

Which Watch?

ALL URBAN ADVENTURES happen on the backdrop of a city and no city is complete without some law enforcement officers walking the streets. In many ways, a town's guard is as integral to the settlement's atmosphere as the architectural style of its buildings: always in the background, always with its own quirks, and occasionally standing in the way of adventurers.



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This article contains several suggestions for twists on the generic city watch, though none are presented as story hooks—they're best used by GMs who already have a story to tell and want to spice up the town's police forces for more interesting interactions with the party. In a large city (one that has several districts) use several of the following templates and complications to characterize each district's guards to establish the feeling of a vibrant, complex world in which 'the Law' can take several faces even when wearing the same uniforms.

Watch Templates

Each type of city watch is presented with a template (to add to the statistics for **guards**, **knights**, **veterans**, and **gladiators** in the core rules) as well as an Escalation entry that lists the likely course of action that a type of watch takes in response to an unruly adventuring party.

Brutal

These guards behave as thugs and bullies, using force as the first and only method to achieve their goals. They're not necessarily evil—in fact they might be committed to the orderly governance of the city, or even devoted to a god of justice. They simply see brutal strength as the most effective way to handle the streets under their protection.

Escalation: Brutal guards only respond with force. Any attempt to resist, ignore, or avoid them is met with greater and greater force, up to and including the most high-ranking captain charging on a gryphon from the skies, assisted by snipers,

wizards, and a citizen militia. These guards believe that the only way to keep the peace and maintain control is by projecting the greatest strength, and that deterrence can only be achieved by proving their superiority. If shamed in any way, they strike back twice as hard and spare no resources.

Brutal: The NPC's weapon attacks deal an extra 1d4 damage. In addition, the NPC gains proficiency with Intimidation. If they already have proficiency with Intimidation, their proficiency bonus is doubled when making Charisma (Intimidation) checks.

Bound

This watch works for a second powerful organization other than the government, such as a church, grand wizard, guild (or a council of guilds), or similar independent entity. Perhaps this connection is unofficial, arising from the simple fact that most members of the watch are devoted believers in the faith or have family relations to the guilds. It could also be an official connection made in accordance with the government, especially likely if the city's ruling body is itself a religious, magical, or commercial institution. In any case, this special connection grants the watch unusual mandates—such as chasing heretics, overseeing fey relations, or maintaining commercial weight standards—but also unusual support.

Escalation: The group in charge of the watch probably have some special, powerful forces at its disposal, and a problematic party might make them consider using such resources. A church can summon a divine being to chase down adventurers, a wizard can send their golem, and a guild council has access to well-equipped, highly-dangerous mercenaries and assassins.

Well-Supplied: The city's patrons provide the watch with blessings, simple magical items, or excellent gear. The NPC gains a +1 bonus to AC. A guard captain (a **knight**, **veteran**, or **gladiator**) also carries an *elemental gem*, *gem of brightness* or *lantern of revealing*.

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Corrupt

These guards do a lot of work but not necessarily for the government, and definitely not for the people they are supposed to protect—they're being paid by a rich person in power (legitimate or otherwise), probably with money but perhaps with other benefits as well. In a big enough town it's likely that the officers receive money from several different patrons. This kind of watch is so corrupt that the citizens are quite probably not only well-aware, but are also expected to pay for various ordinary activities (then again, they can also pay to have the watch ignore some less ordinary activities). These guards don't care about revenge or ideals, and can always be bought off.

Escalation: Corrupt guards are too self-serving to care about actual breaking of the law, unless someone in power demands their attention (in which case their income is on the line and they are very keen to finish the job with as much violence as needed). Similarly they will not chase after powerful adventurers even if the party have killed some of their members—unless they believe they have a chance against the adventurers in a fight, or better yet have something to blackmail the PCs with.

New Tax: The corrupt guards approach a person who looks well-off or in a dire situation and demand they pay a 'tax' of 1–5 gold (usually while coming up with a semi-plausible reason). If not paid, the guards resort to violence if they believe they have a chance to bully and rob the individual, or if they think they're out-matched return later in greater numbers to demand more money. When things turn sour for them the coward guards try to stop or avoid a physical conflict by demanding a price (50–250 gold, depending on the situation), to be paid by the adventurers, "*so that all hostilities can be forgiven*". A successful DC 20 Charisma (Intimidation) check turns the offer around, making the guards willing to pay the same amount to be allowed to escape alive.

Honest

In a city ruled over by a corrupt government, plagued by internal infernal forces, or simply too large to be effectively governed these guards try to serve as a barrier between the evils of the world and the innocents under their jurisdiction, attempting to protect the public from their own bosses. While many in the ranks might be too afraid, corrupt, or apathetic to care, most members of the guard (including its ranking officers) truly want to keep their city safe and secure. Their position isn't easy, forcing them to constantly face cruel moral dilemmas and be selective about upholding a code of laws that they don't see as just. Despite this however they have probably accepted this reality as unchangeable, because they don't believe a coup could succeed or are unwilling to pay the price in deaths and destruction.

Escalation: Adventurers who cause trouble to the guards might put them in an uncomfortable situation in which the law-abiding officers have to try and stop the party's actions—even if they believe the PCs are good people with good intentions. If the party aims to topple the ruling body of the city and shows they are both capable and sincere in the efforts, a DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check can turn a group of guards to their side (minus some troublemakers who are then banished or disposed of by the captain).

In Harm's Way: When an ally or civilian within 5 feet of the guard would be the target of a melee or ranged attack, the NPC can use their reaction to jump in the way and become the new target before the attack is rolled. In addition, the NPC gains proficiency with Insight. If they already have proficiency with Insight, their proficiency bonus is doubled when making Wisdom (Insight) checks.

Watch Complications

These can be applied to any watch whether generic or using one of the above templates, adding an unusual flair to a single encounter or a new way to interact with NPCs. In adventures that feature a lot of engagement with the local guards, GMs should consider adding a complication to mix things up.

Day and Night Watches

The city has essentially two different watches: one for the day and one for the night. Both report to the government but each is led by a different high-ranking officer, and the two might have nothing in common (being as different as, well, night and day). The two watches don't share barracks or equipment, and may even have different orders and procedures.

Divided Force

In a big city different sections can have different watch captains and jurisdictions. This can lead to conflict between the groups, making each district's guards very protective of their own people and 'turf'. A clever killer that commits a murder on one street can then hide the body in another to likely escape justice, the people in charge of each crime scene too proud and stubborn to agree to share findings and collaborate (this is exactly what happened in real-world London during the chase after Jack the Ripper).

Infested with Cultists

Ah, those cultists! Can't get rid of them. Every group of guards probably has a **cultist** among them. They're probably related to the main adventure in some way and might eventually rise up against their comrades closer to the finale. If a fight breaks out between the party and the watch, the GM can have one of the guards reveal themselves to be a cultist, spill some blood, summon a tentacle monster (get eaten by it), and turn the conflict into a cooperative effort to defeat the greater menace.

Leadership Crisis

An important officer retired, died, or had to quit, and now the lesser-ranking captains are without leadership. Most are unsure what to do, how to interpret their orders, or even what their orders are. Being very cautious—since there's no longer any boss to protect them from the politicians—they avoid most conflicts and try to defer, postpone, and delay, delay, delay. Their go-to solution to all problems that can't be ignored is to throw offenders into a jail cell for the night, but a DC 20 Intelligence (History) check can be used to quote a relevant law that convinces them otherwise.

Mistrusted

The public does not trust their own guards. This mistrust could be well-earned but it could also be that bad apples have been recently pushed out of the ranks leaving an orderly and just leadership, yet they can't manage (or don't know how) to convince the people to trust in them. With a little convincing most citizens are likely to agree to help the adventurers avoid the police, and even help in covering crimes.

Nepotism

A lot of important people in the guard belong to influential families, perhaps because their positions are considered honorable or it's expected as part of some tradition of military training. Once the party angers a powerful noble, they'll find that half the guard is after them for entirely personal reasons—even crossing the street can end with a fine.

New Recruits

The guard is mostly made of new, young, and inexperienced recruits. Perhaps all of the older guards died in the latest dragon attack, or maybe the city only recently managed to establish an official watch (twice the size of its old and retired militia). The guards are slow to react and slow to plan, taking a -2 penalty on all attack rolls.

Lazy and Unfit

These guards have it good! Crime rates are low, the city is out of the way of most barbarian hordes, and adventurers get rid of the most dangerous monsters in the surrounding lands. The watch have allowed themselves to become lazy and are no longer quick to respond—if they bother to do so at all, preferring to assume that most disturbances are minor and therefore will resolve themselves.

Obsessed with the Thieves' Guild

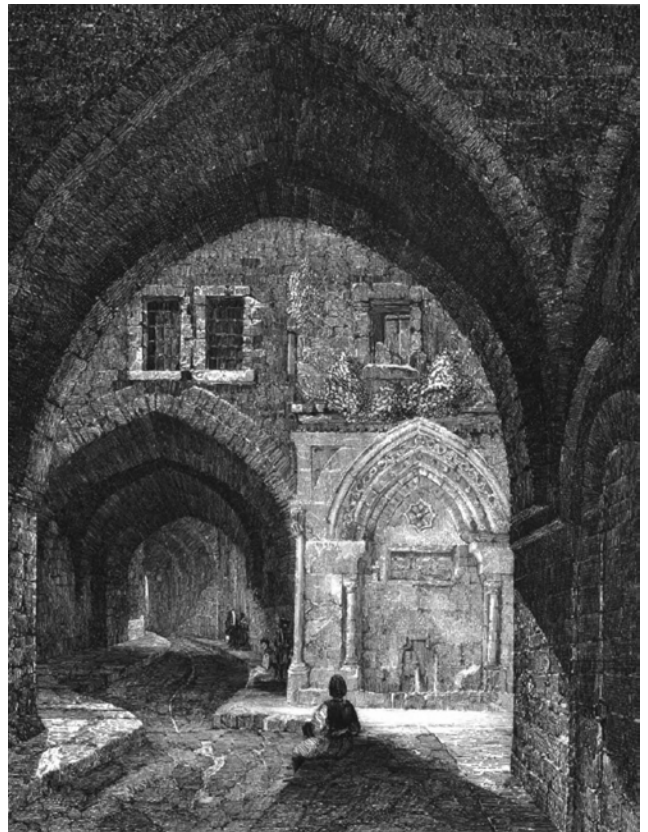
This watch (or maybe just a high-ranking official) is hot on the trail of the town's thieves' guild, trying to take them down for good. They're so focused on this quest that they neglect most other kinds of policing, but double down on anything that is even remotely similar to the patterns of behavior and types of clues they've managed to gather so far.

Overlapping Jurisdictions

When it comes to a specific type of crime the town's guard is not the only one in charge of the investigation. Maybe all mail is protected by the Royal Mail Police, or anything that happens in the sewers is technically under the authority of the Sewer-Cleaners' Guild. This overlap usually results in strained cooperation between the two groups, bogging down any investigations and creating interorganizational conflicts.

Understaffed

Not enough guards are available to patrol the streets, *and* to station in the prisons, *and* provide security to important officials, *and* to watch over the marketplace amongst dozens of other tasks. The watch are constantly out-numbered and therefore avoid risks, are quick to retreat, and try to find peaceful solutions whenever possible.



Well-Organized

Target the healer. Look out for hidden knives. Alert plain-clothed officers to follow suspicious individuals (like the PCs) around and track their movements. These guards are ready to handle a party of adventurers and will spend several days studying them closely to understand their motives and weaknesses—to be ready to tackle and subdue them if necessary.

Yell the Time Every Hour

This watch can be seen all over the city since they focus on the many lesser (yet still important) city services that historical real-world towns guards would do. They direct traffic in the streets, stand in the gates to collect gate tax, monitor the amount of muck in sewer ditches (alerting cleaners when necessary), protect the rich as they walk through the unsavory parts of a settlement, keep lists of undesirables, and, yes, yell the time every hour while ringing a bell. 🛎️