

DDAL08-00



ONCE IN WATERDEEP

An Introduction to the City of Splendor



Who knows why adventurers are drawn together? The lust for gold, a common foe, or the whimsy of fate? Pull up a stool, stoke the hearth, and let YOUR story begin!

A Four-Hour Adventure for Tier 1 Characters. Optimized for APL 1.

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ADVENTURE PRIMER

“People think that stories are shaped by people. In fact, it’s the other way around.”

– Terry Pratchett, *Witches Abroad*

The events of this adventure are modified by the backstories and personality traits of your group’s characters. You’ll collaborate with your players to weave their own villain, objectives, and complications into the story.

BACKGROUND

Across the City of Splendors, rival factions plot to seize control of the **VAULT OF DRAGONS**: a vast cache of purloined gold hidden somewhere beneath the city streets. Numerous villains contrive to locate the **STONE OF GOLORR**, a mind-bending artifact that holds the key to the vault’s location. Into this conspiracy tread the characters of your own group, brought together by chance for a single, fateful night at the Yawning Portal tavern. By the end of the evening, events will have propelled your group into the main storyline of the season.

EPISODES

The adventure is comprised of three episodes that are played in sequence.

EPISODE 1: SETUP

At the start of this episode, you’ll work with your group to determine the important plot points of the story: a villain, an interesting character, and a “MacGuffin” that springboards the story.

The players meet the interesting character in the tavern and learn of the MacGuffin, but their meeting is interrupted by the arrival of two meddling crooks. A dramatic intervention by a wayward carriage leads to a combat in the taproom. During the confusion, the crooks make their move to steal the MacGuffin.

EPISODE 2: FACTION QUEST

Rival factions from the *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* storyline conspire against each other. In this

episode, you’ll play ONE short quest that is determined by your chosen villain:

- **Quest A: Showtime (Traitor).** The characters masquerade as travelling minstrels to steal an item from one of the performers. In doing so, they cross swords with a drow mercenary loyal to **JARLAXLE BAENRE**.
- **Quest B: Gang War (Brute).** The characters find themselves caught up in the vicious turf war between the **ZHENTARIM** and the **XANATHAR GUILD**.
- **Quest C: Treasure Hunt (Mastermind).** The characters decipher a mysterious pamphlet to unearth a treasure hidden in one of the tavern’s guest rooms. In doing so, they find themselves competing against the powerful **CASSALANTER** noble family.

PRESELECTING THE VILLAIN

If you don’t want to prepare all three quests ahead of time, you can insist that your players craft a villain of a specific role during the Story Workshop. That way, you’ll know ahead of time which quest to prepare. As your confidence with the adventure grows, you can allow the players to create a villain of any role.

EPISODE 3: FINALE

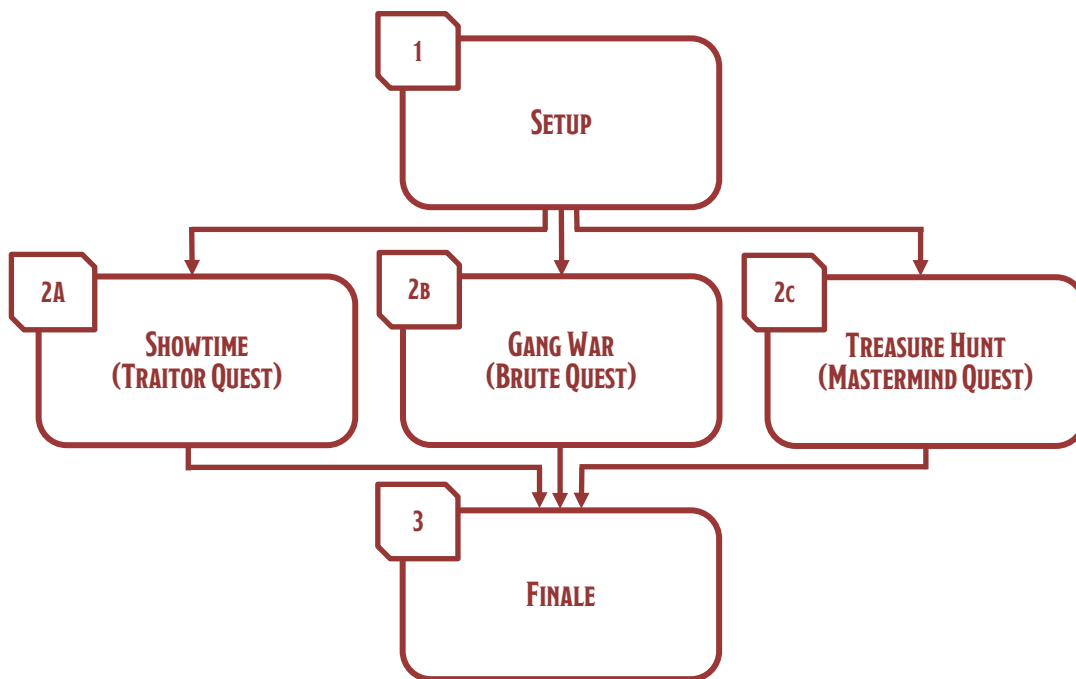
In this final episode, the villain makes their move to steal the MacGuffin or get revenge on the characters. If the characters survive, they earn a reward from whichever factions they allied with in Episode 2.

ADAPTING THE ADVENTURE

Once in Waterdeep provides suggestions for linking plot points to the backstories of your own group. If none of the suggestions fit, feel free to invent your own connections. You can even pass this challenge onto the players during play by offering inspiration to the player who provides the best link. For example, you could say “I’ll give inspiration to whoever comes up with the best reason for our villain wanting this object”.

Also feel free to re flavor events or characters to better fit your own group. For example, you could replace one of the quest-giving NPCs at the inn with a character’s mentor, or rule that the carriage in episode one carries a noble relative. So long as the key encounters of the adventure play out roughly as described, you can remold events around them to best fit your own group. Make the adventure your own!

ADVENTURE FLOW



BACKDROP: THE YAWNING PORTAL

The Yawning Portal is a famous inn and tavern located in the Castle Ward of Waterdeep. It's named after the large well in its common room – the tip of a sunken stone tower – which descends into the mazelike dungeon of Undermountain. Treasure seekers from across the Forgotten Realms meet in the inn's common room to plan their own delves, making it the perfect place to start an adventure!

AREA INFORMATION

Refer to Appendix 3 for a map of the Yawning Portal. Much of the adventure is set in the tavern's taproom: tables and chairs litter the floor, and dozens of thirsty patrons shake off the day through the application of strong ale and good company. Two balcony levels overlook the main taproom, reached by sturdy wooden staircases. Comfortable guest rooms adjoin these balconies.

Well. The common room is dominated by the 40-foot-diameter open well. This shaft plunges 140 feet to the first level of Undermountain and is ringed by magical torches. A rope-and-pulley mechanism is used to transport adventurers into the dungeon. Any character pushed into the well can make a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw to catch hold of the bucket as they fall.

Stage. A travelling theater group has constructed a stage at one end of the common room with draped curtains and a painted backdrop. A small, curtained off dressing room lies behind the stage. The stage is empty until the performance begins in Episode 2.

Trinkets. Dozens of curios hang from the taproom walls: mysterious statues, bloodied banners, unidentified sigils, and much more. Adventurers returning from Undermountain give these trinkets to the proprietor as trophies for surviving the dungeon.

CREATURES/NPCs

The tavern has the following notable NPCs. For further details, see Appendix 1.

Durnan. The proprietor of the Yawning Portal is a tough, taciturn old adventurer. He keeps a magic greatsword hidden behind the bar in case any beasts clamber up out of the well.

"Bonnie". Bonnie is a quick-witted and cheerful barmaid with a terrible secret: she's a doppelganger in disguise. A few people know what she's hiding.

Rusty Bighat. This boisterous halfling is the master of ceremonies for tonight's theater performances. Anyone who wants to get on the lineup for tonight's show must go through him.

Matrim "Threestrings" Mereg. The tavern's resident bard and storyteller is a secret member of the Harpers.

Marmaduke. Durnan leaves a saucer of milk out for this stray ginger tomcat each morning, but he'd prefer the old dog had a proper home.

Other patrons. The tavern is crammed with patrons. If you wish, you can introduce the relevant quest-giving characters from Episode 2 ahead of time to foreshadow their meeting.

THE CHARACTERS ARE THE STARS

Remember that the player characters are the stars of this story. When combat occurs, the other patrons shouldn't get involved unless you really want them to. Handwave them away by saying they're caught up in their own distractions: aiding other patrons, calling for the City Watch, or whatever else you can think of that gets them out of the picture.

TAVERN EVENTS

Roll on the following table to add flavorful incidents to the game during play.

TAVERN EVENTS TABLE

d8	Event
1	Bonnie tosses a patron's tankard into the well after he makes a crude remark. A few moments later, an echoing belch is heard from below.
2	A tense card game between halflings ends with the winner buying a round of drinks for everyone.
3	A swarm of dusty grey butterflies flutters up out of the well.
4	A storekeeper bemoans the feud between the Xanathar Guild and the Zhentarim.
5	One of the tables briefly levitates, much to the surprise of those seated there.
6	A goliath gladiator challenges anyone who dares face him to a drinking contest.
7	Marmaduke the tomcat hacks up a hairball containing a single gold dragon coin.
8	A group of adventurers are lowered into the well to face the horrors of Undermountain. As they depart, the patrons take bets on whether they'll return.

EPISODE 1: SETUP

Estimated Duration: 60-80 minutes.

In this episode, the players meet an interesting character in the tavern and learn of the MacGuffin. A dramatic intervention by a wayward carriage leads to a combat in the taproom.

PRELUDE. STORY WORKSHOP

Before play begins, you'll collaborate with your players to weave their own unique villain, objectives, and complications into the story.

SET THE SCENE

Read the following aloud:

Waterdeep! Greatest city in all the Forgotten Realms! In these fabled streets, heroes are forged, and adventures begun. Tonight, you gather at the Yawning Portal to hear tales of glory from a troupe of traveling performers.

Give the players the "Theater Handbill" handout from Appendix 4. Once they've read it, ask each player to introduce their character into the scene as dramatically as possible. Grant inspiration to anyone who impresses you with their entrance.

REVEAL BACKSTORIES

Next, ask each player to briefly describe their character's backstory: who are they, how did they get here, and why do they seek adventure? If anyone gets stuck, use the following questions to prompt them:

- What event forced your character become an adventurer?
- Which ideal, bond or flaw on your character sheet best represents your character?
- What would be the perfect start to your character's story?

DEVISE THE PLOT POINTS

Everyone - including yourself! - must now answer the following three questions. Without conferring, write your answers on index cards, post-it notes, or scraps of paper.

- Who would make a suitable antagonist for the group at this level? This character becomes the **VILLAIN** for the adventure. Optionally, you can insist that the players invent a villain that fits one of the roles you've prepared for (see "Categorize the Plot Points", below).

- Who would be an **INTERESTING CHARACTER** for this group to meet in the tavern? This person serves as the springboard for the villain's scheme.
- What would be an exciting character development between two characters in this group? This becomes the roleplay **CHALLENGE** for the players.

Before revealing any answers, hand three tokens to each player: poker chips, coins, dice, or anything else you have at hand. The players use these tokens to vote on their favorite answers:

- Go around the table, starting with yourself, and reveal the answers to the first question. If any answers are duplicated, stack them into a single pile.
- Once all the answers have been revealed, ask the players to place a token on their favorite answer.
- The answer with the most tokens is selected for the story: keep this answer in view and remove the others. If there's a tie, YOU have the deciding vote.

Continue until you've reached consensus on all three questions, and then proceed to the next stage.

CATEGORIZE THE PLOT POINTS

Once the plot points are defined, you must categorize them for the adventure.

1: Define Villain Role. Choose a role that best represents your villain and then check the appropriate box below:

VILLAIN ROLE

- Brute
- Mastermind

- Traitor

BEHAVIOUR

The brute favours direct action.
The mastermind works behind the scenes, exploiting minions and deception to carry out their long-term goals.
The traitor is ostensibly on the group's side but has chosen to betray them to achieve their goals. Crucially, they can operate in plain sight.

2: Define Interesting Character Role. Choose a role that fits the interesting character and then check the appropriate box. If none match, go with "victim":

CHARACTER ROLE

- Ally

- Rival

GROUP CONNECTION

This character is a friend, patron, relative or adventuring companion of one or more of the characters.
This character has goals that are generally at odds with the group.

- Victim One or more characters in your group are keen to protect this character.

USING THE CHECKBOXES

To simplify your job, checkboxes are provided whenever these roles create branched events. After defining your chosen roles, skim through the adventure and mark any checkboxes that apply. This makes it easier to scan the text during play.

3: Determine the MacGuffin. A MacGuffin is a plot device that springboards the story: in this case, an object that loosely links to the *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* storyline. Roll on the following table to determine what your MacGuffin is, or invent something that ties into the group's backstory:

MACGUFFIN TABLE

d20	MacGuffin Object
1	A blackmail letter that exposes the secret identity of one of the Masked Lords of Waterdeep.
2	A clockwork dove whose scratchy voice, when activated, repeats the last sentence it overheard.
3	A mysterious tapestry that depicts the characters inside the fabled Vault of Dragons.
4	A Menzoberranzan longword engraved with a sewer map of Waterdeep.
5	An infernal pact agreement between a devil and noble named Victorio Cassalanter.
6	The severed (yet still living) eyestalk of a beholder, preserved in pickling fluid.
7	A list of storekeepers who've crossed Manshoon's Zhents during the last tenday.
8	A property deed that falsely grants the bearer ownership of a large townhouse in the Sea Ward.
9	A coded parchment that identifies one or more of the characters as threats to an upcoming heist.
10	A letter written by the spy who gathered dirt on Lord Neveber, previous Open Lord of Waterdeep.
11	A fine powder that induces incriminating visions of the Xanathar when inhaled.
12	A schedule of all the City Watch rotas in the South Ward for the coming tenday.
13	A letter that a character can't remember writing, containing a warning not to lose "the Stone".
14	A handbill advertising the Seamaiden's Faire, with the name "Jarlaxle Baenre?" etched on the back.
15	A schematic detailing the intricate design of a mechanical hand.
16	A magic skullcap that grants recollection of one forgotten fact when donned.
17	A dragon-shaped kite that tugs toward the Castle Ward when airborne.

- 18 The disconnected hands of a grandfather clock that count down slowly when fixed to a clock dial.
- 19 A sketch portrait of a gnome named "Dalakhar", pinned to a street map of the South Ward.
- 20 An empty potion bottle that whispers "Manshoon is nearby..." when unstopped.

4: Outline the challenge. The challenge is a roleplaying goal that the players can attempt to complete during play (for example, "Edda and Klaus have an argument about right and wrong"). If the players orchestrate this event in a cool way, **every player in the group gains inspiration**. Lazy performances shouldn't count: the interaction must occur at a dramatically appropriate time or be triggered by an unforeseen event.

NPC STATISTICS

Choose NPC stat blocks from Appendix 2 to represent the villain and the interesting character. If none seem appropriate, choose an NPC or creature of CR 3 or lower from an official D&D rulebook and re flavor it if required. For example, an **orc warchief** could double as a human brute with little to no change required.

SCENE 1-1. THE HOOK

The characters encounter the interesting character and learn of the MacGuffin, but their meeting is interrupted by the arrival of two meddling crooks.

WELCOMER'S BREW

The story begins in the tavern's taproom. If your group is comprised of 1st-level characters, Durnan pours them each a flagon of his "Welcomer's Brew". Drinking the brew grants each character 5 temporary hit points that last until they next take a long rest.

MEETING THE INTERESTING CHARACTER

Shortly after the characters arrive, the interesting character makes their entrance. How this character arrives depends on their role:

- ❑ **The ALLY has come here to reveal an important find to the characters.** After spotting the characters in the bar, they invite them to a private booth to show them the MacGuffin.
- ❑ **The RIVAL has arranged to meet a trusted accomplice in the tavern.** They don't notice the characters on entry and move to a private booth to await their accomplice.
- ❑ **The VICTIM is being stalked by shady characters.** Oblivious to the characters, they hasten to a private booth to hide from their pursuers.

THE MACGUFFIN

No matter how the interesting character arrives, the presence of the MacGuffin soon becomes apparent.

- ❑ **The ALLY reveals the MacGuffin to the group and explains what little they know of its function or purpose.** They acquired the object by chance: perhaps it was given to them by a worried servant, found on their doorstep one morning, or passed on to them as payment for a debt. The ally wants the characters to take this mysterious object off their hands and ascertain its purpose.
- ❑ **The RIVAL or VICTIM surreptitiously examines the MacGuffin upon reaching their private booth.** Any character spying on them or confronting them can take a good look at the MacGuffin without needing an ability check.

Shortly after the MacGuffin is revealed, a pair of crooks arrive onsite to steal it.

GRADY AND DWINDLEJOY

Soon after the interesting character arrives, a notorious pair of crooks named Grady and Dwindlejoy enter the tavern (see Appendix 1: "Locations and NPCs" for full details). The crooks use the **thug** statistics.

When the crooks enter, the character with the highest passive Wisdom (Insight) immediately becomes suspicious of them. Any character who succeeds on a DC 10 Intelligence check recognizes the duo and recalls one or more of the following facts about them, as determined by the result of their check. Native Waterdhavians and characters with the Agent of the Masked Lords, Criminal, Detective, or City Watch background have advantage on this check.

INTELLIGENCE CHECK RESULTS

- **DC 10:** Grady and Dwindlejoy are a notorious pair of "fixers". They work as spies-for-hire, thieves or muscle for whoever has the means to pay them.
- **DC 12:** Grady is said to obey daily instructions that appear by magic inside his left boot. Nobody knows who plants these instructions: Grady himself believes that it's a fairy, but others have suggested that his companion Dwindlejoy is responsible, or even that he writes them himself during nightly fits of madness.
- **DC 14:** Dwindlejoy has an odd manner of speaking and pointedly ignores any conversations that don't include himself. He has a terrible fear of fire.

Objectives/Goals. Grady and Dwindlejoy have simple instructions: acquire the MacGuffin by any means necessary. They'd rather do so without bloodshed but are prepared for a "smash and grab" job if necessary. Roleplay their actions in whatever manner feels best for your group.

What do they know? A third party hired the crooks to steal the MacGuffin, but they won't reveal what they know about their patron unless they're captured (see "Questioning the Crooks" in Scene 1C: "After the Crash").

Let the players deal with the crooks however they please. **Before they can resolve the situation, move onto Scene 1B: "Carriage Crash".**

SCENE 1-2. CARRIAGE CRASH

Seemingly by chance, a runaway carriage smashes into the tavern! The crooks exploit the ensuing chaos to steal the MacGuffin.

TRIGGERING THE CARRIAGE CRASH

This encounter occurs while the characters are still dealing with the crooks. When it's most dramatic to do so, thump the table and shout:

SMASH! The tavern wall explodes inwards, showering patrons with dust and rubble! A tangled wreck of iron and wood tumbles through the hole, hitched to a team of frothing horses. Luggage tumbles from the vehicle's roof and spills out over the floor!

Explain to the players that one of Waterdeep's signature double-decker dray carriages has crashed through the wall of the building through a set of windows.

COMPLICATIONS

The carriage crash creates the following perilous events inside the tavern:

- A bundle of magic broomsticks spring free from an apprentice wizard's luggage and begin sweeping up patrons.
- The wreck tips a table of patrons into the well, leaving some of them dangling from the lip.
- An oil lamp spills onto the theater stage, igniting the drapes. The flames threaten to engulf Marmaduke the tomcat, who is cowering on the curtain rail.

Roll for initiative so the characters can deal with these complications.

CREATURES/NPCs

- Three **brooms of animated attack** harass the inn's patrons (striking to subdue rather than kill).
- The two **thugs** Grady and Dwindlejoy try to steal the MacGuffin during the confusion.
- The interesting character tries to protect the MacGuffin, hopefully aided by the player characters.

If Grady and Dwindlejoy look likely to steal the MacGuffin, the City Watch arrives before they can escape. If captured, the crooks are happy to spill whatever they know to save their own skins (see Scene 1C: "After the Crash").

ADJUSTING THE SCENE

Here are some suggestions for adjusting this scene, according to your group. This adventure is optimized for APL 1.

- **Weak:** Half the hit points of all combatants.
- **Strong:** Add two **brooms of animated attack**.
- **Very Strong:** Add two **brooms of animated attack** and a suit of **animated armor**.

PLAYING THE PILLARS

COMBAT

Grady and Dwindlejoy use the Shove action where possible to push their enemies into the well. The broomsticks attack enemy and ally alike!

EXPLORATION

Grant inspiration to any character who uses their action to rescue a patron, stop the fire, or rescue the tomcat. **Give the "Marmaduke" story award to any character who saves the cat.**

SOCIAL

A character can spend their action to recruit backup from the crowd. On a successful DC 15 Charisma (Persuasion) check, 1d4 **commoners** join them for the rest of the encounter.

SCENE 1-3. AFTER THE CRASH

QUESTIONING THE CROOKS

Grady and Dwindlejoy gladly betray their patron to save their own skins. What they know depends on the villain's role:

- ❑ **The BRUTE is planning to raid the tavern tonight.** Having learned of the raid, one of the villains from the *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* storyline hired the crooks to steal the MacGuffin beforehand: either Manshoon, the Xanathar, Jarlaxle Baenre or the Cassalanter family. If the characters warn Durnan about the raid, he offers them free room and board for the night if they stay and guard the premises.
- ❑ **The MASTERMIND tricked Grady into stealing the MacGuffin.** The mastermind slipped their instructions into Grady's boot, and thinking these were the orders of his fairy patron, Grady was compelled to obey. The instructions read: *"Go to the Yawning Portal tonight and steal the object carried by [name of interesting character.] There will be a diversion to cover your escape."*
- ❑ **The TRAITOR used a front man to hire the crooks.** Grady is supposed to meet this contact tomorrow morning. Unknown to the crooks, the traitor tailed them here to spy on them. Soon after the City Watch arrive, the traitor enters the premises (see Episode 2).

THE WATCH ARRIVES

A patrol of City Watch officers soon arrives on the scene. Sergeant Lug Grimsditch leads eight **veteran** officers into the premises to take statements from everyone present. The Watch can also step in to save the day if Grady and Dwindlejoy try to escape with the MacGuffin, or if the magic broomsticks overpower the characters. Sergeant Grimsditch is a mixed race Chultan/Illuskan human **veteran** (see Appendix 1 for more details).

The City Watch refuses to let anyone leave the tavern while they remain on site. The officers drag the wreck onto the street, and laborers from the Carpenters', Roofers', & Plasterers' Guild arrive to shore up the tavern wall. Within an hour, the Yawning Portal reopens for business. Durnan pours a round on the house, and the traveling performers announce that their show must go on!

- The characters can take a short rest.
- The City Watch patrol leaves the premises when the show starts at the start of Episode 2.

THE CARRIAGE

The carriage driver confesses that he was speeding to make up for bad traffic earlier on his route. He skidded while cornering, hit the sidewalk, and flipped the carriage sideways into the tavern wall. The City Watch fine him appropriately for speeding.

- ❑ **If the BRUTE is the villain, another carriage was partially to blame.** While the driver was turning, he was clipped by another carriage that galloped off at speed.

THE MACGUFFIN

The MacGuffin either remains in the hands of the interesting character or with the group. Before the players can hatch any major plans, various patrons of the tavern approach them for work. **Proceed to Episode 2.**

EPISODE 2: FACTION QUEST

Estimated Duration: 60-80 minutes

Rival factions from the *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* storyline conspire against each other. In this episode, you'll play ONE short quest that is determined by your chosen villain.

BACKDROP: THE TRAVELLING PLAYERS

All three quests are set against the backdrop of a variety show. Halfling master-of-ceremonies Rusty Bighat has assembled a lineup of performers from across the city to delight the patrons. As the quest plays out, you can introduce the following acts to add color to the proceedings:

STORYTELLER

Resident bard Mattrim "Threestrings" Mereg opens the event by recounting the legend of the "Baron of Blood". If the characters listen, you can narrate the following story:

THE BARON OF BLOOD

Waterdeep has many villains, but few so terrifying as the "Baron of Blood": a cruel nobleman who bathes in a bath of blood drawn from his victims. Each night, the baron's minions prowl the streets for lost souls to kidnap. They deliver them to the baron's manor, where he personally murders them.

One night, a penniless tiefling named Bravado was searching the sewers for salvage when he tripped and broke his lantern. In the pitch dark, he stumbled across the hidden entrance to the baron's manor. When the baron returned, Bravado had no option but to hide in his bath of blood. Alas, the baron found him! Covered in blood, Bravado took a great gamble: he pretended to be the devil lord Asmodeus! The trick worked, and Bravado tried many unsuccessful ploys to distract the baron and escape. In time, the baron caught on to his ruse, but was so impressed by his cunning that he decided to let him live!

The baron rewarded Bravado by agreeing to swap roles with him one night every tenday. For that night, Bravado would enjoy all the luxuries of the wealthy, while the baron mixed with the poor. Perhaps he's here tonight...?

The **BARON OF BLOOD** appears in later modules in the season eight storyline.

- If the **MASTERMIND** is the villain, this tall tale contains a valuable clue to solving one of the puzzles in Quest C: "Treasure Hunt."

THEATER PERFORMANCE

Tonight's theater performance is a three-act play entitled "The Lay of Ahghairon". It's normally a stuffy, historical piece, but the "Midnight Mummies" theater troupe have adapted it to feature saucy jokes, slapstick comedy, and racy melodrama.

- If the **BRUTE** is the villain, a goblin theater troupe named "Circus of Skullport" has replaced the Midnight Mummies at short notice (see Quest A: "Showtime.")

THE MOUSE ORCHESTRA

Valas Trapp is a wizard-for-hire who runs a sideline in performance art with his "mouse orchestra". Trapp's trained mice can play musical instruments and perform acrobatic feats on command.

- If the **MASTERMIND** is the villain, Valas Trap has been sent here to steal the MacGuffin (see Quest C: "Treasure Hunt.")

A HELPING HAND

If the players need it, the faction agents can assist them with *cure* spells and *potions of healing* outside of combat. The characters need only return to their patrons and request aid.

2A: SHOWTIME (TRAITOR QUEST)

The characters masquerade as travelling minstrels to steal an item from one of the performers. In doing so, they cross swords with a drow mercenary loyal to Jarlaxle Baenre.

SCENE 2A-1. ENTER THE VILLAIN

The **TRAITOR** enters the tavern just before the performance begins. If possible, they openly congratulate the characters for their efforts during the crash. The traitor settles down for the show and remains on site for the remainder of the adventure.

In secret, the traitor has come here to check up on Grady and Dwindlejoy's efforts to steal the McGuffin. When the traitor learns that their crooks have been defeated, they assume that the characters have stolen the MacGuffin and begin to plot their downfall. **When the characters perform their variety show, the traitor heckles them from the crowd (or pays someone else to do so).**

SCENE 2A-2. CALL TO ACTION

Impressed by the group's performance in combat, local bard Matrim "Threestrings" Mereg approaches the characters for work. He introduces them to Meloon Wardragon, a local adventurer and an open member of Force Grey: a league of heroes sworn to defend Waterdeep. Wardragon reveals the following information:

- Rival factions across Waterdeep are conspiring to find the fabled Vault of Dragons: a vast treasure hoard of embezzled gold that is said to lie somewhere beneath the city.
- Wardragon has learned that Zardo Zord, captain of the traveling carnival known as the Sea Maidens Faire, is among those searching for the Vault.
- Captain Zord has sent performers to the Yawning Portal tonight to drum up business. Wardragon believes Zord has an ulterior motive and wants the characters to find out what it is.
- Threestrings can arrange for the group to be put on the bill for tonight's performance. If they can get behind stage and spy on the performers, they may learn something of their plans.

In return for their help, Wardragon promises the support of Force Grey. Threestrings offers the help of the Harpers.

QUEST OBJECTIVE

To complete the quest, the characters must steal a mysterious casket from the performer "Nula" and examine its contents. Threestrings identifies the five dancers that belong to the Sea Maiden's Faire. One of them, Nula, carries a mysterious casket that never seems to leave her side. Nula is unlikely to take the casket onstage, so Threestrings advises the characters to steal it from the backstage area while she's performing.

POSING AS PERFORMERS

The characters can get backstage by posing as travelling performers. Rusty Bighat has an opening for new acts: Threestrings can talk him into signing the characters onto tonight's lineup, but they'll have to perform in front of the crowd whenever Bighat calls on them.

The players must invent their own variety show for the evening. The show should comprise of three short "acts" involving all the characters. Threestrings promises to read the crowd and use his magic to feed the performers hints as they go.

Ask the players to choose a prop from the list below. Threestrings says that a previous acting troupe left it behind and recommends that the characters incorporate it into their show "to add authenticity". He also has a dressing-up box of costumes that the characters can delve into to find almost anything they need.

THEATER PROPS

d8	Prop
1	Two-person centaur costume.
2	Stuffed owlbear.
3	Pyrotechnic flashbang.
4	Wobbly-wheeled unicycle.
5	Papier-mâché "god" on strings.
6	Talking skull hand-puppet.
7	Staircase on wheels.
8	Massive bronze gong.

Give the players ten minutes to prepare their variety show. If possible, place a stopwatch on the table to ramp up the tension. When the players are ready, run Scene 2A-3: "Performing the Show."

SCENE 2A-3. PERFORMING THE SHOW

CREATURES/NPCs

The following NPCs are present backstage:

- Sh'Vis Jhalavar is a **swashbuckler** with drow racial traits (see Appendix 1). She disguises herself as the human dancer "Nula" alongside four **commoner** performers. Her troupe is due to end the evening's performance.
- Valas Trapp is a **mage** with a box containing a swarm of trained mice. His mouse circus performs during the play's intermissions.
- "The Midnight Mummies" are four human **commoner** theater performers.

Objectives/Goals. Sh'Vis has orders to steal the MacGuffin for Zardo Zord: the cover identity of her drow master Jarlaxle Baenre.

What do they know? Sh'Vis knows that the MacGuffin could help her master find the Vault of Dragons, but she'll only spill the beans if magically compelled. Her dancers are simple carnival folk: they know nothing of Jarlaxle or the treasure hoard.

AREA INFORMATION

Dimensions & Terrain. Backstage is a small curtained-off area behind the painted backdrop, no larger than 20x20ft. Thick curtains muffle sound to the rest of the tavern.

Casket. Sh'vis keeps the casket on her person but secretes it in the rest of her gear when she goes onstage to perform. The casket is locked (Dexterity DC 10 to pick with thieves' tools, Break DC 10, 5hp). Sh'Vis hides the key in her hair. **Proceed to Scene 2A-4: "Inside the Casket" if the players get inside.**

ADLIBBING THE PERFORMANCE

Cut out the lines from "Performance Hints" handout (Appendix 4) and place them in a bag in the middle of the table. These represent hints that Threestrings feeds to the performers using *message*.

- Whenever Bighat calls on them, the players must go onstage and adlib an act of their variety show. Their acts are entirely up to them: characters can perform magic tricks, feats of strength, jokes, or whatever else they feel comfortable with.
- Players must describe their performance in full. When appropriate, call for skill checks to determine how well the characters perform.
- If a character hesitates or performs poorly on a check, ask the player to draw a performance hint from the bag. The player must incorporate this into their show and then reveal the hint to you!
- All characters must be involved at some point during each act. The show must have three acts, with short intermissions between each act.

Use a scrap of paper to jot down the success of the show as the players perform:

- Mark a failure each time a player hesitates for too long or badly fails a skill check.
- Mark a failure if a character fails to incorporate their performance hint effectively.
- Remove a failure if a player incorporates the performance hint particularly well or makes everyone laugh.
- If the players incorporate their prop effectively, grant inspiration to anyone involved and remove any failures.

If the players accrue three or more failures, Rusty calls their show to a halt. The players must now devise another way to steal the casket.

PLAYING THE PILLARS

COMBAT

If the players lure "Nula" away from backstage, they could try to take the casket by force. Nula would rather die than fail Jarlaxle, so she fights to the death.

EXPLORATION

If a character gets close, they spot the key in "Nula's" hair with a successful DC 12 Wisdom (Perception) check. Once they spot the key, they can steal it with a successful DC 15 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check.

SOCIAL

When heckled by the **TRAITOR**, a player must come up with a good response or succeed on a DC 10 Charisma (Performance) check to avoid a failure.

SCENE 2A-4. INSIDE THE CASKET

The casket contains a secret message from Jaxlaxle to Sh'Vis. Read the following aloud if it is opened:

Magic light radiates from the casket as it opens, merging into a foot-high image of [the interesting character]. A male voice whispers a message in the elven tongue.

Only characters who speak elven can understand the message. If nobody speaks elven, Threestrings can translate the message if the characters bring the box to him. The message says:

"My dear Sh'Vis. This fool has acquired an artifact that is pertinent to our hunt for the Vault of Dragons. It may even be a lead to the object we seek. Be wary: other agents are trying to steal it, so you need to move fast. I've arranged for your dancers to perform tonight at the Yawning Portal. Steal the artifact and place it inside this casket. I'll take it from there."

Any character who speaks elven recognizes Sh'Vis as a drow name and detects a drow accent in the

speaker. The message repeats every time the casket is opened. If an object is placed inside the casket and the lid is closed, the casket teleports to Jarlaxle's side.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE CASKET GOES MISSING?

Sh'Vis knows that one of the other performers is most likely responsible for the theft. She doesn't report the theft: instead she stays in the tavern for the remainder of the adventure. If possible, she tries to corner and interrogate one of the characters. She also tries to steal the MacGuffin from the interesting character if they're still present.

REPORTING BACK

The casket confirms Wardragon's fears: Zardoz Zord is hunting for the Vault of Dragons. He also works with drow elves: or perhaps is a drow himself? This information completes the quest and earns the characters the **Faction Favor** story award at the end of the adventure. **Proceed to Episode 3.**

2B: GANG WAR (BRUTE QUEST)

The characters find themselves caught up in the vicious turf war between the Zhentarim and the Xanathar Guild.

SCENE 2B-1. CALL TO ACTION

Impressed by the group's performance in combat, half-orc thug-for-hire Yagra Stonefist invites the characters to meet Jalester Silvermane, a minor noble and tavern regular (see Appendix 1 for further details on these NPCs). Yagra is loyal to the Zhentarim and Jalester is a spy for the Lord's Alliance. They explain the following:

- A fierce gang war between the Xanathar Guild and the Zhentarim rages across Waterdeep. The hostilities are a threat to business and order.
- A clone of the great wizard Manshoon is said to command the Zhents in Waterdeep. The Black Network has fractured into two rival blocs within the city: those who support Manshoon, and those who seek to expose him to end the war. Yagra represents the latter bloc.
- One of Manshoon's trusted lieutenants, a wizard named Urlon Vhrule, plans to attend the show tonight with his mistress. Yaga and Jalester want the characters to capture him during the show and interrogate him about Manshoon's whereabouts.

In return for their help, Jalester Silvermane promises the support of the Lord's Alliance. Yaga offers them membership of the Zhentarim.

QUEST OBJECTIVE

To complete the quest, the characters must interrogate Zhent agent Urlon Vhrule about the whereabouts of the wizard Manshoon. Vhrule and his mistress Diahne Icewilder arrive soon after the characters are briefed (see Appendix 1 for full details on these NPCs). Stonefist makes herself scarce while Silvermane spies on the pair from a distance. He cautions the characters against causing trouble inside the tavern, and suggests they lure their mark to a private room or back alley before making their move.

PREPARING THE KIDNAP

Give the players a few minutes to plan their kidnap. During this time, master-of-ceremonies Rusty Bighand announces that the "Circus of Skullport" will replace tonight's theatrical performers, who have not shown. The performers then move onstage and begin their show. Unknown to all, the Xanathar crime lord arranged an "accident" for tonight's theater troupe and replaced them with his own agents. At the height of their performance, these scoundrels plan to assassinate Urlon Vhrule.

Proceed to Scene 2B-2: "Hit Squad" when the players make their move on Vhrule.

SCENE 2B-2. HIT SQUAD

Read the following aloud when the players make their move:

A painted goblin wobbles onstage on stilts, dressed as a hairy orc. Behind him, two more goblins drag a giant papier-mâché pie into view. The goblin on stilts begins to sing.

“Sing a song of sixpence, I’m not about to lie,
Got some angry blackbirds baked in my pie,
When the pie is opened, their tempers will be bent,
Maybe they can work it out by murdering this ZHENT?”

At this, the pie crust tears open and a cadre of kenku assassins emerges from within pepper Vhrule with arrows! Roll initiative!

CREATURES/NPCs

- Three **kenku** assassins emerge from the pie to kill Urlon Vhrule.
- The three **goblins** hop off the stage to join the kenkus in the second round.
- Urlon Vhrule is an **apprentice mage**. His mistress is a **commoner**.

Objectives/Goals. The assassins have orders to kill Urlon Vhrule and escape before the City Watch arrives. Vhrule tries to stay alive!

What do they know? If captured, the assassins reveal that they work for the Xanathar Guild. They warn that the characters will earn their boss’s enmity if they don’t release them at once. Each assassin has a tattoo of an eye hidden somewhere on their body.

ADJUSTING THE SCENE

Here are some suggestions for adjusting this scene, according to your group. This adventure is optimized for APL 1.

- **Weak:** Remove one **kenku** and one **goblin**.
- **Strong:** Add two **kenkus**.
- **Very Strong:** Add four **kenkus**.

PLAYING THE PILLARS

COMBAT

A character can use their action to flip a table, creating cover from the arrows (+5 AC). If the papier-mâché pie ignites, any creature that enters that area on their turn or starts their turn inside the area takes 5 (2d4) fire damage.

EXPLORATION

–

SOCIAL

Urlon Vhrule is swift to trust anyone who defends him from the assassins. This makes it easier for the characters to isolate him for the interrogation. **Proceed to Scene 2B-3: “Dealing with Vhrule” if the players interrogate Vhrule.**

SCENE 2B-3. DEALING WITH VHRULE

If interrogated, Vhrule crumbles and reveals that he works for Manshoon's Zhentarim. He says the great wizard recently joined forces with the Xanathar to locate the legendary Vault of Dragons, but their alliance crumbled after the Xanathar accused Manshoon of stealing the secret key to the Vault.

MANSHOON'S FAILSAFE

As Vhrule begins to explain where Manshoon is hiding, green flames leap from his skin and he burns to cinders with a startled shriek! Vhrule's self-combustion terrifies any patrons who witnessed it (especially his mistress). Patrons rush to fetch the City Watch, but the responders take a few minutes to arrive.

Meanwhile, Durnan tries to restore order in the tavern and tend to any injured patrons. **Durnan gives a free healing potion to anyone injured by the assassins.**

REPORTING BACK

Silvermane is disappointed to learn that Manshoon's whereabouts remain a mystery but hopes his grisly show of magic galvanizes the Lords' Alliance into action. Speaking to Silvermane completes the quest and earns the characters the **Faction Favor** story award at the end of the adventure. **Proceed to Episode 3.**

2C. TREASURE HUNT (MASTERMIND QUEST)

The characters decipher a mysterious pamphlet to unearth a treasure hidden in one of the rooms. In doing so, they find themselves competing against the fiendish Cassalanter noble family.

SCENE 2C-1. CALL TO ACTION

Impressed by the group's performance in combat, an elderly halfling druid named Blossom Snobeedle and her human friend Savra Belabranta approach the characters in confidence. Savra is a reformed knight loyal to the Order of the Gauntlet, and Blossom is a local agent of the Emerald Enclave (see Appendix 1 for more details on these NPCs). They reveal the following:

- Two of Waterdeep's nobles – Victoro and Ammalia Cassalanter – have sent an undercover agent to the tavern tonight. The Cassalanters have a dark reputation and are rumored to consort with devils.
- The Cassalanters are hunting a gnome named Dalakhar. Blossom knows that Dalakhar stayed at the tavern recently. Interestingly, he also designed the handbill for tonight's performance.
- Savra is sure the Cassalanters are up to no good. She'd like the characters to search the room where Dalakhar stayed for clues and find out why the Cassalanters are hunting him.

In return for their help, Savra promises the aid of the Order of the Gauntlet. Blossom offers the same deal for the Emerald Enclave.

QUEST OBJECTIVE

To complete the quest, the characters must search the room where Dalakhar stayed and uncover why the Cassalanters are so interested in him. Blossom and Savra reveal the following:

- Blossom thinks it's too coincidental for a spy to arrive here on the same night as the event advertised on Dalakhar's handbill. Something about this show must be important.
- Savra reveals which room Dalakhar stayed in.
- Neither of them knows the identity of the Cassalanter's spy.

Blossom and Savra say they're too well known to get involved in this. They urge the characters to check out Dalakhar's room and watch the show for clues.

BACKSTORY: THE CASSALANTER PLOT

Exiled Lord Neverember sent Dalakhar to steal the *Stone of Golorr*, magic key to the Vault of Dragons. The stone can wipe memories, so Dalakhar set up a failsafe to relocate it if he ever lost his mind: a puzzle he planted for his future self to solve. Through divination, the fiendish Cassalanters have learned of this puzzle and know it's somehow connected to tonight's performance at the tavern. They've recruited mouse conductor Valas Trapp to their cause and compelled him to investigate Dalakhar's puzzle on their behalf. Unfortunately for the Cassalanters, Trapp has sold them out... and the **MASTERMIND** has got in on the game!

SCENE 2C-2. SEARCHING THE GUEST ROOM

The room where Dalakhar stayed is currently occupied by Valas Trapp, the mouse conductor. Between his acts onstage, Trapp returns here to decipher the puzzles left by Dalakhar. He keeps the door locked whether he's present or not (DC 10 Dexterity check with thieves' tools to pick. Break DC 12, 10hp). **Proceed to Scene 2C-3: "Dealing with the Spy" if Trapp discovers the characters sneaking about.**

AREA INFORMATION

The guest room contains a four-poster bed, a mirrored dresser, a wardrobe, and a storage chest. Trapp's belongings are neatly laid out for the night's stay. The room has the following notable features:

Ritual circle. A magic circle is chalked on the floorboards, ringed with burned-out candles. Any character trained in the Arcana skill recognizes the components of the *detect magic* spell ritual. A character with this spell on their spell list and the ability to perform rituals can complete the ritual in one minute if they pay the component cost.

Scroll on dresser. This is the instructions for creating the *detect magic* ritual circle. In the margin is a recently-scrawled note, reading "Bravado? The bard's story?"

Illusory script. A message is etched on a floorboard underneath the bed: "Show me the object that Bravado broke." This is an *illusory script* spell left by Dalakhar and refers to a scene from the legend of the Baron of Blood. If a character waves a lantern close to the message, the letters swirl around to

reveal a new sentence: “When the piper kisses the raven, the knave lights the way.”

Folding the theater handbill so the piper kisses the raven leaves the knave in the top-right corner pointing toward a mirror. The knave grips a candle in his other hand.

Storage Chest. The storage chest contains Trapp’s clothes. In the pocket of his breeches is a jeweler’s receipt for a ruby worth 999gp. If a character succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check, they recognize this as the component for an *infernal calling* spell: a spell used to summon and bind devils.

Mirrored dresser. Dalakhar had a *programmed illusion* imbued into the mirror. When a character holds a lit candle in front of the glass, an image of Dalakhar appears in the mirror!

A gnome’s face appears in the mirror. Anxiously, he whispers a message:

“Dalakhar, if you’re listening to this it means we’ve been separated from the stone, and that means you’ve forgotten all about it! Go to the cellar now, I’ve left written instructions in the usual place!”

Proceed to **Scene 2C-4: “Searching the Cellar”** when the characters head downstairs. Note the Durnan won’t allow them entry without good reason, so they may need to sneak inside.

SCENE 2C-3. DEALING WITH THE SPY

CREATURES/NPCs

Valas Trapp, the mouse conductor, has orders to search Dalakhar's old room for clues. He is a **mage** with the following spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt, light, mage hand, prestidigitation*

1st level (4 slots): *detect magic, disguise self, mage armor, shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *misty step, suggestion*

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, fly, hypnotic pattern*

4th level (3 slots): *greater invisibility, locate creature*

5th level (1 slot – already cast): *infernal calling*

Trapp also carries a box of trained mice which can aid him in combat (see "Mouse Orchestra" sidebar).

Objectives/Goals. Trapp has orders to uncover whatever Dalakhar was hiding and report back to the Cassalanter.

What do they know? Trapp has already deciphered the arcane script in Dalakhar's room and listened to the gnome's message. He has now summoned an invisible imp and sent it into the cellars to search for Dalakhar's hiding place.

If interrogated, Trapp quickly crumbles and reveals his ties to the Cassalanter noble family. He also reveals that he's secretly working as a double agent for the **MASTERMIND**. He has orders to meet the mastermind outside the tavern at ten bells tonight and reveal what he's learned.

MOUSE ORCHESTRA

During combat, Trapp can order his mice to perform the following special actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Trapp can take one special action to cause one of the following effects:

- The mice construct a tiny catapult to fire a glob of ink at one character. This character must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or be blinded until the end of their next turn.
- A mouse bounces from a tiny trampoline and lands inside the backpack or pouches of a character. It can steal one small object (such as a potion or spell component pouch) and return it to Valas Trapp on the same turn.
- The mice play a scratchy, discordant tune on their instruments. All characters within 10 feet of Valas Trapp who can hear the mice must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or suffer disadvantage on ability checks and saving throws until the end of their next turns.

PLAYING THE PILLARS

COMBAT

Be warned: even with his modified spell list, Trapp is a deadly opponent for the characters at this level unless they can ambush him or somehow prevent him from casting spells!

EXPLORATION

Characters can sneak past Trapp if they overcome his passive Perception score. If Trapp is looking for them, they must beat his Perception in a contested check.

SOCIAL

A character can bluff their way out of a confrontation with Trapp by succeeding on a contested Charisma (Deception) check versus Trapp's Wisdom (Insight).

SCENE 2C-4. SEARCHING THE CELLAR

Dalakhar has hidden a note behind one of the loose bricks in the wall. An invisible imp named Helmagog is currently searching the cellar for this hiding place on Trapp's behalf.

AREA INFORMATION

The cellar of the Yawning portal is 50 ft x 80 ft. Guttering torches shed dim light throughout. Giant barrels of ale rest inside arched alcoves and wine racks cover the walls.

CREATURES/NPCs

- The **imp** is the only creature in the cellar.

Objectives/Goals. Trapp bound Helmagog to find Dalakhar's hiding place and recover whatever's inside. If Helmagog suspects the characters are getting in its way, it takes measures to stop them.

At first, the imp tries toppling objects onto character's heads and making noises to indicate that the cellar is haunted. When this doesn't work, the imp goes to fetch Trapp (or alert Durnan if Trapp is dead). It only attacks the characters if they look likely to find Dalakhar's hiding place.

What do they know? Helmagog hates being bound and is happy to discuss its predicament with anyone who asks. The imp gladly betrays Trapp, even luring him into an ambush if needed. Although Trapp's death doesn't release Helmagog from its oath, the imp would like to see the wizard dead nonetheless.

PLAYING THE PILLARS

COMBAT

Helmagog uses hit-and-run tactics in combat and tries to distract and separate its enemies where possible.

EXPLORATION

Helmagog isn't stupid and stays invisible to avoid being caught. Reward clever attempts to reveal the imp, such as throwing flour into the air or dusting the surfaces where it may move.

SOCIAL

Helmagog has a habit of gloating aloud while invisible. The summoned imp gladly converses with the characters if they respond to it, soon revealing its own predicament.

SCENE 2C-5. DALAKHAR'S HIDING PLACE

Any character who cases the cellar finds the loose brick after ten minutes of searching. If they succeed on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check, this time is reduced to five minutes.

For every minute that passes, there is a cumulative 10% chance that a **commoner** kitchen worker enters the cellar for supplies. If they spot intruders, they rush to alert Durnan.

INSIDE THE HIDEY-HOLE

A rolled-up parchment rests behind a loose brick at the rear of the cellar. Any character who reads this uncovers the following message:

“Sorry, Dalakhar. I had second thoughts. It’s too risky to leave any instructions here that could lead our master’s enemies to the Vault of Dragons. If you find this message, I’m sorry. You’ll have to report back to Neverember for further orders. Yours, Dalakhar.”

REPORTING BACK

Blossom and Savra are intrigued to learn of Dalakhar’s mysterious message. They’ve heard the legend of the Vault of Dragons, and know it was built by exiled Lord Neverember. This information is sure to impress their superiors! Delivering Dalakhar’s note to Blossom and Savra completes the quest and earns the characters the **Faction Favor** story award at the end of the adventure. **Proceed to Episode 3.**

EPISODE 3. FINALE

Estimated Duration: 60-80 minutes.

In this final episode, the villain makes a final move to steal the MacGuffin or get revenge on the characters.

THE VILLAIN'S PLOT

Events in this episode are dependent on the role chosen for the villain:

- The **BRUTE** plans to ram-raid the tavern with their minions to steal the MacGuffin.
- The **MASTERMIND** waits outside the tavern to meet their contact.
- The **TRAITOR** lures the characters into a trap in the tavern's cellar.

In each case, your chosen villain has recruited the services of an underworld alchemist as bodyguard (see the "Malleus Grimehouse" sidebar).

THE BRUTE

The brute is preparing to raid the Yawning Portal. Their attack plan is simple: on the signal of a firecracker, their forces shoot out the tavern's windows to spread panic. The brute then uses a cart to smash through the shored-up wall left behind by the earlier dray crash (which the brute orchestrated to test the City Watch response times). **Run Scene 3-1: "Confronting the Brute" when you're ready to begin this episode.**

THE MASTERMIND'S PLOT

The mastermind has already sent minions into the tavern to steal the MacGuffin. During Episode 2, the characters may have learned that the Mastermind is waiting nearby to meet mouse conductor Valas Trapp at "ten bells". How the characters exploit this information is up to them! **Run Scene 3-2: "Confronting the Mastermind" when you're ready to begin this episode.**

THE TRAITOR

The traitor is already present in the tavern. They suspect the characters have the MacGuffin, so they try to lure them into an ambush. The traitor sets a fire in the kitchens and uses the confusion to lure the characters to the cellar to fetch water. The traitor and their minions then attack the characters to steal the MacGuffin or interrogate them about its whereabouts. **Run Scene 3-3: "Confronting the Traitor" when you're ready to begin this episode.**

MALLEUS GRIMEHOUSE

Your chosen villain has recruited an alchemist named Malleus Grimehouse to protect them (see Appendix 1 for details on this NPC). Malleus secretly works for Jarlaxle Baenre and has orders to deliver the MacGuffin to him.

During combat, Malleus can use his alchemical kit to perform the following special actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), Malleus can take one special action to cause one of the following effects:

- Malleus hurls a gas bomb to the ground that envelopes a 60ft. diameter circle around him in sleep gas. Any NPC patrons in the area automatically pass out (Malleus's allies have drunk an antidote to make them immune). Characters inside the area must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned. A character can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of their turns to shake off the effect. If they fail any of these checks, they fall unconscious instead.
- Malleus throws a bag of sticky adhesive up to 20 ft. at a Large or smaller creature. The target must succeed on a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw or be restrained by the glue. A creature restrained this way can break free with a successful DC 10 Strength check made as an action. Dealing 5 slashing damage to the glue also frees the creature without harming it.
- Malleus hurls a magic flint to the floor up to 20 ft. away. With a flash of light, one of Malleus's allies that he can see is teleported to where the flint landed.

THE INTERESTING CHARACTER

If the interesting character is still alive, try to involve them in the finale. Here are some ideas:

Character Role	Involvement
<input type="checkbox"/> Ally	The villain lures the ally into a trap and murders them. When the characters confront the villain, the villain reveals their crime.
<input type="checkbox"/> Rival	The rival tries to cut a deal with the villain to find the MacGuffin and turn on the characters.
<input type="checkbox"/> Victim	The villain takes the victim as a hostage.

IMPROVISING EVENTS

This final stage requires you to think on your feet and is easily modified by earlier events in the adventure. Try to roll with the players' ideas and tweak events to best fit your own story. This episode provides you with an armature for a finale – how you mold your story around it is up to you! If your tale is entertaining, be sure to share it with the admins at <http://dndadventurersleague.org>!

SCENE 3-1. CONFRONTING THE BRUTE

The brute ram-raids the tavern with their minions to steal the MacGuffin.

OBJECTIVES

The characters must survive the attack and prevent the MacGuffin from falling into the brute's hands.

LAUNCHING THE ATTACK

When the brute's forces are in position, one of the minions lets off a firecracker on the street outside. This is a signal for the others to open fire on the tavern's windows with ranged weapons. Anyone close to a window has a 50% chance of being targeted by a crossbow bolt.

As the windows shatter, the tavern patrons fall prone in panic. At the start of the next round, the brute rams an armored cart through the shored-up wall left behind by the earlier dray crash. Once inside the tavern, the villain demands the MacGuffin from the patrons or tries to slay the characters (or both).

CREATURES/NPCs

- The brute leads their attack (max CR 3).
- Malleus Grimehouse protects the brute. The alchemist is an **apprentice wizard** with the following adjustments: every round, Malleus can use a concoction from his alchemical kit to cause havoc in the tavern (see the "Malleus Grimehouse" section at the start of this episode).
- Four **bandits** also attack: two on the cart, and two in the street outside.

Objectives/Goals. The villain tries to steal the MacGuffin. If the characters defeat the villain, the minions likely flee or surrender.

What do they know? Malleus Grimehouse is secretly working for Jarlaxle Baenre and carries a casket identical to the one carried by Sh'Vis Jhalavar in Quest A: "Showtime". **Proceed to Scene 3-4: "Denouement" if the players find this casket.**

ADJUSTING THE SCENE

Here are some suggestions for adjusting this scene, according to your group. This adventure is optimized for APL 1.

- **Weak:** Remove two **bandits**.
- **Strong:** Add two **thugs**.
- **Very Strong:** Add four **thugs**.

PLAYING THE PILLARS

COMBAT

The armored cart is pulled by a draft horse with a forward-facing metal plough slung over its shoulders. The villain abandons the cart once it's through the breach, leaving it open for the characters to commandeer.

EXPLORATION

If Grimehouse releases his sleep bomb, any conscious character inside the cloud can attempt to hide in the gas by making a Dexterity (Stealth) check opposed by their enemies' passive Perception.

SOCIAL

Feel free to make the villain launch into mocking monologues. Should a character goad the villain, they quickly draw the villain's ire.

SCENE 3-2. CONFRONTING THE MASTERMIND

The mastermind waits outside the tavern to meet their contact.

OBJECTIVES

The characters must find a way to expose or defeat the mastermind without giving away the MacGuffin.

THE COACH

By default, the villain waits in a coach parked in an alley opposite the tavern. If you wish, you could swap the coach out with a palanquin or riding horse, or even have the mastermind wait on foot. The mastermind is waiting to hear from their contacts inside the tavern: Grady, Dwindlejoy, and mouse conductor Valas Trapp.

The characters can deal with the mastermind however they please. They have the drop on the villain, so an ambush is likely, but the villain probably knows they're inside.

CREATURES/NPCs

- The mastermind (max CR 3) waits inside the alley, perhaps inside their own coach.
- Malleus Grimehouse waits with the mastermind. The alchemist is an **apprentice wizard** with the following adjustments: every round, Malleus can use a concoction from his alchemical kit to attack the characters (see the “Malleus Grimehouse” section at the start of this episode).
- Four hired **bandits** linger around nearby: two at the mouth of the alley, and two with the villain.

Objectives/Goals. The mastermind awaits their contact at “ten bells”. If they feel they’ve been exposed, they try to flee into the city.

What do they know? Malleus Grimehouse is secretly working for Jarlaxle Baenre and carries a casket identical to the one carried by Sh’Vis Jhalavar in Quest A: “Showtime”. **Proceed to Scene 3-4: “Denouement” if the players find this casket.**

ADJUSTING THE SCENE

Here are some suggestions for adjusting this scene, according to your group. This adventure is optimized for APL 1.

- **Weak:** Remove two **bandits**.
- **Strong:** Add two **thugs**.
- **Very Strong:** Add four **thugs**.

PLAYING THE PILLARS

COMBAT

Allow the characters to plot their ambush, remembering to grant advantage to their attacks if their enemies are surprised and unaware.

EXPLORATION

If the Mastermind flees, use the chase rules from chapter 8 of the *Dungeon Master’s Guide* to play out any pursuit.

SOCIAL

Characters can trick the mastermind’s guards with a successful Charisma (Deception) check opposed by the guard’s passive Insight. Grant advantage if the players come up with a good ruse.

SCENE 3-3. CONFRONTING THE TRAITOR

The traitor lures the characters into an ambush in the tavern's cellar.

OBJECTIVES

The characters must survive the ambush and prevent the MacGuffin from falling into the traitor's hands.

THE DISTRACTION

While the characters are dealing with their faction contacts at the end of episode 2, Malleus Grimehouse enters the inn and sets a fire in the kitchens on the traitor's orders. Black smoke belches out into the bar and Durnan calls for the characters to fetch water from the cellars.

When the characters enter the cellars, the traitor follows them down with Malleus and a group of hired thugs. Malleus uses a *spell scroll of silence* at the top of the cellar steps to prevent the other patrons upstairs from hearing them. The traitor demands that the characters hand over the MacGuffin.

CREATURES/NPCs

- The traitor confronts the characters (max CR 3).
- Malleus Grimehouse guards the traitor. The alchemist is an **apprentice wizard** with the following adjustments: every round, Malleus can use a concoction from his alchemical kit to cause havoc in the cellar (see the "Malleus Grimehouse" section at the start of this episode).
- Four **bandits** escort the villain into the cellar, forming a protective screen between them and the characters.

Objectives/Goals. The traitor tries to steal the MacGuffin. If the characters defeat the traitor, the minions likely flee or surrender.

What do they know? Malleus Grimehouse is secretly working for Jarlaxle Baenre and carries a casket identical to the one carried by Sh'Vis Jhalavar in Quest A: "Showtime". **Proceed to Scene 3-4: "Denouement" if the players find this casket.**

ADJUSTING THE SCENE

Here are some suggestions for adjusting this scene, according to your group. This adventure is optimized for APL 1.

- **Weak:** Remove two **bandits**.
- **Strong:** Add two **thugs**.
- **Very Strong:** Add four **thugs**.

PLAYING THE PILLARS

COMBAT

The cellar has racks of spirits that are easily ignited. If lit, each bottle of spirits counts as a flask of *alchemist's fire* (see chapter 5 of the *Player's Handbook*).

EXPLORATION

If a character ducks behind the barrels, they can attempt to hide by making a Dexterity (Stealth) check opposed by their enemies' passive Perception.

SOCIAL

Feel free to make the villain launch into mocking monologues. Should a character goad the villain, they quickly draw the villain's ire.

SCENE 3-4. DENOUEMENT

The characters reflect on what's happened and perhaps choose which factions to ally with for the coming storyline.

THE CITY WATCH RETURN!

It's likely that the City Watch returns following the events of the finale. Sergeant **Lug Grimsditch** and his eight **veteran** officers march into the premises and demand to know what's happened. If the characters captured the villain, they can now hand them over to the Watch for sentencing.

Durnan thanks the characters and offers a final round on the house to everyone at the bar. If it seems appropriate, they toast the characters and wish them well for their future adventures!

GRIMEHOUSE'S CASKET

Grimehouse's casket contains a secret message from Jaxlaxle. Read the following aloud if it is opened:

Magic light radiates from the casket as it opens, merging into a foot-high image of [villain name]. A male voice whispers a message in the elven tongue.

Only characters who speak elven can understand the message. If nobody speaks elven, one of the faction members can translate the message if the characters bring the box to them. The message says:

"My loyal Grimehouse. An enemy of mine named [villain name] is visiting the Yawning Portal tonight. I want you to offer your services to them – they may prove useful in my search for the Vault of Dragons. Be aware they have their own rivals inside the tavern: adventurers who could prove to be a thorn in my side. Watch out for them!"

Character who understand elven detect a drow accent to the message. Who could it be from?

ADVENTURE REWARDS

Upon completing the adventure, the characters each receive rewards based upon their accomplishments. These rewards include advancement and treasure, and may include special rewards, such as story awards or new downtime activities, as follows:

ADVANCEMENT AND TREASURE CHECKPOINTS

The characters receive 1 advancement checkpoint and 1 treasure checkpoint for each **story** objective that they complete, as follows:

- **Story Objective A:** Complete the faction quest.
- **Story Objective B:** Defeat the villain.

PLAYER REWARDS

The characters earn the following player rewards for **completing the adventure**:

STORY AWARDS

During this adventure, the characters may earn the following story award:

Marmaduke the Tomcat. Any character who rescues Marmaduke can claim him as a pet. More information can be found in **Appendix 4**.

Faction Favor. All characters who complete the faction quest in **Episode 2** gain the support of one or more factions. More information can be found in **Appendix 4**.

DM REWARDS

In exchange for running this adventure, you earn advancement and treasure checkpoints and downtime as though you played the adventure, but none of the other rewards listed above.

However, this adventure may qualify for rewards earned by completing DM Quests. See the ALDMG (*Adventurers League Dungeon Master's Guide*) for more information about DM Quests.

APPENDIX 1: LOCATIONS & NPCs

The following NPCs and locations feature prominently in this adventure.

GRADY AND DWINDLEJOY

These notorious rakes specialize in bone-breaking and burglary, but also have a reputation as knowledge brokers. They're known to extract the tongues of employers who mistreat them.

- **Bellwish Grady.** Grady is a dumpling-shaped man clad in a tattered waistcoat and a filthy powdered wig. He speaks in a mocking, downbeat drawl that reeks of cabbages, and receives daily instructions from a parchment that appears by magic inside his left boot. Nobody knows who plants these instructions: Grady himself believes it's a fairy, but others have suggested that his companion Dwindlejoy is responsible, or even that he writes the notes himself during nightly fits of madness. Grady has a rusted arrowhead embedded in his brain, so the latter is most likely true.

Personality: Grady never loses his calm, and acts like he's heard it all too many times before.

Ideal: "I am motivated entirely by greed."

Bond: "My fear of the 'fairy gentleman' compels me to obey his daily instructions".

Flaw: "My loyalty is easily bought: so long the price exceeds my current fee."

- **Merry Dwindlejoy.** Dwindlejoy is a sallow, lank-haired ghoul of a man with cadaverous, oversized features and a rotten grin. He has an odd manner of speaking: aside from "aye" and "nay", he prefaces every utterance with either "Let us be clear..." or "So we ask you this...", and pointedly ignores any conversations that don't include himself. Grady compensates for this by addressing all his statements to Dwindlejoy (for example, "I wonder, don't you Dwindlejoy, if this rat is going to hand over its bauble without a fight?").

Personality: Dwindlejoy always appears like he's gloating over a joke you missed.

Ideal: "The law of chance governs everything, so I often flip a coin to resolve tough decisions.

Bond: "I'm always loyal to my friend Grady."

Flaw: "I am deeply afraid of fire".

CITY WATCH OFFICERS

Waterdeep is renowned for its tough regulations and militant officers of the law.

- **Sergeant Lug Grimsditch.** Sergeant Grimsditch is a City Watch officer assigned to the Castle Ward. His father was a famous Chultan buccaneer, and young Grimsditch was raised at sea aboard a pirate ship. After his father's capture, Lug served as a jailor's boy in the prison where he was incarcerated. He's now lawful to a fault but prides himself on knowing how criminals think.

Personality: Sergeant Grimsditch is always on duty, projecting an air of confidence and discipline.

Ideal: "The law, the Lords, and the Realm must always be respected."

Bond: "I still visit my elderly father in prison to bring him alms."

Flaw: "I think I have the ear of the criminal underworld, but really they don't trust me."

FACTION AGENTS

Waterdeep is home to many competing factions. The following faction agents can be encountered during this adventure:

- **Mattrim "Threestrings" Mereg.** This awkward Illuskan bard performs regularly at the Yawning Portal. "Threestrings" is so named for his battered lute that only has three strings remaining. He's secretly a member of the Harpers and is far more persuasive than his manner suggests.

Personality: "Threestrings'" absent-minded and fidgety demeanor conceals a calculated and cunning mind.

Ideal: "Defend the poor and the vulnerable".

Bond: "The Yawning Portal is my base in the city. You can always find me here."

Flaw: "I've a habit of hanging on to lost causes".

- **Meloon Wardragon.** Wardragon belongs to Force Grey: an elite league of adventurers sworn to defend Waterdeep. His jolly demeanor belies a dark secret: an intellect devourer recently ate his brain and his body is now controlled by its mind flayer master.

Personality: Wardragon appears as a rowdy, good-humored human who's proud of his city.

Ideal: "The city must be protected" ("*Obey the master!*").

Bond: "Waterdeep Forever!" ("Protect the master!")

Flaw: "My bravery blinds me to the odds." ("I'll gladly die for the master!")

- **Yagra Stonefist.** This half-orc thug works as a bodyguard for the Zhentarim. When she's not on active duty, she spends her time arm-wrestling patrons for money.

Personality: Yagra speaks her mind and doesn't tolerate fools.

Ideal: "Live for the moment. If I live 'til tomorrow, it's been a good day."

Bond: "The Black Network pays the bills. I'll not cross them."

Flaw: "You think YOU can take me down?"

- **Jalester Silvermane.** This weathered warrior spends most nights sipping ale in one of the tavern's darkened corners. Silvermane is secretly a spy for the Lord's Alliance, sent here to surveil adventurers and assess the threat they pose to the city's order.

Personality: Silvermane is serious and soft-spoken, always wary for threats.

Ideal: "Honor is measured in loyalty. I swear myself to the Lords' Alliance."

Bond: "I like it here in Waterdeep. I'll not leave, unless ordered to do so by my superiors."

Flaw: "I find socializing exhausting. Sometimes I'll do anything to avoid it."

- **Blossom Snobeedle.** Blossom works at the Snobeedle Orchard and Meadery, her family business. She's a motherly soul who delights in socializing, and a longtime agent of the Emerald Enclave. Recently her youngest son Dasher disappeared, and fearing for his life, she came to Waterdeep to track his last movements.

Personality: Blossom has a delightful demeanor, but underneath it all she seems sad.

Ideal: "We are what we do."

Bond: "I've failed my son once. If he's alive, I won't fail him again."

Flaw: "I sometime trust people a little too willingly."

- **Savra Belabranta.** Savra once belonged to the feathergale knights: a team of Waterdhavian aerial-mount enthusiasts with pretensions of nobility. They indoctrinated her into the Cult of Howling Hatred, but she was freed by the intervention of a group of adventurers (see *Princes of the Apocalypse*). Since then, Savra has dedicated herself to Tyr and seeks to redeem her dark past.

Personality: Savra has an energetic outlook that means she rarely sits still.

Ideal: "I must redeem my sins."

Bond: "Despite my dark past, I still get a thrill from flying on a winged steed."

Flaw: "My energetic demeanor masks my latent mania."

TRAVELLING PERFORMERS

Bighat's carnival show has come to the Yawning Portal tonight to entertain the locals. The performers include:

- **Sh'Vis Jhalavar, aka "Nula".** This drow swashbuckler fled the drow city of Menzoberranzan after covering up her brother's conversion to the goddess Eilistraee (a cover-up that involved the death of more than one drow inquisitor). She now roams the surface world with Jarlaxle Baenre in the hope of reuniting with her brother.

Personality: Sh'Vis appears calm and detached, but secretly suppresses great fury.

Ideal: "I'll do anything to survive."

Bond: "Jarlaxle gave me a home. He must never know that I am hunted."

Flaw: "I tend to lash out at people who learn my secrets."

- **Rusty Bighat.** This red-nosed halfling was raised among the roustabouts and performers of a travelling circus. Over the years, Rusty scraped together the coin to start his own enterprise and has been touring ever since. He took the family name "Bighat" in honor of his signature, oversized top hat.

Personality: Loud and often obnoxious.

Ideal: "The show must go on!"

Bond: "My reputation is everything."

Flaw: "Another drink? Don't mind if I do!"

- **Valas Trapp.** The "Mouse Conductor" of Waterdeep works as an undercover operative for many clandestine or governmental factions within the city. Trapp dresses in a dusty, rodent-gnawed suit, and looks a little like a mouse himself, with wily features and tufts of coarse grey hair. He uses his act as an excuse to move freely through the city's taverns.

Personality: Nervous and simpering, but with a streak of cunning.

Ideal: "Money can buy you anything."

Bond: "My mice mean everything to me: they are my messengers, spies, and friends."

Flaw: “I’m always looking over my shoulder for the dagger in my back.”

TAVERN STAFF

- **Durnan.** The proprietor of the Yawning Portal is a man of few words with a gruff demeanor and a mercenary outlook to life. Long ago, Durnan returned from Undermountain with a haul of riches; among which were said to be magic items which extended his own lifespan. He bought the Yawning Portal by investing a small portion of that treasure haul.

Personality: Durnan believes that everyone must fend for themselves in this cruel world.

Ideal: “Someone who can stand alone can stand against anything.”

Bond: “The Yawning Portal is my home. I’ll not get attached to the people here: just like the tavern, I’ll outlive them all.”

Flaw: “If you want sympathy you’ve come to the wrong place.”

- **“Bonnie”.** The barmaid of the Yawning Portal is secretly a doppelganger who works at the tavern to make ends meet. She leads a gang of five doppelgangers who pose as residents across the city.

Personality: Bonnie is cheery and quick-witted, but sometimes seems oddly on edge.

Ideal: “If you want something badly enough, you take it.”

Bond: “My gang have learned to trust each other. I’ll never betray them.”

Flaw: “When my temper flares, I sometimes act a little too impulsively.”

VISITORS

- **Urlon Vhrule.** Vhrule is a pudgy half-elf with a greying goatee beard and a fine collection of fashionable hats. He’s one of Manshoon’s many apprentices: a fact that terrifies him utterly. Vhrule would far prefer to spend his time

wining and dining through Waterdeep’s upper echelons than studying magic with the clone of a demented mastermind.

Personality: Vhrule likes the finer things in life and is never more animated than when talking about his greatest love: theater.

Ideal: “Indulging in the arts is the closest we can come to godliness.”

Bond: “Magic comes naturally to me, even though it bores me.”

Flaw: “I’m unfaithful to my wife with more men and women than I care to think about.”

- **Diahne Icewilder.** Vhrule’s mistress is cold, patient, and deadly if roused. Her hatred and disgust for Vhrule is well masked, as she need him to work her way into high society.

Personality: Diahne views the world through two lenses: “is this valuable to me?” and “how can I get it without paying?”

Ideal: “I’ll climb the social ladder to the very top and then kick it away before anyone else can follow me.”

Bond: “Vhrule is my ticket out of mediocrity.”

Flaw: “I’m obsessed with cleanliness and have many tiresome rituals.”

- **Malleus Grimehouse.** This dour chemist has the bearing of a toad, with blotchy skin, an inscrutable pout, and an ill-humored and preposterously arrogant demeanor. Grimehouse believes that magic is a crude practice that is soon to be eclipsed by the science of alchemy. He knows a handful of spells, but his true passion lies in concocting alchemical alternates to such magic. His studies are costly, so he hires out his services to fund his research.

Personality: Painfully boring and lacking in any social grace.

Ideal: “Study and practice lead to mastery in any discipline. There are no natural talents.”

Bond: “My books are the reservoir of my art.”

Flaw: “I look down on everyone.”

APPENDIX 2: CREATURE STATISTICS

ANIMATED ARMOR

Medium construct, unaligned

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 33 (6d8 + 6)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	1 (-5)	3 (-4)	1 (-5)

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 6

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Antimagic Susceptibility. The armor is incapacitated while in the area of an *antimagic field*. If targeted by *dispel magic*, the armor must succeed on a Constitution saving throw against the caster's spell save DC or fall unconscious for 1 minute.

False Appearance. While the armor remains motionless, it is indistinguishable from a normal suit of armor.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The armor makes two melee attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

APPRENTICE WIZARD

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 10

Hit Points 9 (2d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Arcana +4, History +4

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Spellcasting. The mage is a 1st-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). The mage has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt*, *mending*, *prestidigitation*
1st level (2 slots): *burning hands*, *disguise self*, *shield*

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) piercing damage.

BANDIT

Medium humanoid (any race), any non-lawful alignment

Armor Class 12 (leather armor)

Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

ACTIONS

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) slashing damage.

Light Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 80 ft./320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d8 + 1) piercing damage.

BROOM OF ANIMATED ATTACK

Small construct, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 17 (5d6)

Speed 0 ft., fly 50 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	17 (+3)	10 (+0)	1 (-5)	5 (-3)	1 (-5)

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone

Senses blindsight 30 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 7

Languages –

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Antimagic Susceptibility. The broom is incapacitated while in the area of an *antimagic field*. If targeted by *dispel magic*, the broom must succeed on a Constitution saving throw against the caster's spell save DC or fall unconscious for 1 minute.

False Appearance. While the broom remains motionless, and isn't flying, it is indistinguishable from a normal broom.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The broom makes two melee attacks.

Broomstick. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

REACTIONS

Animated Attack. If the broom is motionless and a creature grabs hold of it, the broom makes a Dexterity check contested by the creature's Strength check. If the broom wins the contest, it flies out of the creature's grasp and makes a melee attack against the creature with advantage on the attack roll.

COMMONER

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 10

Hit Points 4 (1d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 0 (10 XP)

ACTIONS

Club. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage.

GOBLIN

Small humanoid (goblinoid), neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (leather armor, shield)

Hit Points 7 (2d6)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (-1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	8 (-1)	8 (-1)

Skills Stealth +6

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9

Languages Common, Goblin

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Nimble Escape. The goblin can take the Disengage or Hide action as a bonus action on each of its turns.

ACTIONS

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

IMP

Tiny fiend (devil, shapeshifter), lawful evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 10 (3d4 + 3)

Speed 20 ft., fly 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (-2)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Skills Deception +4, Insight +3, Persuasion +4, Stealth +5

Damage Resistances cold; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks that aren't silvered

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Infernal, Common

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Shapeshifter. The imp can use its action to polymorph into a beast form that resembles a rat (speed 20 ft.), a raven (20 ft., fly 60 ft.), or a spider (20 ft., climb 20 ft.), or back into its true form. Its statistics are the same in each form, except for the speed changes noted. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. It reverts to its true form if it dies.

Devil's Sight. Magical darkness doesn't impede the imp's darkvision.

Magic Resistance. The imp has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Sting (Bite in Beast Form). *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage, and the target must make on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw, taking 10 (3d6) poison damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Invisibility. The imp magically turns invisible until it attacks or until its concentration ends (as if concentrating on a spell). Any equipment the imp wears or carries is invisible with it.

KENKU

Medium humanoid (kenku), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 13 (3d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Deception +4, Perception +2, Stealth +5

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages understands Auran and Common but speaks only through the use of its Mimicry trait

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Ambusher. The kenku has advantage on attack rolls against any creature it has surprised.

Mimicry. The kenku can mimic any sounds it has heard, including voices. A creature that hears the sounds can tell they are imitations with a successful DC 14 Wisdom (Insight) check.

ACTIONS

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

MAGE

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 12 (15 with mage armor)

Hit Points 40 (9d8)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (-1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)

Saving Throws Int +6, Wis +4

Skills Arcana +6, History +6

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages any four languages

Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Spellcasting. The mage is a 9th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). The mage has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *fire bolt*, *light*, *mage hand*, *prestidigitation*

1st level (4 slots): *detect magic*, *mage armor*, *magic missile*, *shield*

2nd level (3 slots): *misty step*, *suggestion*

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell*, *fireball*, *fly*

4th level (3 slots): *greater invisibility*, *ice storm*

5th level (1 slot): *cone of cold*

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

SWASHBUCKLER

Medium humanoid (human), any non-lawful alignment

Armor Class 17 (leather armor)

Hit Points 66 (12d8 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	18 (+4)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)

Skills Acrobatics +8, Athletics +5, Persuasion +6

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Lightfooted. The swashbuckler can take the Dash or Disengage action as a bonus action on each of its turns.

Sauve Defense. While the swashbuckler is wearing light or no armor and wielding no shield, its AC includes its Charisma modifier.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The swashbuckler makes three attacks: one with a dagger and two with its rapier.

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) piercing damage

Rapier. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage

THUG

Medium humanoid (any), any non-good alignment

Armor Class 11 (leather armor)

Hit Points 32 (5d8 + 10)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)

Skills Intimidation +2

Senses passive Perception 10

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Pack Tactics. The thug has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the thug's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The thug makes two melee attacks.

Mace. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Heavy Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d10) piercing damage.

Veteran

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 17 (splint)

Hit Points 58 (9d8 + 18)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Athletics +5, Perception +2

Senses passive Perception 12

Languages any one language (usually Common)

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The veteran makes two longsword attacks. If it has a shortsword drawn, it can also make a shortsword attack.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage if used with two hands.

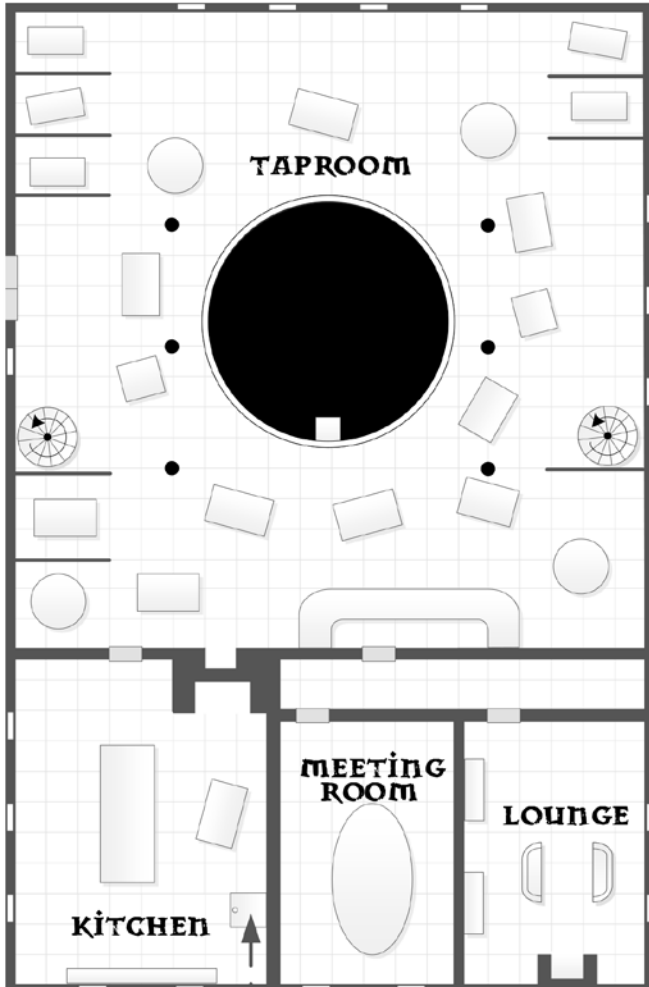
Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) piercing damage.

Heavy Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, range 100/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d10) piercing damage.

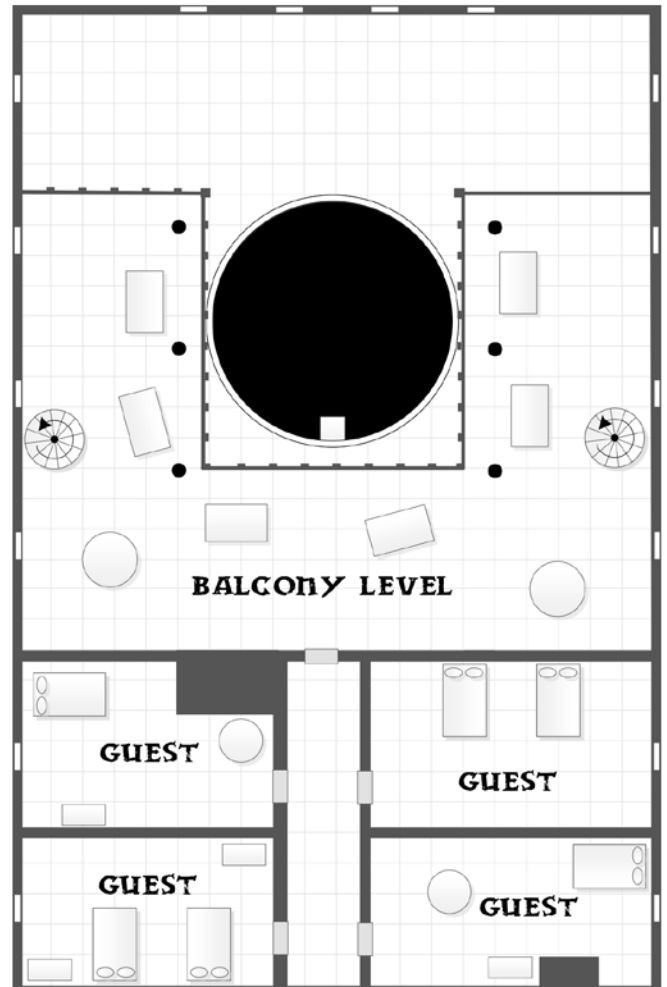
APPENDIX 3: MAPS

THE YAWNING PORTAL

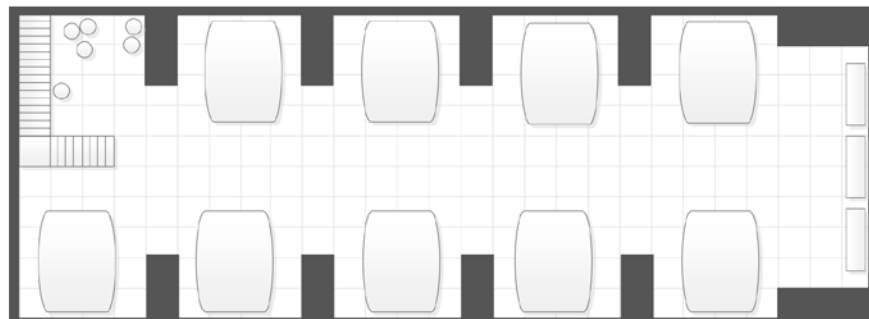
1ST FLOOR



2ND & 3RD FLOOR

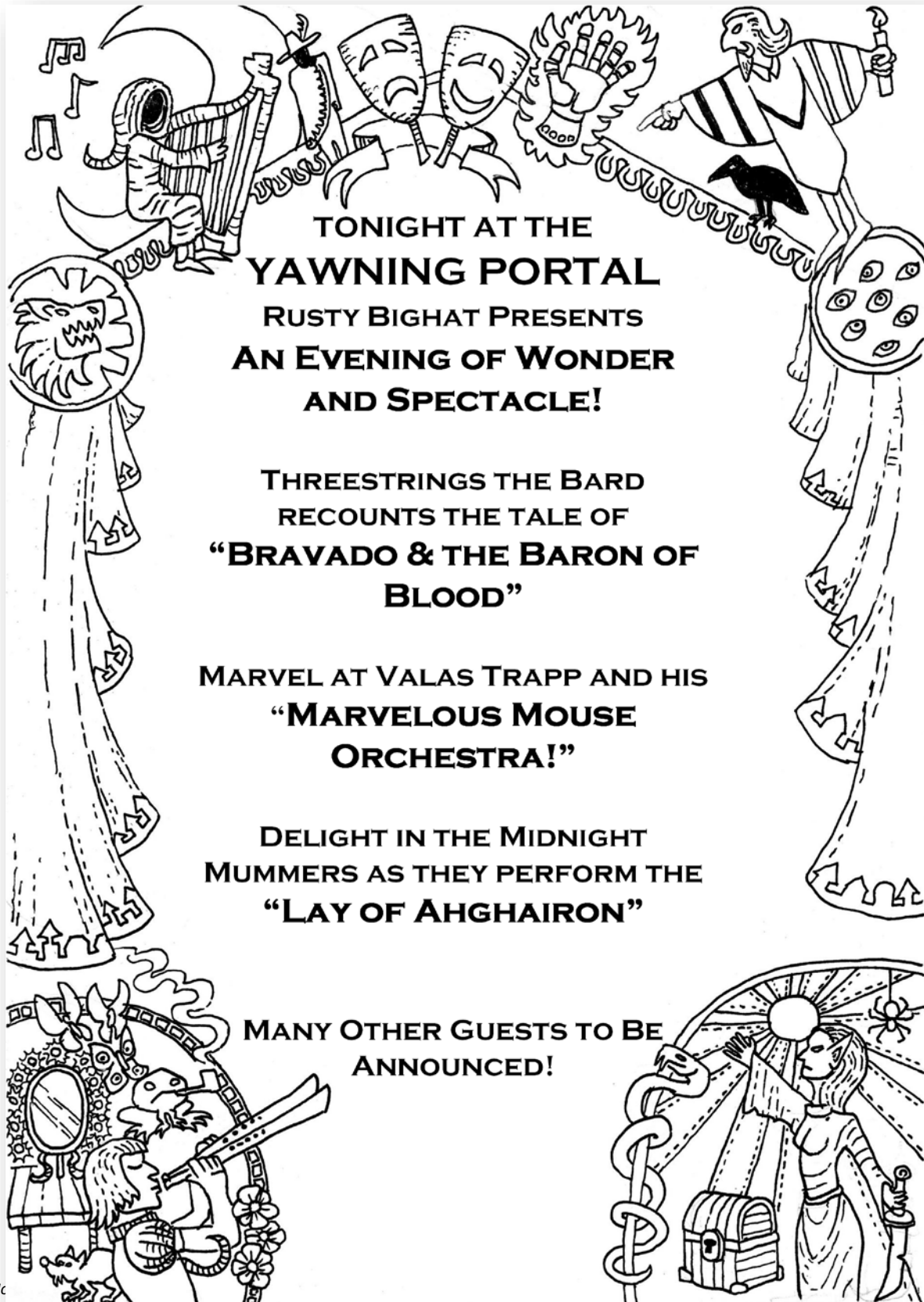


CELLAR



APPENDIX 4: PLAYER HANDOUTS

THEATER HANDBILL



TONIGHT AT THE
YAWNING PORTAL
RUSTY BIGHAT PRESENTS
**AN EVENING OF WONDER
AND SPECTACLE!**

THREESTRINGS THE BARD
RECOUNTS THE TALE OF
**“BRAVADO & THE BARON OF
BLOOD”**

MARVEL AT VALAS TRAPP AND HIS
**“MARVELOUS MOUSE
ORCHESTRA!”**

DELIGHT IN THE MIDNIGHT
MUMMERS AS THEY PERFORM THE
“LAY OF AHGHAIRON”

MANY OTHER GUESTS TO BE
ANNOUNCED!

STORY AWARD: MARMADUKE THE TOMCAT

This old ginger tomcat has a heart of gold and likes nothing better than to snooze on your lap. He wears a name tag on his collar that identifies him as “Marmaduke”, but the tag has chipped off just underneath “This Cat Belongs To...”. If you can find Mardaduke’s owner, you’re sure to get a reward!

Unfortunately, Marmaduke is extremely cowardly. During combat, he leaps onto you and digs his claws in, never letting go and scrambling all over your body. Treat this as a flaw – if you use it to your disadvantage, your DM can grant inspiration at their discretion.

STORY AWARD: FACTION FAVOR

You have won the favor of two of the great factions: The Emerald Enclave, the Lords’ Alliance, the Zhentarim, the Order of the Gauntlet, the Harpers, or Force Grey (circle which factions apply when you receive this award). As the bearer of this award, you may at any time replace your own background feature with the **Safe Haven** background feature (*Sword Coast Adventurer’s Guide*).

In addition, you may call upon these factions to cast *raise dead* on your character if your remains are taken to Waterdeep. Doing so removes this story award from your record. You can use this favor even if you don’t have the Faction Agent background.

PERFORMANCE HINTS

<i>"The crowd craves comedy! Do something funny, quick!"</i>	<i>"This is good, but not good enough. You need to push it to the next level!"</i>
<i>"I think you could enhance this performance with a song!"</i>	<i>"You're stealing all the limelight! Find a way to better involve your companions in your act!"</i>
<i>"Ah, the audience wants pathos! Can you think of a way to bring out those bittersweet feelings?"</i>	<i>"I think the audience needs to see your wits. Quick, think of something witty to say!"</i>
<i>"This act is going to end in cabbages if you don't impress the audience with a feat of strength!"</i>	<i>"This is it! Your grand solo piece! All eyes are on you! Don't let them down!"</i>
<i>"This is stale - we need drama! Your act needs a twist, fast!"</i>	<i>"The audience are restless. Why not get one of them involved in the act?"</i>
<i>"They're getting bored! Can you pull some acrobatics out of the bag?"</i>	<i>"The time is ripe to give the audience a surprise! Do something shocking!"</i>
<i>"Quick! Dance a jig or something!"</i>	<i>"Ah, sweet romance! Can you do something romantic for the crowd?"</i>
<i>"I think this scene would work better if you pretended to be someone else?"</i>	<i>"There's a moral to this performance, right? That's coming up soon?"</i>
<i>"I think you need to tie this thing into some sort of historical context."</i>	<i>"I know this crowd, and I can tell when they want to see blood."</i>
<i>"You need to get all your friends involved in the finale for this one!"</i>	<i>"Sometimes, when things aren't going so well, I fall back on poetry..."</i>
<i>"Why don't you offer to take some challenges from the crowd?"</i>	<i>"Drink deep from the Cauldron of Story! You need a better narrative to this act!"</i>

APPENDIX 6: DUNGEON MASTER TIPS

This adventure is designed for **three to seven 1st-4th level characters** and is optimized for **five characters with an average party level (APL) of 1**. Characters outside this level range cannot participate in this adventure.

NEW TO D&D ADVENTURERS LEAGUE?

<http://dnd.wizards.com/playevents/organized-play>

NEW TO THE ANNUAL STORYLINE?

<http://dnd.wizards.com/story/waterdeep>

<http://dndadventurersleague.org/storyline-seasons/waterdeep-adventures/>

To DM an adventure, you **must** have 3 to 7 players—each with their own character whose level is within the adventure’s level range. Characters playing in a **hardcover** adventure may continue to play to but if they play a different hardcover adventure, they **can’t return** to the first one if they’re outside its level range.

PREPARING THE ADVENTURE

Before you start play, consider the following:

- Read through the adventure, taking notes of anything you’d like to highlight or remind yourself of while running the adventure, such as a way you’d like to portray an NPC or a tactic you’d like to use in a combat. Familiar yourself with the adventure’s appendices and handouts.
- Gather any resources you’d like to use to aid you in running this adventure—such as notecards, a DM screen, miniatures, and battlemaps.
- Ask the players to provide you with relevant character information, such as name, race, class, and level; passive Wisdom (Perception), and anything specified as notable by the adventure (such as backgrounds, traits, flaws, etc.)

Players can play an adventure they previously played as a Player or Dungeon Master but may only play it once with a given character. Ensure each player has their character’s adventure logsheet (if not, get one from the organizer). The players fill out the adventure name, session number, date, and your name and DCI number. In addition, the player also fills in the starting values for advancement and treasure checkpoints, downtime days, and renown.

These values are updated at the conclusion of the session.

Each player is responsible for maintaining an accurate logsheet. If you have time, you can do a quick scan of a player’s character sheet to ensure that nothing looks out of order. If you see magic items of very high rarities or strange arrays of ability scores, you can ask players to provide documentation for the irregularities. If they cannot, feel free to restrict item use or ask them to use a standard ability score array.

Point players to the D&D Adventurers League Players Guide for reference. If players wish to spend downtime days and it’s the beginning of an adventure or episode, they can declare their activity and spend the days now, or they can do so at the end of the adventure or episode. Players should select their characters’ spells and other daily options prior to the start of the adventure, unless the adventure specifies otherwise. Feel free to reread the adventure description to help give players hints about what they might face.

ADJUSTING THIS ADVENTURE

When combat is a possibility, the adventure will provide a sidebar that helps you to determine the best mix/number of opponents to provide them with to create an appropriate challenge. While you’re not bound to these adjustments; they’re here for your convenience and consideration.

To determine whether you should consider adjusting the adventure, add up the total levels of all the characters and divide the result by the number of characters (rounding .5 or greater up; .4 or less down). This is the group’s average party level (APL). To approximate the **party strength** for the adventure, consult the table below.

DETERMINING PARTY STRENGTH

Party Composition	Party	Strength
3-4 characters,	APL less than	Very weak
3-4 characters,	APL equivalent	Weak
3-4 characters,	APL greater than	Average
5 characters,	APL less than	Weak
5 characters,	APL equivalent	Average
5 characters,	APL greater than	Strong
6-7 characters,	APL less than	Average
6-7 characters,	APL equivalent	Strong