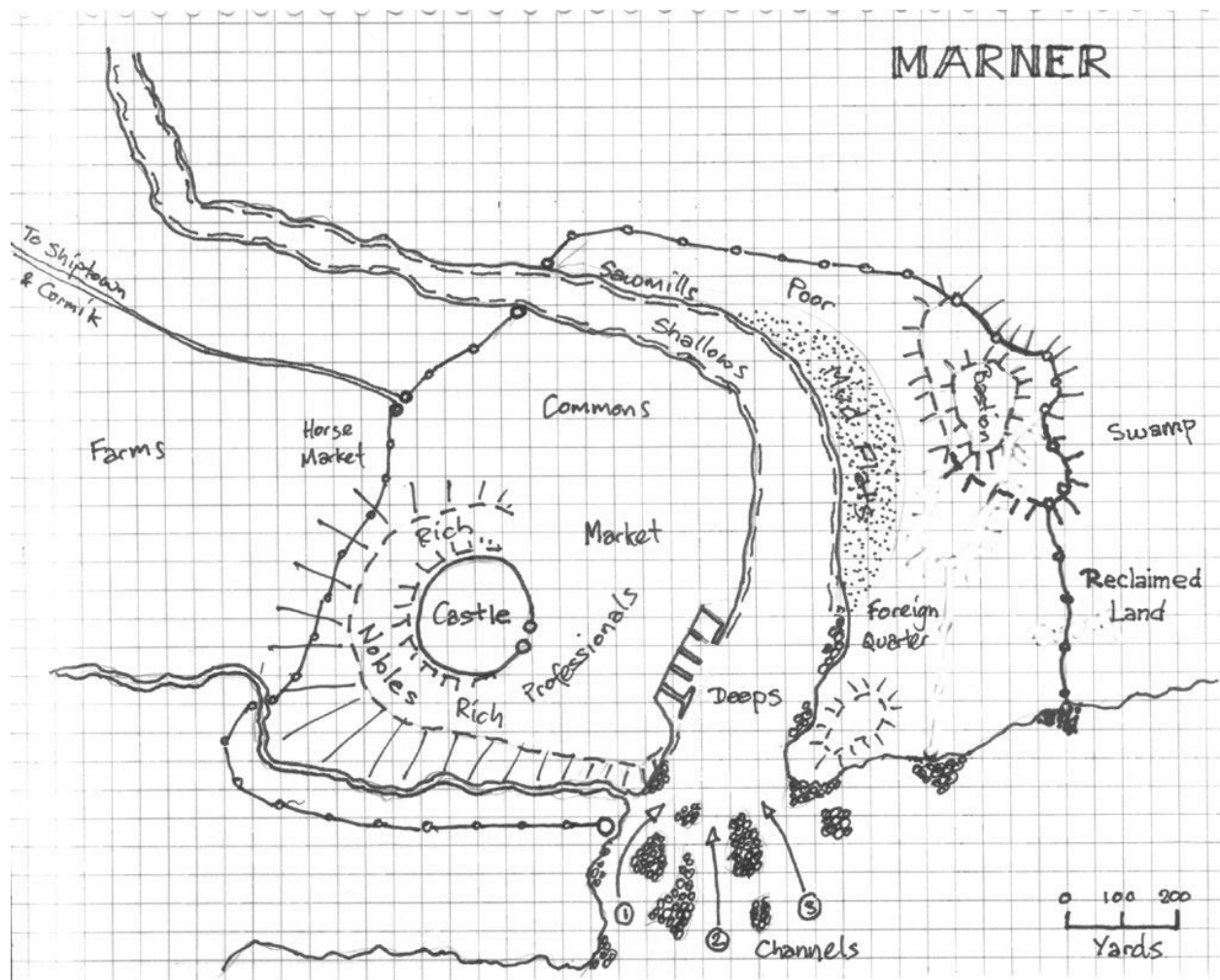


Sir Ardent Bentner

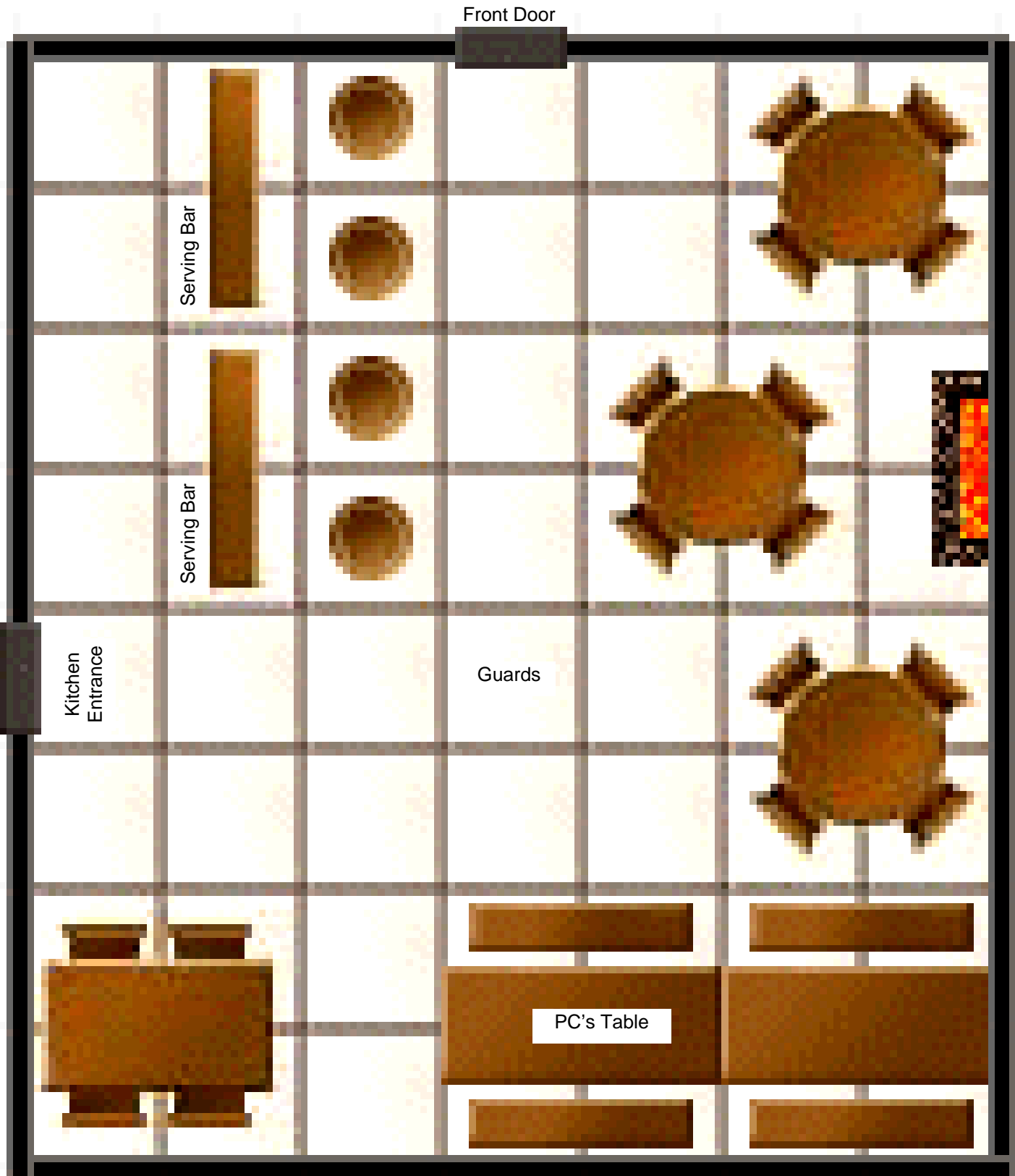
Head of Security for Marner
Watcher of the Gem of the North
Male human Fighter 6 / Rog 3.

As a young man, Ardent put food on his parent's table by serving simultaneously in the militias for House Cormik and House Abonhoth. He learned he could earn a better living by joining the Marner Constabulary, but while employed there, became distrustful of the merchants that paid his wages. When his parents passed on, he enlisted in the Ratic army and served faithfully as a sergeant stationed at the Bastion in Marner for several years. His refusal to turn a blind eye to the shadier practices of some of the merchant guilds, who were supposedly under the jurisdiction of the Constabulary which they paid for, caught the attention of Prince Alain, who enlisted him as the head of security first for his household, then later for the city of Marner.

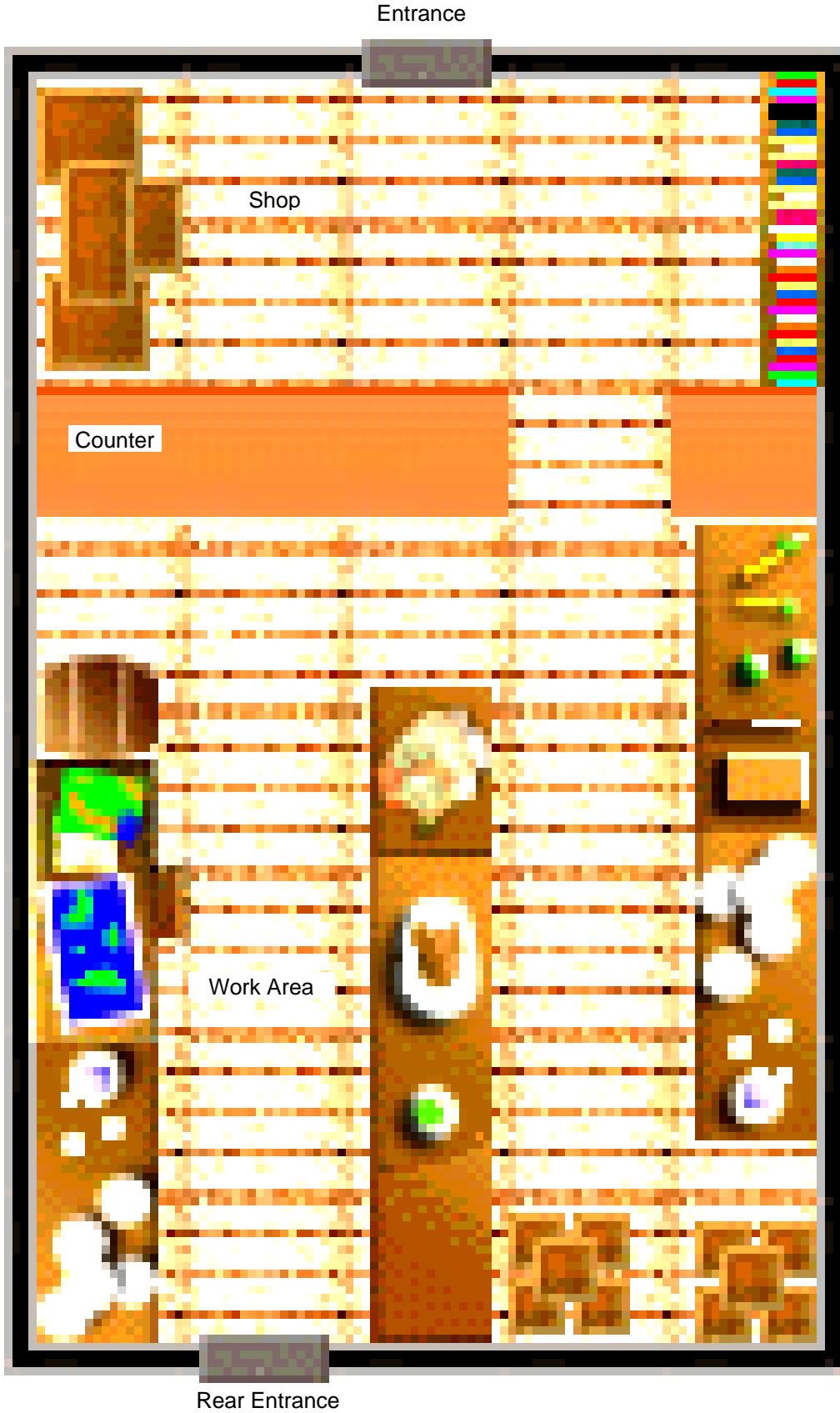
Overview Map of the City of Marner



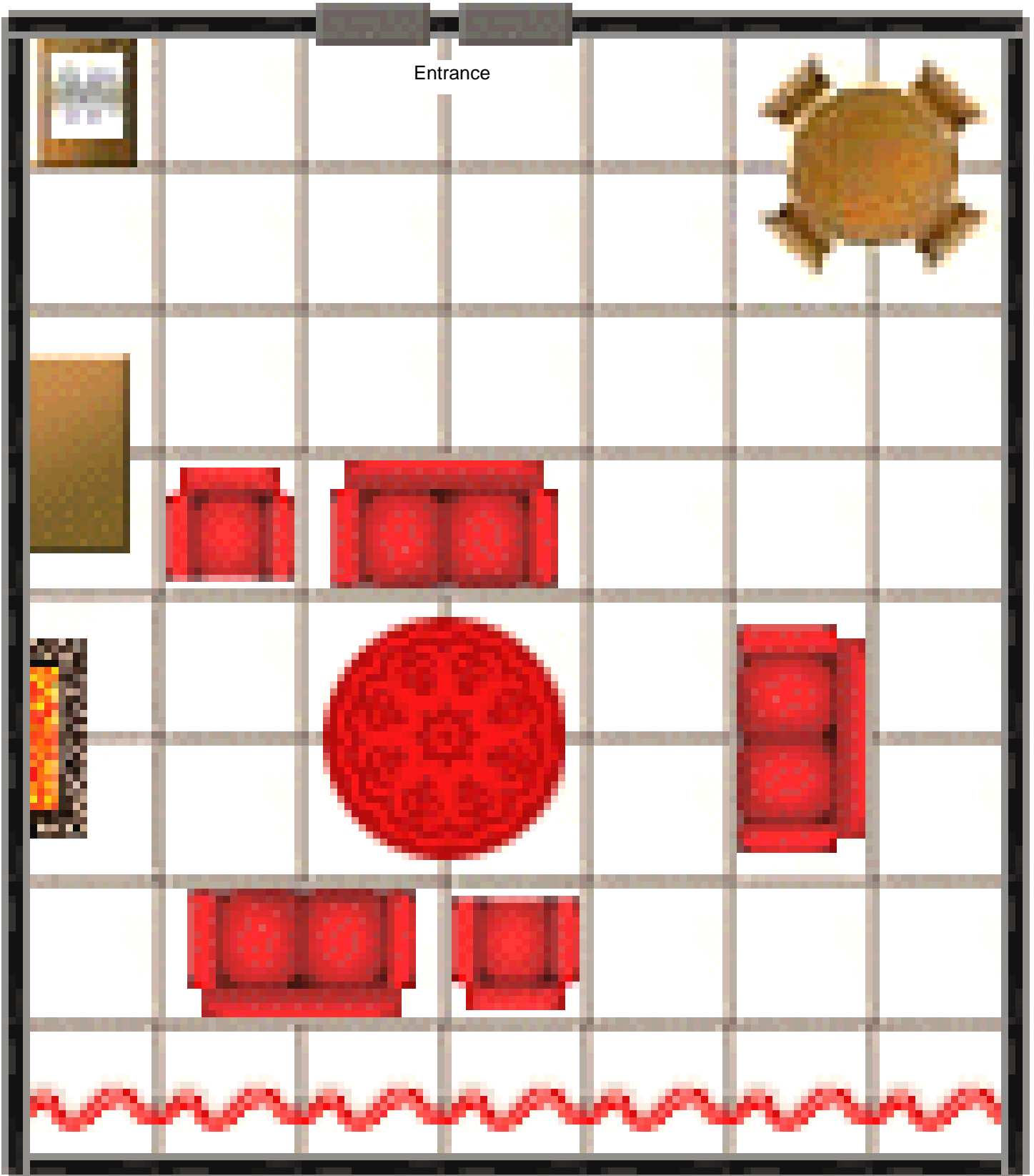
The Baron's Beard Tavern



Workshop of Jelof Stind, Chandler



Sitting Room – Sir Engerd Kebert / Ms Mona Castiger



Shop of Milin Anghild, Sailmaker



Sail Hanging Room of Milin Anghild

