

WATERDEEP BACKGROUND HOOKS



30+ hooks that tie your PCs to the cast of *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*, with bonds of love, jealousy, prophecy and justice.



DRAGON HEIST: BACKGROUND HOOKS

Did flames, professional rivals, family feuds... if your PCs grew up in Waterdeep, or the surrounding area, the chances are they've made a few friends and enemies in the city before the events of *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* unfold. This supplement aims to inspire richer back stories for your PCs, with a series of "background hooks" that tie your PCs to the NPC cast of *Dragon Heist* with bonds of love, friendship, jealousy, prophecy, justice and revenge.

Each background hook represents an event or episode in that PC's past where they encountered one of *Dragon Heist's* NPCs - events which will most likely come back to haunt (or possibly help) them during the course of the adventure. For each hook, I have supplied what the player knows, followed by what the DM knows.

I've suggested at least one hook for every background in the Player's Handbook, however please note that several of these hooks could work well for other backgrounds (not just the one I assigned). In other words, feel free to mix and match as you feel appropriate, discussing with your PCs which hook(s) make sense for their character concept. This guide finishes with several hooks that might work for nearly any character of any background, plus a player handout containing the hooks without the DM's Notes besides them.

All NPCs that appear in the official storyline have a *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* page reference, whilst the couple of new NPCs I have created are labelled clearly along the way.

ACOLYTE

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO PRIMROSE?

When you were a young novice, you studied at your temple with another acolyte, known to all as Primrose, on account of the fact that her mother would always bring flowers to the temple. She was not the best nor brightest student, but she was like an older sister to you, standing up for you against a temple bully, while also introducing you to 'grown up pleasures' like drinking honeywine and smoking pixie's delight. She was eventually thrown out of the priesthood for her rebellious behaviour. You always wondered what happened to her.

DM'S NOTES

Vaelle Lurval, aka Primrose, is the cult fanatic that is left for dead in the Mausoleum (p. 70, WDH) in the Summer Encounter Chain. After having her chosen career as cleric curtailed, she was forced to fall back on the family business as a florist, but remained intrigued by greater powers, both light and dark. If you are not playing the Summer Encounter Chain, she might turn up as a Cassalanter spy, or as part of a unit sent to steal the Stone of Golorr from the PCs. Otherwise, the PCs may witness her being knifed in the back by other cult fanatics in another Waterdeep location.

CHARLATAN

YOU WON A VIAL OF POISON...

...and pissed off a drow in the process. You won your prize during a game of Three Dragon Ante, after the drow in question ran out of money and was forced to wager something more valuable. Well built and wearing a permanent snarl, he was angry enough at the loss to accuse you of cheating. When he stood up to leave, he placed the venom in front of you and said: "next time we meet, I'll be sure to fire some of this straight into your heart." Technically-speaking, you did cheat, but what was a foreigner like him going to do in front of everyone? Characters like that never hang around, and he's probably left Waterdeep by now.

DM'S NOTES

The drow that the PC defrauded out of his poison, and a fair few dragons besides, is Soluun Xibrindas (p.202, WDH), an unfriendly fellow at the best of times. If he sees the PC again he won't hesitate to make good on his promise. The vial contains three doses of a rare drow poison, which does 2d10 poison damage on injury. An apothecary would value the vial, if full, at 600 gp.

YOU CONNED A NOBLEWOMAN

About six months ago, you heard on the grapevine that a noblewoman, who simply called herself Y., was paying good money to anyone who could reveal the identity of any of Waterdeep's Masked Lords. You set up a meeting and presented her with several letters demonstrating "beyond doubt" that Jelenn Umbrusk is one of the city's faceless rulers, claiming 250 gp from her in the process. The letters of course were forged.

DM'S NOTES

A little fact-checking later and Yalah Grahlund (p 220, WDH) realised she has been duped. She has since given Victor Trench (p.32, WDH) the PC's description and told him to find out their real identity. Once she has it, she will pay extra, either to Trench or her Zhentarim contacts, to take back the 250 gp with interest, and leave the PC a few physical reminders why it doesn't pay to mess with a lady like her.

CRIMINAL

BYE-BYE BEHOLDER

Once upon a crime you used to run with the Xanathar Guild. Your friend, Zilo, got you involved, and to begin with you loved the adventure, and fast rewards, that the criminal underworld offered. But when Zilo got butchered by the boss for botching a mission, you discovered how brutal operating on the wrong side of the law can be. You decided to get out while you still could. That was over a year ago. Since you know the locations of most of the Guild's Waterdeep hideouts and hang outs, you've managed to avoid any unpleasant reunions with your ex-colleagues, up until now. The only person you'd be happy to see again is a guy called Jenten, who you got on well with. For a tough guy, he had a good sense of humour. You're pretty sure he'd be happy to see you too...

DM'S NOTES

Many of the Xanathar Guild that this PC worked with are no doubt dead by now - junior members have a short life expectancy - but there is a 20% chance that any human guild member will recognise this PC, if they encounter them. While a guild member from a monstrous race, like kenku or bugbear, has a 10% chance of recognising them. If the PC has disguised themselves or significantly altered their appearance since that time, you can halve those percentages. Any guild member who does recognise the PC, apart from Jenten (CN, human, **thug**, new NPC), will attempt to capture the PC and bring them before Xanathar. The PC can find their way to a specific Guild hideout on a successful DC 10 Wisdom (Survival) check, and to Xanathar's Lair on a successful DC 15 check.

BUSTED FOR BURGLARY

After pulling off several high profile robberies, you were well on your way to an early retirement, until a certain blundering Barnibus Blastwind got on your case. This meddling, self-styled 'detective', produced such compelling evidence against you, that even the Magister you bribed couldn't ignore it. You were summarily flogged and sentenced to one year in a cold, damp, dungeon cell with nothing but two bowls of rotten tripe a day to feed on. Wouldn't it be great to knock that sententious so-and-so down a peg or three, or perhaps expose a skeleton in his closet? No one is that squeaky clean, after all.

DM'S NOTES

Barnibus Blastwind (p.195, WDH) is one of the campaign's bona fide good guys, but if you want to spice things up a bit it might transpire that he is being paid to obstruct the investigation into the *fireball* launched in Chapter 3, and stop it from going anywhere. A combination of debt and old age may have made him cynical enough to accept a very large 'retirement gift' from someone keen not to be exposed by his detective work. This could set Barnibus and the PC at odds, as well as offer your PC the perfect chance for revenge.

CRIMINAL SPY

IN DEBT TO THE ZHENTARIM

You've been employed by various members of the Zhentarim, on more than one occasion, to spy on lords and low lifes alike, and as such you've built up a small network of contacts amongst the Black Network. So when you needed 200 gp in a hurry, to settle an old score, it was to the Zhentarim you turned - after all, you figured you could quickly earn the money back in the field and pay back the debt. A recent street fight, however, left you unable to work for several months and you're now stony broke. Hopefully your criminal colleagues won't be pissed off if you delay payment for just a few more weeks...

DM'S NOTES

It might be that this PC has contacts on both sides of the feuding Zhentarim factions, both of which might try to call them into service at any time in order to pay back their debt. But mostly likely it was Istrid Horn (p 199, WDH) who lent them the money. It will be hard to say no if she calls in a favour, no matter how unpleasant the job in hand.



ENTERTAINER

A HECKLER HUMILIATED

During one of your less inspired performances in The Yawning Portal tavern, you were heckled by a thuggish half orc who told you to: "stop squealing like a half-gutted pig". Never one to take an insult lying down, you ad-libbed a song that called into question both the beauty and brains of the heckler, causing the tavern's patrons to roar with laughter. The half orc didn't take their eyes off you for the rest of the night, their gaze of hate burning into the back of your head, as you contemptuously ignored them.

DM's NOTES

The half orc in question could be one of Yagra Stonefist (p 20, WDH), Hrabbz (p 205, WDH) or Ziraj the Hunter (p.201, WDH), or even a member of the Xanathar Guild, such as Grum'shar (p 29) Whoever you decide it is, they will be very keen to have a little one on one time with the PC, if the opportunity ever arises.

PUT IT ON THE TAB!

During a particularly long and raucous night in The Yawning Portal tavern, you offered every geek and sundry a flagon of Shadowdark ale (the best brew in the taproom), at regular intervals throughout the night. You were in high spirits and, to begin with, you earned back the money you spent by singing for tips. However, as your performances became more slurred and the tips fewer, you kept buying rounds with the same reckless abandon, telling Durnan the proprietor to "put it on the tab". Long after midnight you stumbled out of the bar, forgetting to pay, and somehow evading the watchful eye of the landlord. Oh well, he's probably forgotten about it by now.

DM's NOTES

The next time the party go to The Yawning Portal (which will be right away, if you play the adventure as written), Durnan collars the PC in question and reminds them of their unpaid bar tab. Durnan says it was 100 gp - a successful Wisdom (Insight) contest vs. Durnan's Charisma (Deception) reveals it was less, but the tavern owner will justify any surplus as 'interest'. If the PC doesn't have the money, they could try and assure Durnan that they will pay it later, which requires a successful DC 20 Charisma (Persuasion) check. Otherwise Durnan might oblige them to run an errand on his behalf, wash dishes for a tenday, or force them to perform for free at the tavern, giving Durnan any tips they earn until the debt is paid. If you want to keep this hook for later in the adventure, replace the tavern and landlord with those of your making.

ENTERTAINER (GLADIATOR)

FIGHTING PIT RIVAL

Some tenday ago, you were invited to compete in a show fight in an illegal fighting pit in the cellar of a Dock Ward tavern. The guy you were fighting was an ugly brute, with a broken nose and a pale bald pate that was covered in blue eye tattoos. From the way he looked at you as he walked into the ring, it was obvious he thought he'd won already. He must have felt more than a little stupid when you knocked him out with almost your first punch.

DM's NOTES

The would-be hard man is Krentz (p.21, WDH), a low level boss of the Xanathar Guild. If one of your PCs chooses this background hook, allow Krentz his full hit points when they encounter him in Chapter 1, so that there is more opportunity for drama to unfold, and for Krentz to be a reoccurring NPC in your adventure. If he is knocked unconscious by Yagra (p 22, WDH), or anyone else, that doesn't necessarily mean he has been killed.

FOLK HERO

THUGS SENT PACKING

Your once quaint village in Undercliff has slowly become more dangerous over the last few years, as enterprising criminals from Waterdeep look to conduct their business free from the beady eye of the City Watch. When a group of thugs started harrassing your elderly father, along with other farmers and local business owners, with demands for protection money, you rallied a group of young men and sent them packing with their tails between their legs. Virtually any denizen of Undercliff will stand you a drink in their local tap room.

DM's NOTES

The thugs the PC sent packing were low level Xanathar Guild members keen to make a name for themselves by carving out a bit of extra business in an as-yet-untapped market. It's probably only a matter of time before they try again in bigger, and more powerful, numbers. The PC's name is well known to them, and the thugs may decide that burning his/her father's business to the ground (with or without the old man in it) might incentivise the rest of the village folk to pay their protection fees without a fuss next time. The City Watch will continue to kick their feet in dealing with any problems, saying that they lack the resources to deal with problems outside the city walls. The City Guard meanwhile consider such trifling local disputes beneath them.

GUILD ARTISAN

PROFESSIONAL RIVAL

Ever since you went into business in Waterdeep, a certain member of your guild has tried to thwart you. First they tried to block your entry to the guild, and when that didn't work they tried other means to run you out of town. At every step of your way, you are dogged by nosy inspectors and overly fastidious Magisters, who seem hellbent on throwing bureaucratic obstacles in your way and finding legal irregularities in your business. Sooner or later you're going to have take action against your rival.

DM's NOTES

Depending on what trade this PC is engaged in, you may be able to find an appropriate PC amongst the cast of *Dragon Heist* to be their business rival. If not you can invent one. Meanwhile, consider where this burning enmity on the part of the NPC comes from? Is it a fear of competition, a sense of inferiority next to the PC's craftsmanship, or is there a more compelling reason behind it perhaps a forgotten family feud, insult or humiliation that the PC is totally unaware of

HERMIT

A COSMIC PORTENT

During intense meditation that lasted several days, you detected a disturbing, diabolical change in the cosmos that portended the death of 100 innocent people in Waterdeep. The visions you had featured a noblewoman crying at the stroke of midnight, and people in golden masks throwing bodies on a huge cauldron of fire, while a demonic figure counted them. The demonic figure had a cruel, lascivious human face with two horns on his forehead. You have travelled to the city in the hope of realigning the cosmos and preventing these tragic deaths.

DM's NOTES

The deaths this PC has fortold are those of the 100 people Ammalia Cassalanter intends to poison during her Founder's Day party (see *Day of the Damned*, p.130 WDH). If the PC goes to any temple in Waterdeep and describes his vision the priest will suggest that the 'demonic' figure could be the devil Asmodeus. Similarly a PC can ascertain that for themselves in 1d3 hours if they visit a library and succeed on a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check.

GUILD MERCHANT

A BUSINESS DEBT

You borrowed 400 gp from the Cassalanter, a noble family who engage in money lending, one year ago to start your trading business. By the terms of your loan, you now owe them 480 gp, but wheeling and dealing is not as profitable as it seems... not when wagons break, horses go lame, and staff and guards need paying. You've managed to accrue 200 gp of what you owe them. Still it's been a long while since their accountant has been in touch, and 480 dragons is small change to them. Perhaps they've written off the debt.

DM's NOTES

As the Cassalanter (p.193 and 218, WDH) scour the city for Neverember's hoard, they are also desperate to call in all the outstanding debt owed to them, as they desperately try to raise the one million dragons they need to save their children's souls. Shortly after the adventure begins, the PC receives a strongly-worded letter demanding that they bring the money to the Cassalanter's villa within three days, without fail.

HLAM-FISTED

Upon hearing tales of the mighty Hlam, the grand master of the Order of the Even-Handed, you travelled to his cave on Mount Waterdeep, hoping to benefit from his wisdom. After entering the cave, you found him meditating in the lotus position and you offered to be his apprentice. In response, he slowly stood up and then battered you with flurry of blows that sent you flying out of the cave, with several cracked ribs and two less teeth. He then turned around and walked back into his cave, without saying a word.

DM's NOTES

That was Hlam's way of saying a) please don't disturb me when I'm meditating and b) you're not ready for my instruction. If the PC in question has a chance to apologise and impress Hlam on another occasion, or if they gain 4 renown in the Order of the Gauntlet, Hlam will take the PC on as an apprentice. If they spend three months training with Hlam consider giving them a new power or ability appropriate to their class.

NOBLE

EMBARRASSING YOUTH

Your family was great friends with the Rosznars, and when you were young you used to play with their daughter Ezzy. Or, more precisely, you used to mercilessly tease and bully her. On one occasion, a large family wedding, you took great pleasure in pouring mead on her dress and yelling: "Look everyone! Ezzy has wet herself!" Everyone believed you. You feel bad about it now, but in your own childish way you were just trying to flirt with her. No doubt she's forgiven you by now.

DM'S NOTES

Esvele (no one calls her Ezzy any more) has definitely not forgiven the PC in question for this humiliating incident, oft recounted at family gatherings. Nor has she forgiven them for half a dozen more similarly cruel tricks. Now of course she is the rather formidable Black Viper (p 196, WDH).

A NOBLE RIVAL

If there's one person you really can't stand in the whole city it's that Renaer Neverember. How the son of a traitor can continue to swan around Waterdeep like he owns the place, you have no idea. While others call him good-looking, well-educated and a bon vivant, you consider him wan, artificial and boorish. Sure he's good with a sword, but anyone can excel in fencing if they have time to practice every day thanks to daddy's embezzled riches. If someone were to ask your opinion, the city should seize his family mansion and make it public property.

DM'S NOTES

Maybe the PC is just jealous of Renaer (p.25 and 215, WDH), maybe there's a family rivalry, or maybe Renaer proved too popular with someone the PC was romantically interested in for their liking (and possibly still is interested in. Could they both be in love with Esvele Rosznar?). As Renaer plays an important role in Dragon Heist, a rivalry between him and one of the party could create an interesting dynamic throughout your campaign.

BAD PRESS

The editor of the Waterdeep Wazoo, Gaxly Rudderbust, ran a lengthy exposé on your family history, using public records as 'evidence' that you are descended from the bastard son of a Lord's mistress and that you should not be considered part of society's aristocratic fabric. The piece was clearly paid for.

DM'S NOTES

This exposé could replace the one Jarlaxle writes (p 34 and p 39, WDH), in which case you need to consider what the drow's motivation would be. Otherwise it might be that your family has a long running feud with the Cassanlancers or the Grahlunds. Or perhaps the PC has riled one of the Guilds, or a criminal organisation like the Zhentarim.

NOBLE KNIGHT

PLEGDED TO THE CASSALANTERS

Powerful, beautiful, noble... ever since you saw Ammalia Cassalancer at the annual Spring Joust tournament, held at the Fields of Triumph, you understood that she is a woman worth fighting for. You won the debutants' joust, and dedicated your victory to this vision of elegance. She has since blessed you with her patronage, and in return you have agreed to serve her in times of need. You hope she will call on you soon, so you can prove your valour. A married lady, it goes without saying that yours is a chaste devotion...

DM'S NOTES

This hook might suit a character from minor nobility. Ammalia's patronage could be what pays for this PC's retainers (p 136, PH), or their horse, or you may consider if she has gifted the PC a suit of plate armour. In return, she expects her knight to perform certain services for her, of one type or another. Naturally she wouldn't ask a knight to betray their code of honour. Unless she thought they would say yes (nb if your PC would prefer to idolise a male NPC, simply replace Ammalia with Victorio Cassalancer. Either might call in a favour that could compromise the morals of the knight, and their fellow adventurers).

OUTLANDER

MARKED BY THE LAW

You have barely spent any time in Waterdeep, but almost immediately after your arrival you managed to get into a drunken street brawl with a group of thugs who were harrassing people in a Dock Ward tavern. When the City Watch tried to arrest everyone involved, your blood was up and you were in no mood to go quietly. You punched a sergeant in the face, knocking him flat out unconscious and shattering his nose. You were promptly clubbed into submission by his colleagues and hauled into a cell at the nearest courthouse. The half-elven Magister who presided over your case let you off the assault charges due to the fact that you were trying to protect law-abiding citizens. He did warn you however that: "unlike whatever savage backwater it is you said you come from, we don't tolerate violence in Waterdeep. If I see you in this court again, I won't be so lenient."

DM's NOTES

The sergeant in question is called Lorn Stonefellow (**veteran**, new NPC), and his hardman reputation took a beating along with his nose the day the PC laid him out. To say he is bitter is a bit of an understatement, and his crooked nose is a permanent reminder of "that punk's lucky punch". He won't take unlawful revenge, but if he catches the PC causing trouble anywhere in the city he will take them down with extreme prejudice. If the party encounter the City Watch in the Dock Ward there is a 20% chance Stonefellow is leading the patrol. Meanwhile, the PC may encounter the half-elven Magister, Umbero Zastro (p.82, WDH), again as well, especially if you are playing the Spring Encounter Chain.

YOU'RE THE UNLIKELY CO-AUTHOR OF A GUIDE TO MONSTERS

Your life patrolling the hills, plains and forests of the realms hasn't put you in contact with many city folk, and those you have encountered mostly filled you with contempt. Recently, you had the misfortune to be employed as a guide by a garrulous, overweight fellow called Rolo (or some similarly ridiculous name). For someone who couldn't swing a sword, and was no great magic user either, he had an incongruous fascination with monsters. He paid you to lead him through a fetid swamp to the lair of a catoblepas, but the minute the creature showed its face he ran like a whelp in the opposite direction. Later he asked you everything you knew about the beast and wrote it down word-for-word in a heavily-annotated scrapbook he carried with him everywhere. He was so pleased by what you could tell him regarding the beast's eating, mating and other behavioural habits, that he didn't bother tracking down any more of the monsters in the region - he simply quizzed you about the critters instead.

DM's NOTES

This PC was unwittingly instrumental in the research of *Volo's Guide to Monsters*. When they meet Volothamp Geddarm (p.218, WDH) again, he may be pleased to see the PC at first, but then may become paranoid that they have come to claim some of the book's royalties, or worse, discredit him in front of Waterdeep's reading public.

SAGE

BLACKLISTED FROM BLACKSTAFF TOWERS

You studied for many years at the Blackstaff Academy, at the invitation of the 6th Blackstaff, Samark Dhanzscul. However when Vajra Safahr became the seventh to bear the title, she was left unimpressed by your "unoriginal and uninspiring methodology". She turfed you out of the academy and told you to gain some life experience, to see some more of the world first, before wasting any more time in studies that weren't benefitting anyone. Naturally, you felt victimised by her decision and hated her for it. She was clearly trying to imprint her authority in her new role, at your expense.

DM's NOTES

The PC's eviction wasn't personal. Vajra Safahr (p.217, WDH) really does believe they must go out into the world in order to grow - even if she didn't manage to dress their dismissal very diplomatically. She recognises the PC's abilities and may even employ them for Gray Hands faction missions (p.36, WDH), but they will have to impress her to be allowed back to into the Blackstaff Academy.

Variant. Or maybe the eviction was personal! Vajra might have (very well hidden) feelings for this PC, and she may have decided that by removing them from the Blackstaff Academy she was removing a potential danger for her career. After all the Blackstaff can hardly be seen falling in love with her students.



SAILOR

SHE LEFT YOU IN LUSKAN

Many years ago you fell in love with a young, spirited and troubled female drow, who called herself Fel. A misfit in her society, one who abhorred the cruel matriarchy of her race, she had fled the Underdark and found work on the same ship as you, bound for Luskan. After docking, she slipped away without saying goodbye. For weeks you searched the city but finally you ran out of money and were forced to leave Luskan with the next ship that offered you work.

DM's NOTES

Once in Luskan, Fel'rekt Lafeen (p 201, WDH) sought out Jarlaxle and petitioned to join his gang, Bregan D'aerthe. She quickly impressed the boss, who rewarded her work by paying for the expensive rituals that enabled her to assume a male gender. As a male, Fel'rekt continues to work as one of Jarlaxle's most trusted agents.

SAILOR PIRATE

YOU CROSSED DRIFTWOOD BONES

You were part of the crew aboard the pirate vessel, Barracuda, when it successfully assaulted the merchant ship, the Silk Purse, several months ago. Seven members of the pirate gang, including two friends of yours, died in the attack, while the captain, Driftwood Bones, refused to share the booty evenly. Crew unrest soon led to outright mutiny, and Bones was set adrift in a rowing boat, some fifty miles off shore from Waterdeep. Whether he drowned, starved or got eaten by sharks, it's all the same to you.

DM's NOTES

Driftwood Bones (new NPC) is a 62-year-old dwarf **swashbuckler** who wears necklaces and earrings fashioned from his enemies' bones. Against the odds, he made it back to Waterdeep with his first mate and three more loyal crew members and - thanks to a large Zhentarim loan - recently managed to get his ship back, using a mix of guile and force. Nailed to the wall of his cabin is a list, containing the names of each of the Barracuda crew who mutineered against him. Several names have been crossed out already, names which match the corpses that have been turning up in dark alleys around the Dock Ward in recent days.

SOLDIER

A WARDRAGON WELCOME

Your father fought side by side the formidable frame of Meloon Wardragon in defense of Waterdeep several times over, and the pair were fast friends. Now that you've decided to make your way in the world, he has written a letter of introduction commending you to Wardragon's service. A servant of the goddess Tymora, Wardragon is highly thought of in Waterdeep and has contacts in both the City Guard and the City Watch. Your father is sure he will find good use for your skills.

DM's NOTES

Meloon Wardragon (p.210, WDH) was a hero, but, since having his brain devoured, he works as a spy for the Xanathar Guild in thrall to the mind flayer Nihiloor (p 212, WDH). He retains all of his old memories and will remember the PC's father. He will attempt to use the PC, and their allies, as pawns for the Xanathar Guild, going so far as to have them secure the Stone of Golorr for Nihiloor. This hook works well for any PC who comes from the area surrounding Waterdeep, or even further afield. It would also work well for clerics who worship Tymora.

EXPELLED FROM THE CITY GUARD

From the day you joined Waterdeep's famed City Guard, Sergeant Yafeera hated your guts. She made it her mission to make your life in the Guard a misery, always giving you the dirtiest jobs and never missing a chance to put you down in front of the troops. When you suspected she was engaging in illegal behaviour with criminal gangs you confronted her. The next thing you knew you woke up bloodied and bruised in a holding cell. Yafeera claimed she had caught you stealing from the barracks, and you were flogged and sentenced to two years hard labour. Now you've returned to Waterdeep.

DM's NOTES

Tashlyn Yafeera (p.199, WDH) is no longer a sergeant but a captain of the City Guard, who acts as the bodyguard to a Magister stationed at the Southern Gate. This information can be gleaned with a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check. During the day there is a 60% chance she will be stationed at the gate, 20% chance that she is accompanying the Magister on around the city, and 20% chance that she is engaged in Zhentarim activity. At night there is a 60% chance she is resting in a barracks stationed near the Southern Gate, 20% chance she is on Zhentarim business and 20% she is out drinking in taverns with either guards or Zhents.

URCHIN

A BEATING YOU'LL NEVER FORGET

You'll never forget the night, many years ago, when you ran into a slack-jawed young thug stumbling out of tavern. The dead-eyed beefcake beat you to within an inch of your life for the temerity of brushing into him, and left you in the snow to die. If the City Watch hadn't stumbled across you and taken you to the Hospice of St. Laupsenn you probably would have done. If you ever see that face again you'd have trouble controlling yourself.

DM'S NOTES

The thug in question is Justyn Rassk (p.41, WDH), a member of the guild of butchers. If the PC encounters Rassk and manages to exact revenge, there are likely to be legal consequences. In the case of Rassk's murder, the guild of butchers will employ Vincent Trench (p.32, WDH) to investigate.

MISSING ROSKY

Life on the streets is tough, but having a friend or two around to share the hard times with you has always made it bearable. That's why it hurts that you haven't seen your little halfling friend, Rosky, for nearly a month now. Recently he'd been spending a lot of time with a character called Kelso (another halfling - but one that you wouldn't trust with a single nib!), but you never thought he would desert you for such a sketchy lowlife and his gang.

DM'S NOTES

Roscoe 'Rosky' Underbough (p.30, WDH) has been recruited by Kelso Fiddlewick (p.42, WDH) as the newest member of the halfling wererat gang the Shard Shunners, which has ties to the Xanathar Guild. Kelso preyed on Roscoe's vulnerability, offering him a way off the streets if he accepted the gift of lycanthropy. How Roscoe reacts if he encounters the PC is up to you to decide...



MORE BACKGROUND HOOKS

The following hooks are not tied to any particular background.

JUST A ONE NIGHT STAND?

You were drinking in the Silver Scabbard tavern (or the Silver something at any rate...), when you met a flirty, somewhat volatile, actress called Jaylin (...at least you think that was her name!). The opening night of Jaylin's new play had been a roaring success and she was out celebrating with other cast members when you crossed paths. You ended up at her place, but didn't stay for breakfast as you had to "see a man about an owlbear". You never did turn up to the Pink Flumph theatre to watch her perform.

DM'S NOTES

Yaliek (not Jaylin) Iltizmar (p.74, WDH) was looking out for her new lover amongst the audience of the comedy *The Taming of the Kenku* for almost the whole run, and her performance never again hit the heights of the opening night. If she sees the PC who spurned her again, she is likely to castigate them loudly and publicly. However if the PC succeeds on a DC 10 Charisma (Deception) check, Yaliek will readily believe any lies they tell her about why they were unable to get in contact. In this scenario she is likely to want to take them to bed again, with a view to becoming long term partners. If she feels mistreated by her lover, or ex-lover, she may try to exact revenge. She is a bard and member of the Harpers.

NO WORD FROM NERARE

Several days ago you met a swashbuckling young nobleman at a festhall in Castle Ward, who introduced himself as Nerare. You have since embarked on a whirlwind love affair. In fact, you were supposed to meet him last night at a coffee house on Virgin's Square but he didn't turn up. Things were going so well between you, you really hope this isn't his way of calling things off.

DM'S NOTES

Nerare's real name is Renaer Neverember (p.215, WDH), a name he rarely uses when boozing and carousing in the city's festhalls, as it tends to attract a lot of unwanted attention. He has been meaning to tell the PC his real name ever since his original lie, but is worried how they might react. He didn't make their appointment on Virgin's Square because he was captured, along with Floon, by Zhentarim agents (who were in turn ambushed by Xanathar Guild members). See Chapter 1 for more.

A CRUSH ON BONNIE

That waitress, Bonnie, at the Yawning Portal tavern is so dreamy! How you would love to take her away from this filthy town and start a family of little auburn-haired munchkins in the country. It's true, she has never paid much attention to you, but you figure that's just because she's always busy, being run into the ground by that miserable, money-grabbing landlord, Durnan. You're sure if you had some time to get to know her, something magical could happen.

DM'S NOTES

Sadly for this PC, Bonnie (p.20, WDH) is a doppelganger, who is only posing as a barmaid while her and her gang of four other doppelgangers find some more lucrative business to engage in. If she discovers the PC has fallen for her, she may take advantage of them, for example asking them for all the information she would need to impersonate a certain high-ranking person in the city. You might consider, as well, that posing as a human has led Bonnie to some kind of 'awakening' as a person capable of feeling kindness and love, possibly triggered by the PC's affection for her.

A STRANGE SHIPMATE

A few months ago you took a ship from Thay, across the Sea of Fallen Stars. Most of the passengers were merchants, but you recognised one as a Red Wizard. Fascinated by her shaven head, her curious tattoos and the alluring power she exuded, you couldn't resist sneaking into her cabin to snoop around. Amongst her belongings you found a ring with the letter M engraved on it, and on a whim you decided to pocket it. Just as you were about to leave she returned. Seeing you she calmly shut the door and whispered something in a language you didn't understand. After several hours of obeying her every command, you woke as if from a dream and ran as fast as you could from out of the cabin, the sound of her laughter chasing after you. The strange thing is, you could have sworn you saw her again a week ago, here in Waterdeep, in the Southern Ward, wearing a black cloak. She had her hood pulled up close, but it seemed like part of her head and face were now covered in scars. On second thoughts, it must have been somebody else.

DM'S NOTES

The woman in question is Kaevja Cynavern (p.158, WDH), whilst the ring is a Teleporter Ring (p.157, WDH), which Manshoon had sent to Kaevja along with a promise to tutor her in the arcane arts in return for her service. She suspects where she might have lost it, and if she realises the PC is in Waterdeep she will cast *locate object*, in an attempt to find and reclaim it. Probably not before she has toyed with the PC some more.

BACKGROUND HOOKS - PLAYER HANDOUT

This handout offers you a list of events and episodes from your past, which will tie your character more closely to the *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* storyline. Find the one that corresponds to your player's background, or choose one - or more - that suits your PC best. Once you have chosen, check with your DM that this hook will work for them too!

ACOLYTE

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO PRIMROSE?

When you were a young novice, you studied at your temple with another acolyte, known to all as Primrose, on account of the fact that her mother would always bring flowers to the temple. She was not the best nor brightest student, but she was like an older sister to you, standing up for you against a temple bully, while also introducing you to 'grown up pleasures' like drinking honeywine and smoking pixie's delight. She was eventually thrown out of the temple for her rebellious behaviour. You always wondered what happened to her.

CHARLATAN

YOU WON A VIAL OF POISON...

...and pissed off a drow in the process. You won your prize during a game of Three Dragon Ante, after the drow in question ran out of money and was forced to wager something more valuable. Well built and wearing a permanent snarl, he was angry enough at the loss to accuse you of cheating. When he stood up to leave, he placed the venom in front of you and said: "next time we meet, I'll be sure to fire some of this straight into your heart." Technically-speaking, you did cheat, but what was a foreigner like him going to do in front of everyone? Characters like that never hang around, and he's probably left Waterdeep by now.

YOU CONNED A NOBLEWOMAN

About six months ago, you heard on the grapevine that a noblewoman, who simply called herself Y., was paying good money to anyone who could reveal the identity of any of Waterdeep's Masked Lords. You set up a meeting and presented her with several letters demonstrating "beyond doubt" that Jelenn Umbrusk is one of the city's faceless rulers, claiming 250 gp from her in the process. The letters of course were forged.

CRIMINAL

BYE-BYE BEHOLDER

Once upon a crime you used to run with the Xanathar Guild. Your friend, Zilo, got you involved, and to begin with you loved the adventure, and fast rewards, that the criminal underworld offered. But when Zilo got butchered by the boss for botching a mission, you discovered how brutal operating on the wrong side of the law can be.

You decided to get out while you still could. That was over a year ago. Since you know the locations of most of the Guild's Waterdeep hideouts and hang outs, you've managed to avoid any unpleasant reunions with your ex-colleagues, up until now. The only person you'd be happy to see again is a guy called Jenten, who you got on well with. For a tough guy, he had a good sense of humour. You're pretty sure he'd be happy to see you too...

BUSTED FOR BURGLARY

After pulling off several high profile robberies, you were well on your way to an early retirement, until a certain blundering Barnibus Blastwind got on your case. This meddling, self-styled 'detective', produced such compelling evidence against you, that even the Magister you bribed couldn't ignore it. You were summarily flogged and sentenced to one year in a cold, damp, dungeon cell with nothing but two bowls of rotten tripe a day to feed on. Wouldn't it be great to knock that sententious so-and-so down a peg or three, or perhaps expose a skeleton in his closet? No one is that squeaky clean, after all.

CRIMINAL SPY

IN DEBT TO THE ZHENTARIM

You've been employed by various members of the Zhentarim, on more than one occasion, to spy on lords and low lifes alike, and as such you've built up a small network of contacts amongst the Black Network. So when you needed 200 gp in a hurry, to settle an old score, it was to the Zhentarim you turned - after all, you figured you could quickly earn the money back in the field and pay back the debt. A recent street fight, however, left you unable to work for several months and you're now stony broke. Hopefully your criminal colleagues won't be pissed off if you delay payment for just a few more weeks...

ENTERTAINER

A HECKLER HUMILIATED

During one of your less inspired performances in The Yawning Portal tavern, you were heckled by a thuggish half orc who told you to: "stop squealing like a half-gutted pig". Never one to take an insult lying down, you ad-libbed a song that called into question both the beauty and brains of the heckler, causing the tavern's patrons to roar with laughter. The half orc didn't take their eyes off you for the rest of the night, their gaze of hate burning into the back of your head, as you contemptuously ignored them.

PUT IT ON THE TAB!

During a particularly long and raucous night in The Yawning Portal tavern, you offered every geek and sundry a flagon of Shadowdark ale (the best brew in the taproom), at regular intervals throughout the night. You were in high spirits and, to begin with, you earned back the money you spent by singing for tips. However, as your performances became more slurred and the tips fewer, you kept buying rounds with the same reckless abandon, telling Durnan the proprietor to "put it on the tab". Long after midnight you stumbled out of the bar, forgetting to pay, and somehow evading the watchful eye of the landlord. Oh well, he's probably forgotten about it by now.

ENTERTAINER (GLADIATOR)

FIGHTING PIT RIVAL

Some tendar ago, you were invited to compete in a show fight in an illegal fighting pit in the cellar of a Dock Ward tavern. The guy you were fighting was an ugly brute, with a broken nose and a pale bald pate that was covered in blue eye tattoos. From the way he looked at you as he walked into the ring, it was obvious he thought he'd won already. He must have felt more than a little stupid when you knocked him out with almost your first punch.

FOLK HERO

THUGS SENT PACKING

Your once quaint village in Undercliff has slowly become more dangerous over the last few years, as enterprising criminals from Waterdeep look to conduct their business free from the beady eye of the City Watch. When a group of thugs started harrasing your elderly father, along with other farmers and local business owners, with demands for protection money, you rallied a group of young men and sent them packing with their tails between their legs. Virtually any denizen of Undercliff will stand you a drink in their local tap room.

GUILD ARTISAN

PROFESSIONAL RIVAL

Ever since you went into business in Waterdeep, a certain member of your guild has tried to thwart you. First they tried to block your entry to the guild, and when that didn't work they tried other means to run you out of town. At every step of your way, you are dogged by nosy inspectors and overly fastidious Magisters, who seem hellbent on throwing bureaucratic obstacles in your way and finding legal irregularities in your business. Sooner or later you're going to have take action against your rival.

GUILD MERCHANT

A BUSINESS DEBT

You borrowed 400 gp from the Cassalanter, a noble family who engage in money lending, one year ago to start your trading business. By the terms of your loan, you now owe them 480 gp, but wheeling and dealing is not as profitable as it seems... not when wagons break, horses go lame, and staff and guards need paying. You've managed to accrue 200 gp of what you owe them. Still it's been a long while since their accountant has been in touch, and 480 dragons is small change to them. Perhaps they've written off the debt.

HERMIT

A COSMIC PORTENT

During intense meditation that lasted several days, you detected a disturbing, diabolical change in the cosmos that portended the death of 100 innocent people in Waterdeep. The visions you had featured a noblewoman crying at the stroke of midnight, and people in golden masks throwing bodies on a huge cauldron of fire, while a demonic figure counted them. The demonic figure had a cruel, lascivious human face with two horns on his forehead. You have travelled to the city in the hope of realigning the cosmos and preventing these tragic deaths.

HLAM-FISTED

Upon hearing tales of the mighty Hlam, the grand master of the Order of the Even-Handed, you travelled to his cave on Mount Waterdeep, hoping to benefit from his wisdom. After entering the cave, you found him meditating in the lotus position and you offered to be his apprentice. In response, he slowly stood up and then battered you with flurry of blows that sent you flying out of the cave, with several cracked ribs and two less teeth. He then turned around and walked back into his cave, without saying a word.

NOBLE

EMBARRASSING YOUTH

Your family was great friends with the Rosznars, and when you were young you used to play with their daughter Ezzy. Or, more precisely, you used to mercilessly tease and bully her. On one occasion, a large family wedding, you took great pleasure in pouring mead on her dress and yelling: "Look everyone! Ezzy has wet herself!" Everyone believed you. You feel bad about it now, but in your own childish way you were just trying to flirt with her. No doubt she's forgiven you by now.

A NOBLE RIVAL

If there's one person you really can't stand in the whole city it's that Renaer Neverember. How the son of a traitor can continue to swan around Waterdeep like he owns the place, you have no idea. While others call him good-looking, well-educated and a bon vivant, you consider him wan, artificial and boorish. Sure he's good with a sword, but anyone can excel in fencing if they have time to practice every day thanks to daddy's embezzled riches. If someone were to ask your opinion, the city should seize his family mansion and make it public property.

BAD PRESS

The editor of the Waterdeep Wazoo, Gaxly Rudderbust, ran a lengthy exposé on your family history, using public records as 'evidence' that you are descended from the bastard son of a Lord's mistress and that you should not be considered part of society's aristocratic fabric. The piece was clearly paid for.

NOBLE KNIGHT

PLEGGED TO THE CASSALANTERS

Powerful, beautiful, noble... ever since you saw Ammalia Cassalanter at the annual Spring Joust tournament, held at the Fields of Triumph, you understood that she is a woman worth fighting for. You won the debutants' joust, and dedicated your victory to this vision of elegance. She has since blessed you with her patronage, and in return you have agreed to serve her in times of need. You hope she will call on you soon, so you can prove your valour. A married lady, it goes without saying that yours is a chaste devotion...

OUTLANDER

MARKED BY THE LAW

You have barely spent any time in Waterdeep, but almost immediately after your arrival you managed to get into a drunken street brawl with a group of thugs who were harrasing people in a Dock Ward tavern. When the City Watch tried to arrest everyone involved, your blood was up and you were in no mood to go quietly. You punched a sergeant in the face, knocking him flat out unconscious and shattering his nose. You were promptly clubbed into submission by his colleagues and hauled into a cell at the nearest courthouse. The half-elven Magister who presided over your case let you off the assault charges due to the fact that you were trying to protect law-abiding citizens. He did warn you however that: "unlike whatever savage backwater it is you said you come from, we don't tolerate violence in Waterdeep. If I see you in this court again, I won't be so lenient."

YOU'RE THE UNLIKELY CO-AUTHOR OF A GUIDE TO MONSTERS

Your life patrolling the hills, plains and forests of the realms hasn't put you in contact with many city folk, and those you have encountered mostly filled you with contempt. Recently, you had the misfortune to be employed as a guide by a garrulous, overweight fellow called Rolo (or some similarly ridiculous name). For someone who couldn't swing a sword, and was no great magic user either, he had an incongruous fascination with monsters. He paid you to lead him through a fetid swamp to the lair of a catoblepas, but the minute the creature showed its face he ran like a whelp in the opposite direction. Later he asked you everything you knew about the beast and wrote it down word-for-word in a heavily-annotated scrapbook he carried with him everywhere. He was so pleased by what you could tell him regarding the beast's eating, mating and other behavioural habits, that he didn't bother tracking down any more of the monsters in the region - he simply quizzed you about the critters instead.

SAGE

BLACKLISTED FROM BLACKSTAFF TOWERS

You studied for many years at the Blackstaff Academy, at the invitation of the 6th Blackstaff, Samark Dhanzscul. However when Vajra Safahr became the seventh to bear the title, she was left unimpressed by your "unoriginal and uninspiring methodology". She turfed you out of the academy and told you to gain some life experience, to see some more of the world first, before wasting any more time in studies that weren't benefitting anyone. Naturally, you felt victimised by her decision and hated her for it. She was clearly trying to imprint her authority in her new role, at your expense.

SAILOR

SHE LEFT YOU IN LUSKAN

Many years ago you fell in love with a young, spirited and troubled female drow, who called herself Fel. A misfit in her society, one who abhorred the cruel matriarchy of her race, she had fled the Underdark and found work on the same ship as you, bound for Luskan. After docking, she slipped away without saying goodbye. For weeks you searched the city but finally you ran out of money and were forced to leave Luskan with the next ship that offered you work.

SAILOR PIRATE

YOU CROSSED DRIFTWOOD BONES

You were part of the crew aboard the pirate vessel, Barracuda, when it successfully assaulted the merchant ship, the Silk Purse, several months ago. Seven members of the pirate gang, including two friends of yours, died in the attack, while the captain, Driftwood Bones, refused to share the booty evenly. Crew unrest soon led to outright mutiny, and Bones was set adrift in a rowing boat, some fifty miles off shore from Waterdeep. Whether he drowned, starved or got eaten by sharks, it's all the same to you.

SOLDIER

A WARDRAGON WELCOME

Your father fought side by side the formidable frame of Meloon Wardragon in defense of Waterdeep several times over, and the pair were fast friends. Now that you've decided to make your way in the world, he has written a letter of introduction commending you to Wardragon's service. A servant of the goddess Tymora, Wardragon is highly thought of in Waterdeep and has contacts in both the City Guard and the City Watch. Your father is sure he will find good use for your skills.

EXPULSED FROM THE CITY GUARD

From the day you joined Waterdeep's famed City Guard, Sergeant Yafeera hated your guts. She made it her mission to make your life in the Guard a misery, always giving you the dirtiest jobs and never missing a chance to put you down in front of the troops. When you suspected she was engaging in illegal behaviour with criminal gangs you confronted her. The next thing you knew you woke up bloodied and bruised in a holding cell. Yafeera claimed she had caught you stealing from the barracks, and you were flogged and sentenced to two years hard labour. Now you've returned to Waterdeep.

URCHIN

A BEATING YOU'LL NEVER FORGET

You'll never forget the night, many years ago, when you ran into a slack-jawed young thug stumbling out of tavern. The dead-eyed beefcake beat you to within an inch of your life for the temerity of brushing into him, and left you in the snow to die. If the City Watch hadn't stumbled across you and taken you to the Hospice of St. Laupsenn you probably would have done. If you ever see that face again you'd have trouble controlling yourself.

MISSING ROSKY

Life on the streets is tough, but having a friend or two around to share the hard times with you has always made it bearable. That's why it hurts that you haven't seen your little halfling friend, Rosky, for nearly a month now. Recently he'd been spending a lot of time with a character called Kelso (another halfling - but one that you wouldn't trust with a single nib!), but you never thought he would desert you for such a sketchy lowlife and his gang.

MORE BACKGROUND HOOKS

The following hooks are not tied to any particular background.

JUST A ONE NIGHT STAND?

You were drinking in the Silver Scabbard tavern (or the Silver something at any rate...), when you met a flirty, somewhat volatile, actress called Jaylin (...at least you think that was her name!). The opening night of Jaylin's new play had been a roaring success and she was out celebrating with other cast members when you crossed paths. You ended up at her place, but didn't stay for breakfast as you had to "see a man about an owlbear". You never did turn up to the Pink Flumph theatre to watch her perform.

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A STRANGE SHIPMATE

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AFTERWORD

The best DMs, in my experience, use their PCs' back stories as one of the key driving forces in any campaign. However that's often difficult when playing a published adventure, when so much of the plot is already determined. The end goal of this product is to personalise *Dragon Heist* for your players, creating emotional ties-in with your PCs and the adventure's NPC cast, so that the moment a villain steps onto the stage the stakes are already sky high. I hope it brings plenty of extra enjoyment to the already intriguing *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* storyline!

MORE STUFF...

If you liked this, then you may enjoy some of my other publications, which you can read about over on the [DM's Guild](#), such as my bestselling [Esquiel's Guide to Magic Weapons](#).

Aside from writing Dungeons & Dragons supplements, I am the blogger behind [Hipster & Dragons](#), where I post once or twice a month about all things D&D, with tips for players and DMs alike, and other roleplaying chatter. If you want to stay in contact, do check out the blog and subscribe, or 'like' [the Facebook page of the blog](#) for social media updates.

