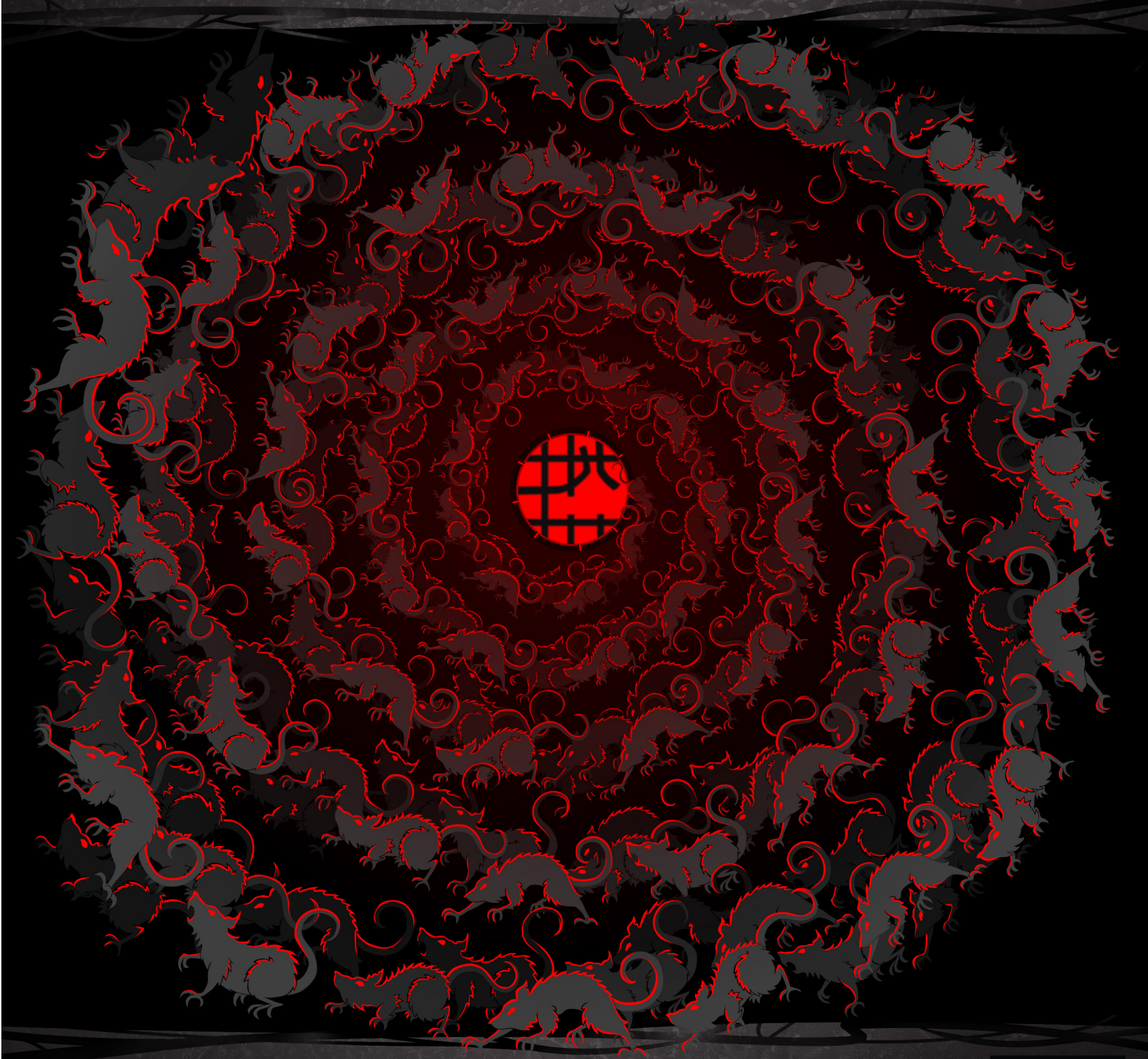
Rats of Waterdeep

Lysa Chen Will Doyle



An urban investigation
for 1st–4th level characters

GUILD

Credits

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Introduction

Rats of Waterdeep is a DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS adventure for characters of level 1-4, optimized for 1st-level characters, and designed for roughly four to six hours of play. The adventure comprises the following sections:

- ***Adventure Primer.*** An overview of the adventure, including character hooks and advice for scaling the adventure.
- ***Part 1: Murder Most Foul.*** The characters investigate the disappearance of a sea captain, uncover a murder, and meet the kingpin who, unbeknownst to them, is behind it all.
- ***Part 2: Trail of the Rat.*** The characters chase up clues from the murder site, and reveal a portion of the true plot the captain discovered: a secret romance between two powerful figures.
- ***Part 3: Revealing the Rat.*** The characters confront the heartbroken Rat King and, perhaps, a spy who reveals the truth behind the lovers' breakup. Then, they rush to the Salvation Parade for a final showdown.
- ***Rewards.*** A summary of experience points, treasure, and magic items available in the adventure.
- ***Appendix A: New Player Options.*** A new background, Detective, and two new class archetypes: Rat King for the ranger, and Circle of Plagues for the druid.
- ***Appendix B: Monster/NPC Statistics.*** Stat blocks for all the villains in the adventure.
- ***Appendix C: Handouts.*** Player handouts and maps for use at the table.

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Adventure Primer

Overview

A magical plague has forced the Lords of Waterdeep to quarantine part of the Dock Ward. Amid the confusion, an old sea captain is found dead in suspicious circumstances within the quarantine zone. With the City Watch too fearful to enter, the characters investigate the murder to bring those responsible to justice.

Their trail unearths a feud between two shadowy characters: the so-called 'Rat King' of Waterdeep, and the mysterious 'Lady of Plagues'. Their grudge culminates at the Salvation Parade: a prayer-march organized by the faithful of Ilmater. If the characters don't intervene, hundreds of innocents could be transformed into rats.

By uncovering the right clues, the players learn that the Lady of Plagues and the Rat King are estranged lovers. Each thinks their partner plotted their murder: when in fact, the Xanathar crime boss orchestrated their feud, and is using the ensuing confusion to smuggle a shipment of slaves into Skullport. With the right evidence, the characters can reunite the lovers, turn them against the Xanathar's agents, and free the slaves.

Background

For years, the Rat King protected the slums from fire, thievery, and oppression. Out of disguise, this vigilante was the lowly sewer scavenger Catarina Brisby, who lived alone with her father, a retired sea captain.

In recent months, Catarina learned that a druid from the Circle of Plagues was concocting a magical disease that would transform the poor folk of the docks into rats. She traced this 'Lady of Plagues' to an apothecary on the docks: a front for the druid's plague laboratory. Here she learned that her enemy was trialing the virus on criminals and murderers: the same foes the Rat King brawled with each night. Rather than fight her, Catarina reached out to the Lady of Plagues, and found a kindred spirit called Maladie Song.

They met often and in secret, and as time passed their rivalry blossomed into love. Catarina persuaded Maladie to lock her plagues away in a casket, and live in peace with her in the city. She introduced her to her father, Captain Brisby, and together they made plans for their future.

Soon after, an outbreak of Rat Pox struck the Dock Ward. Unable to find Maladie, Catarina faced the horrible realization that her lover had betrayed her. As the Rat King hunted anew for the Lady of Plagues, Catarina's father conducted his own investigations through the district's seedier taverns. He discovered that the Xanathar crime boss had stolen and unleashed Maladie's plague, and was using the outbreak to smuggle slaves into the city through the docks. The old captain arranged a covert meeting with the port authorities, but before he could act on it, the Xanathar's minions murdered him and pinned the crime on his own daughter, the Rat King.

Such is the situation when the characters enter the story…

Character Hooks

Use the following hooks to draw the characters into the adventure, or devise your own. All hooks should point to the meeting with Swordcaptain Morrow in Part 1: "Murder Most Foul".

Detectives. The City of Splendors swills with intrigue and sleaze, fueling a burgeoning market in sleuths-for-hire. You've put yourself up for work, and the City Watch have taken the bait. This hook is especially relevant to characters with the Detective background (see appendix A: "New Character Options").

Troubled Relatives. Rat Pox has quarantined the streets where someone special to you lives. There's no way to contact them, so you've appealed to the City Watch for help. They can smuggle you inside, but they want a favor in return…

Faction Agents. The Rat Pox represents a threat to the city's order that no faction can abide. Your superiors have sent you to the docks to uncover the source of the plague and quash it.



Adjusting the Adventure

Rats of Waterdeep is optimized for a group of five characters with an average party level (APL) of 1st-level. It is playable with higher-level groups using the following adjustments (maximum character level 4):

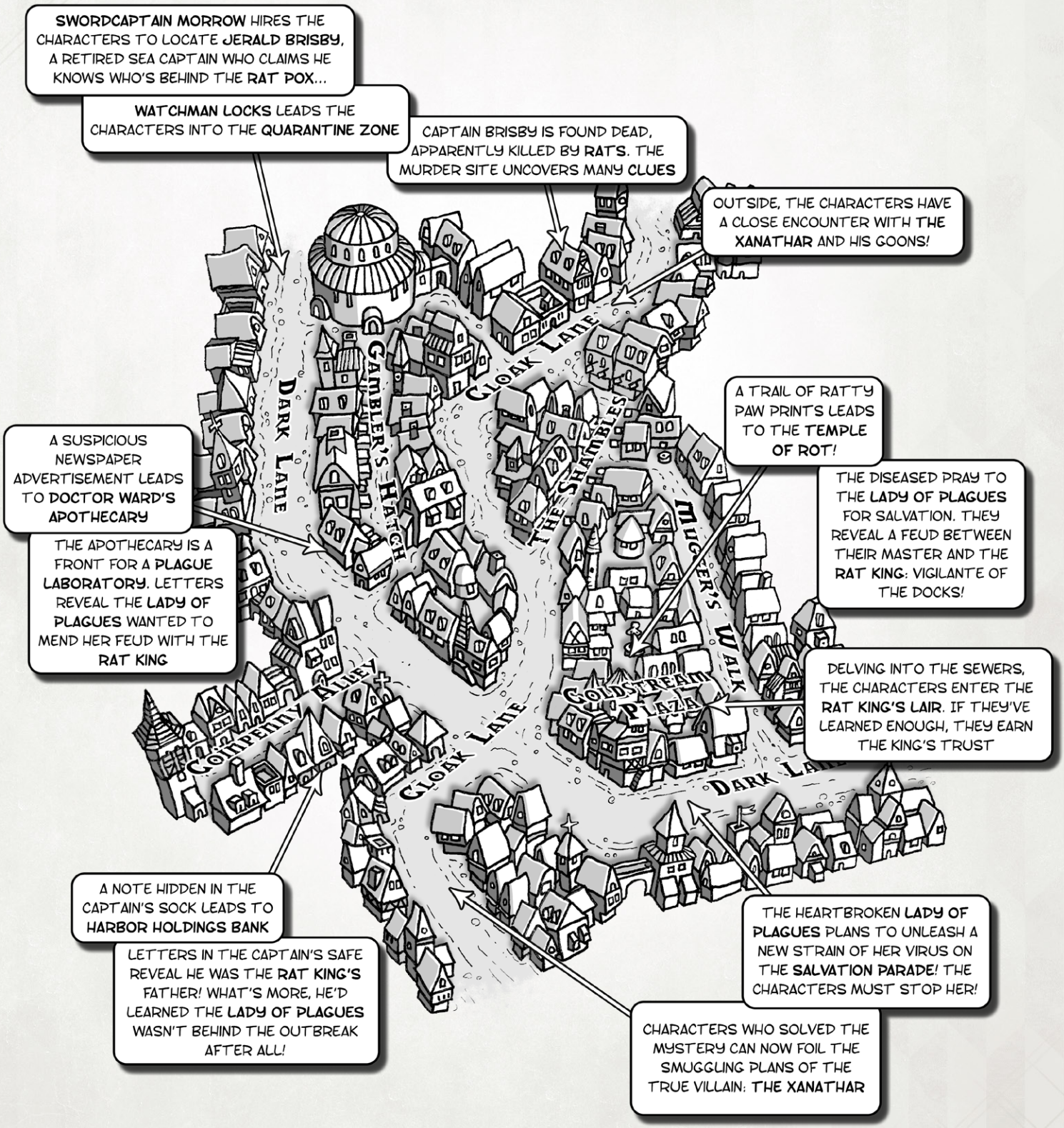
Encounter	Adjustments
Enter the Kingpin	Add two **thugs** for every APL above first.
Doctor Ward's Apothecary	Add three **cultists** for every APL above first.
Harbor Holdings	Above first level, replace the twins with **thugs**. Add one **thug** for every APL above second (i.e. they become triplets or quadruplets!).
Temple of Rot	Add two **swarms of rats** for every APL above first.
Rat King's Lair	Add two **swarms of rats** for every APL above first.
Salvation Parade	Add three **cultists** for every APL above first.
Foil the Xanathar	Add two **apprentice wizards** for every APL above first.

Waterdeep, City of Splendors

Also known as the Crown of the North, Waterdeep is a grand metropolis hewn into the cliffs of the Sword Coast. It's the largest city on Faerûn, if not all Toril, and trades with every corner of the world. Famed for its decadent nobles and powerful guilds, the city attracts thousands of visitors each day. Above ground, a council of Masked Lords regulate the city's strict laws, which are upheld by an army of watchmen. Below the streets, the sprawling dungeon of Undermountain draws adventurers from afar, and criminal gangs vie for control of the subterranean hideout of Skullport. For more information on Waterdeep, refer to the *Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide*.



Adventure Flow



Part 1: Murder Most Foul

The characters investigate the disappearance of a sea captain, uncover a murder, and meet the kingpin who, unbeknownst to them, is behind it all.

Waterdeep Noir

Swordcaptain Arvene Morrow summons the characters to her City Watch office in the Castle Ward. When they enter, the sergeant is seated at her desk, and her intern and detective-in-training, Watchman Bogarte Locks, is staring out the window and muttering to himself.

> The sky was grey and grim in Waterdeep that day. Grey as the faces of those poor souls stuck behind the quarantine barricade down the docks. Grim as them too. The mystery of the Rat Pox. Docks Disease. Pest Plague. This case had a lot of nicknames. About the only thing it had more of was dead ends. We were about to give up when they walked in the door like a bright-eyed town hero walks into a tavern – armor gleaming like it's fresh off the rack with the tags still on. I didn't know who they were, but they looked like trouble...

Swordcaptain Morrow greets the characters, introduces them to her intern, and then shares the following information:

- A mysterious disease is rampaging through the Dock Ward of Waterdeep, forcing the city to quarantine the entire district. The disease, which goes by many nicknames including Rat Pox, is believed to be magical in nature and thus can't easily be cured. Symptoms begin with a simple cough, after which the subjects start to grow rat-like features such as whiskers, hairy ears, claws, fur, and tails. It's feared the final stage turns residents into actual rats.
- The entire City Watch is focused on discovering the root of the outbreak and, hopefully, its cure. Morrow thought she had a lead when a retired sea captain, Jerald Brisby, sent a message claiming that he had top secret information about the truth behind Rat Pox.

> The old man said it was part of something bigger, but the truth was too dangerous to write down. He wanted to meet in person. Now I don't mind trouble, but this thing had trap written all over it in explosive ink. We took the walk, but I made sure I was packing my hand crossbow.

- Captain Brisby didn't show for their rendezvous, and Morrow fears the worst. She's found the captain's address, but it's inside the quarantine zone and Morrow doesn't want to risk her health chasing up the lead. Watchman Locks has offered to venture inside, but it's too dangerous for him – a fledgling detective – to investigate alone.
- If the characters escort Watchman Locks, investigate what happened to the captain, and uncover the "truth," Swordcaptain Morrow promises to reward them 200 gp.
- Swordcaptain Morrow says the civilians inside the quarantine zone are planning a prayer march this evening. She expects the characters to complete their investigation before the march, called the Salvation Parade, concludes.



Bogarte Locks

- If characters seem wary of entering the quarantine zone, Swordcaptain Morrow offers them posies of fragrant freesia blossoms. The peppery scent is said to ward disease.

Roleplaying Swordcaptain Arvene Morrow

With a discerning eye honed by years of experience, this middle-aged human woman speaks in a soft, measured tone that leaves no room for nonsense. She's direct but not unkind and, regarding her trainee watchman, an endless fount of patience.

Roleplaying Watchman Bogarte Locks

For an aspiring detective, this young male tiefling seems to keep his head in the clouds, often staring into space and narrating his surroundings with fanciful yet jaded metaphors. However, he certainly looks the part with a leather fedora under his horns, a tan trench coat, and chiseled features to match. Oddly, to him at least, his co-workers opt for the city-mandated uniform.

Development

With Watchman Locks leading the way, the characters easily bypass the security at the quarantine line and find the captain's apartment. **At this point, give the players Handout 1: the quarantine zone map.**

Rat Pox

Exploring the quarantine zone is dangerous. Each time the characters enter a new location of this adventure, they must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw to avoid infection. On a failure, the character gains a new rat feature by rolling 1d6 on the table below, rerolling if they receive a feature they already have.

1: Your eyes become beady rat eyes. You have disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

2: You sprout whiskers and a rat-like snout. You gain advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

3: Rat ears sprout from your head. You gain advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing.

4: Mottled rat fur covers your skin. You have disadvantage on Charisma (Persuasion or Performance) checks.

5: Your hands morph into rat-like claws. You have disadvantage on Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) checks, and when you attack and roll a natural 1, you drop any weapon you're carrying in your hands.

6: You sprout a tail, and it seems to have a mind of its own.

The Crime Scene

Traveling through the Dock Ward, the characters witness many destitute and sick residents huddled along the streets, with rodents skittering everywhere.

Captain Brisby lives in a shabby tenement building on Cloak Lane. Entering the apartment, the characters discover he's been murdered.

> We opened the door, and the room was red like a hobgoblin caught with his pants down. You don't stay in this line of work without getting to know the smell of blood. There was blood everywhere. That and the body on the floor, and this case had more murder written on it than the Xanathar's rap sheet.

Clues

Captain Brisby's apartment is small and sparsely furnished, with a combined living room and kitchen, and an adjoining bedroom. Among the typical items one might find in a bachelor's pad, the characters can uncover the following clues.

The Body. The captain's corpse is covered in puncture wounds and lies in a pool of blood. Any character investigating the body can discern tiny rodent bite and claw marks everywhere. Judging by the wounds, they didn't prey on the body after death: they took his life! The bloody trails of tiny clawed feet are easily tracked. The tracks lead out of the window, and down the street to the Temple of Rot in Part 2.

The Newspaper. Any character searching under the bed finds a rolled broadsheet next to the chamber pot. **Give the players Handout 2: 'Straight Talk from the Docks'.** This broadsheet holds threads to several parts of this adventure, but the primary clue is an advertisement for a local doctor's office. This leads the characters to Doctor Ward's Apothecary in Part 2.

The main story details a feud between the 'Rat King' and the 'Lady of Plagues'. Characters who read this can make a DC 10 Intelligence (History) check to recall the following information:

- Rat Kings are the legendary, unseen guardians of sewers, back-alleys, and slums. When fire, disease, or invasion threatens a Rat King's domain, it steps from the shadows to defend it.
- According to legend, each large city in the North has its own mysterious Rat King (who may be male or female). To become a Rat King, the existing Rat King must be driven off or slain.

- The Rat King represents the spirit of the urban sprawl, where the weak perish and the mob rule. Each Rat King can summon swarms of vermin to fight at their side.

The Lady of Plagues is more of an enigma, but any character who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check recalls that some druids follow the Circle of Plagues. These zealots believe nature is strengthened by regular culls, and thus visit cities to spread pestilence and disease.

The Hidden Note. Any character searching the body and succeeding on a DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds a tiny piece of parchment hidden in the captain's left sock. This check is made with advantage if the character has the City Watch, Detective, Inquisitor, or Spy background. The note has the letters "HH" and the numbers "908" scribbled on it. Combined with the newspaper, which includes an advertisement for the local bank, the note leads to Harbor Holdings in Part 2.

The Icebox. Any character searching the kitchen finds the icebox and a carton of crackers. The icebox is full of cheese. Every type of cheese. The smell is overwhelming. These clues are useful if characters go to Harbor Holdings in Part 2.

The Sketches. Any character searching the living room finds framed and colored sketches of the captain with a young child. The girl has red hair and a wealth of freckles. A successful DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check reveals that one of the sketches has the words "Cat, Age 6" written on the back. This clue is useful if the characters go to Harbor Holdings in Part 2.

Development

Once their thirst for clues is satisfied, characters can leave to pursue the paths they've discovered. However, their progress is disrupted by Waterdeep's infamous beholder crime lord…

Enter the Kingpin

As they're leaving the apartment, the Xanathar and his goons discover the characters.

We were back on the streets of the Dock Ward with more clues to follow than eyes on the Xanathar… and that's when he floated down the street, the Xanathar with his goons, shadier than a drow's mood lighting. I counted three thugs, a mind flayer, and a whole heap of trouble. That mindflayer was carrying a rat with its brain exposed like its hairdresser took a little too much off the top. And the Xanathar – well, let's just say looks can kill.

Glancing over the characters with a mix of contempt and boredom, the Xanathar proceeds to interrogate them about their investigation (in truth, it's just a chance for him to brag about himself). Those foolish enough to defy him are disintegrated on the spot – although the Xanathar always targets Watchman Locks first as a warning. The Xanathar's 'questions' could include:

- "So, the worthless City Watch dare to cross the barricade. Here to investigate a 'crime', no doubt?"
- "What leads do you have? No, don't tell me, I can tell from your faces. Nobody can read a face like me."
- "I love the people of the docks. Love 'em. And they love me. That's why I'm here, to see they're well cared for. Unlike your City Watch."
- "Everybody knows you people have treated me very unfairly. It's disgusting. Really, I think you should apologize."

Tiring of the interrogation, the Xanathar orders its thugs to "deal with" the nuisance, and then floats away, commanding the mind flayer to follow. The three **thugs** attack the characters. Watchman Locks is a **guard** that fights alongside the characters.

Treasure

The thugs carry a combined 30 gp in loose change and cheap jewelry. One of them has a pearl carved like an eye sewn into his bandana (20 gp).

Development

After dispatching the Xanathar's thugs, the characters can continue to their chosen destination in Part 2. Should the thugs knock them unconscious, you can choose for their bodies to be found by cultists, brought to the Temple of Rot, and revived.



Part 2: Trail of the Rat

The characters chase up clues from the murder site and reveal a portion of the true plot the captain discovered: a secret romance between two powerful figures.

Doctor Ward's Apothecary

The characters visit Doctor Ward's apothecary, which turns out to be a front for the Lady of Plague's experimental disease laboratory.

> Doc Ward's office was hard to find and easy to miss. Almost like the good doc liked to keep things on the down-low, which was strange, given all the sick folk about. There were vermin everywhere on these streets, but somehow, we still smelt a rat.

Doctor Ward's apothecary lies on Dark Lane, and is identifiable only by a small hand-painted sign in the window of an otherwise unmarked storefront. Entering the apothecary, the characters notice the following features:

- The walls are lined with small square drawers and shelves filled with dusty bottles of potions and oils.
- In the center of the room, an aquarium of leeches rests on a small table flanked by two utilitarian couches.
- A young woman sits behind a desk facing this reception area, with a curtained doorway behind her. A small placard on the desk identifies the woman as Joy Hultmark.

The Front

Joy acts as "receptionist" for the "doctor". Since the Lady of Plagues hand-picks her victims, Joy spends her time reading newspaper gossip columns and trying to make visitors go away. Her master's carefully-selected clients are lured into the surgery and thrown into the cellar, where the cultists conduct revolting experiments on them.

Joy is a trained **spy**, but she won't attack unless intruders enter the secret laboratory. Joy makes half-hearted attempts to encourage the characters to leave the office. Here are some examples of how she might interact:

- As characters enter, Joy tells them the appointment books are full and they're to come again another time. Or not. Whatever.
- If characters browse the shelves of snake oils and false potions and try to purchase anything, Joy pauses with an annoyed look and then says the items are floor samples. Not for sale.
- If characters ask about the curtained doorway, she simply states it isn't their business.
- If characters force their way past her and through the curtain, she shrugs and half-heartedly insists they stop – "Oh... no... please... don't..." – without looking up from her newspaper.

Roleplaying Receptionist Joy Hultmark

Playing the role of a fake receptionist would be a dull affair for most, but this young woman really can't be bothered to do anything else. Joy is apathetic to the world and speaks in annoyed pauses and bored sighs. Beneath her guise as an office administrator, however, Joy is a trained and ruthless killer, but she only exercises her skills when necessary. Killing is just, like, so much effort.

The Surgery

A small surgery is located behind the curtain. If the characters enter here, they notice the following features:

- A wooden chair squats in the middle of the floor, surrounded by trays of surgical equipment. A lever set into the chair's base appears to control the angle of its backrest.
- Shelves on the walls contain pickled organs and jars of leeches.

If a character pulls the lever, the chair tips over as a trapdoor opens underneath it. Anyone seated in the chair is dumped into the secret laboratory 20 feet below.

The Secret Laboratory

The Lady of Plagues and her minions use this laboratory to experiment with vile substances and create new diseases.

> If there was a bright side to that basement, it was hidden under a whole mess of dark. There were beakers full of bubbling sludge, rats in cages, and six jokers wearing beaked masks. Things weren't looking so good, so we came out swinging.

The secret laboratory contains the following features:

- Steel tables covered in all manner of glass vials and flasks, filled with sludge-colored liquids simmering over open flames.
- Cages filled with rats that immediately start screeching when the characters enter.
- Six humanoids wearing black suits, wide-brimmed hats, and beaked masks.

The plague-masked humanoids are six **cultists** loyal to the druid, who are continuing her experiments as she prepares her attack on the Salvation Parade. They attack at once.

Rats. Characters who examine the caged rats can make a DC 13 Intelligence (Nature) or Wisdom (Medicine) check. On a success, they realize the rats appear diseased. At best, some are disoriented or feverish. At worst, they're covered in pustules. Oddly, one of them has an oversized gold tooth.

The Lady of Plagues' Secret

A desk in the corner is strewn with original copies of advertisements much like the one in the newspaper, and a parchment that suggests the cultists have been experimenting on criminals and murderers. **Give the players Handout 3: Doc Ward's papers.**

Characters searching the desk drawers find a cipher wheel, which can be used to interpret the letters bordering the advertisements. Give the characters **Handout 4: the cipher wheel.**

Treasure

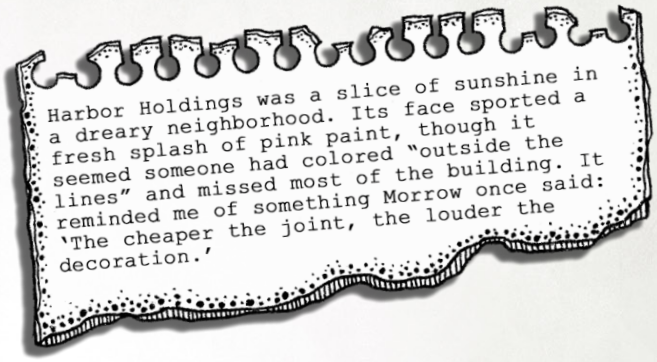
The cultists carry 45 gp in loose change and jewelry. The gold tooth is worth 5 gp.

Solving the Puzzle

Each advertisement contains a clue to using the cipher wheel; for example, "8% off" means you should click the lower wheel eight letters back, and "gain 4 free leeches!" means you should click it four letters ahead. Once correctly set, the players can use the cipher wheel to decode the seemingly random letters bordering each advertisement. The solutions to these puzzles reveal the druid's blossoming romance with the Rat King. The Lady of Plagues used the advertisements to communicate secretly with her paramour, although the recent note in the paper indicates their romance has fallen on hard times. The unfinished advertisement looks like an abandoned attempt to patch things up.

Harbor Holdings

The characters visit a family-run bank in the Dock Ward and deceive their way into Captain Brisby's lock box.



Entering the building, the characters find themselves inside a simple reception.

- The reception is furnished with potted plants and a pair of gaudy sofas.
- An iron doorway opposite is flanked by two male gnomes who look exactly alike.
- When the characters enter, an elderly, hunched female gnome pokes her head out of the door, squints, and hobbles over to greet them, saying "Hello dearies! Do you have a lockbox number?"

Snixxy Silverhearth is the terribly near-sighted proprietor of Harbor Holdings. If characters provide the number found in Captain Brisby's sock or hand Snixxy the parchment - which she reads as close to her face as possible - Snixxy greets one of them as Captain Brisby and notes "how many lovely friends" he's brought with him today.

Snixxy's twin sons – Samwise and Wisesam – are the **guards** of Harbor Holdings. The twins are suspicious of the characters, but can't remember what Captain Brisby looks like, so they don't know for sure their mother is wrong. Should the situation come to blows, the twins have the following added action:

Multiattack. The twins make two melee attacks.

Roleplaying Snixxy Silverhearth

Snixxy is as charming and complimentary as she is nearly blind. Her sons are always trying to save her from herself, but she thinks they're "such silly boys." She goes out of the way to deny her poor eyesight. For instance, if called out for holding a piece of paper upside down, she rotates it slightly and claims it's "aahhh, all better."

Roleplaying Samwise and Wisesam Silverhearth

Snixxy's precious boys don't share their mother's social flare. Usually terse and quiet, they sometimes speak up to correct their mother, who is often misled by her blurry vision, but they're quick to back down when she hushes them. If they catch someone lying, however, they'll do anything to protect Snixxy and the family business.

Security Measures

Snixxy takes the characters into the back room, where she taps on Box 908 among the many that line the walls. Before she can open it, however, she informs the characters that they must solve some simple puzzles using "security hints." With that, she hands a parchment to "Captain Brisby". **Give characters Handout 5: security box puzzles.**

The twins have their eyes on the characters' every move. Each time they attempt to answer a question, they must succeed a DC 12 Charisma (Deception) check. The check is made with advantage if the question is answered correctly. On a failed check, the twins declare the characters frauds and attack.

Solving the Puzzle

To solve the first part of the puzzle, the character must fill in the blanks by writing down three different ingredients: "Cheese", "Crackers" and "Grapes". In the second part, they must outline the word "Red" in the word search. In the final part, they must rearrange the letters to spell "Catarina".

Treasure

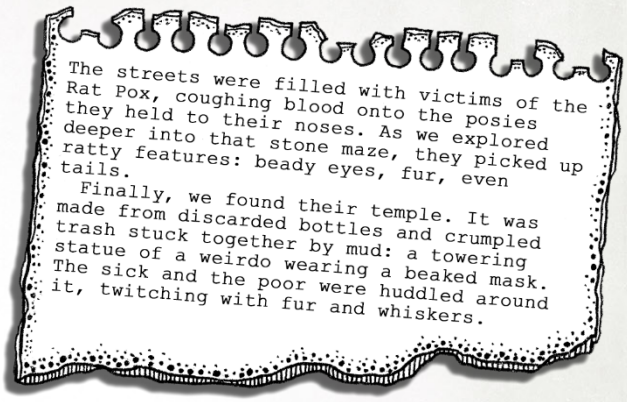
Snixxy opens the lockbox if the characters succeed on all three Charisma (Deception) checks. The lockbox can be unlocked using the key in Snixxy's possession, or picked with a DC 15 Dexterity check made with thieves' tools. Inside, the characters find a pouch of 50 gp, a toy rat, and a sheaf of letters. **Give the characters Handout 6: security box papers.**

The letters prove that the Rat King is Captain Brisby's daughter and reveal she was having a romantic relationship with the Lady of Plagues. Her most recent correspondence indicates that their relationship has dramatically soured. An unsent letter from Captain Brisby suggests the Lady of Plagues is innocent of the crimes his daughter attributed to her.

When a character picks up the toy, the pressure from their hand causes the rat to squeak, and a motherly voice from within says, "Mr. Squeaks loves you!"

The Temple of Rot

The disease- and despair-ridden residents of the Dock Ward assemble and worship the Lady of Plagues at this temple, hoping she'll take pity on them and lift the disease.



The trail of rat tracks from Captain Brisby's apartment goes cold in the churned-up mud of this plaza. The worshipers, who are all ages, genders, and races, display different rat-like features. They share the following information at your discretion:

- "The statue? That there's the Lady of Plagues. Don't know much 'bout her 'cept she's the queen o' death 'n' disease."
- "The Lady of Plagues is the only one who can lift this plague! She can save us!"
- "She's a real mystery woman. All I know is she arrived just before the first case of Rat Pox. They say she's the only one with the cure, so… here I am."
- "Dock Ward is the Rat King's turf. If you ask me, the Lady of Plagues unleashed Rat Pox to wipe out the King's men."
- "The Rat King?! Don't say that name here. We worship only the Lady of Plagues!"
- "The Rat King and the Lady of Plagues hate each other, and the Dock Ward has suffered for it. So many fights. So much blood. As if we didn't have it bad enough with the Xanathar prowling about!"
- "Maybe the Rat King spread Rat Pox to frame the Lady of Plagues?!" "Please. Don't be a conspiracy theorist."
- "I hear the priests of Ilmater have organized a prayer march. The Salvation Parade? This is a bad idea. We must only worship the Lady of Plagues!"

Oh, Rats!

As the characters mingle with the worshipers, screams suddenly break out in the crowd as rats overwhelm the temple! Shouts from the crowd exclaim they've angered the Rat King, and several worshipers move to protect the statue. During the stampede, the characters are attacked by three **swarms of rats.**

When the fight begins, a furry-eared halfling stumbles and falls to the floor, where he's soon surrounded by angry rats. This is Wash Meadsocks, a halfling sewer worker. If a character tries to rescue him, award them inspiration. Through halfling luck, Wash survives the encounter even if he's left to fend for himself.

Development

If the characters defeat the swarms, the remaining rats terrorizing the crowd flee toward a nearby sewer grate. Wash Meadsocks exclaims: "The sewers… That's where the Rat King lives!" He provides the following information.

- The Rat King lives down there in the sewers. Wash thinks he knows where. He can show the characters if they want.
- Wash advises that they don't enter the sewers unless they're completely ready to face the Rat King. That's her home turf, you see. Yes, she's a woman. Wash has seen her.

Wash can lead the players to the Rat King's lair, but warns them against venturing down too hastily. If the characters head into the sewers, go to Part 3: "Revealing the Rat". Wash has the statistics of a **commoner** but flees at the first sign of danger.



Part 3: Revealing the Rat

The characters confront the heartbroken Rat King and, perhaps, a Xanathar spy who reveals the truth behind the lovers' breakup. Then, they rush to the Salvation Parade for a final showdown.

Into the Sewers

Exploring the sewers beneath the Dock Ward, the characters soon approach the Rat King's lair.

> Just when we thought this case couldn't sink any lower, there we were: knee-deep in the muck of the Dock Ward sewers. Those tunnels smelled riper than a troglodyte's laundry, and were twice as rotten.

The sewer tunnels are coated in thick, green-tinged sludge littered with debris. As the group sloughs through, the lead character notices a glimmer of something small and shiny resting atop the sludge… a bag of gold coins.

Mouse Trap

A giant mouse trap lurks under the muck, with the coin bag placed as bait on its triggering mechanism.

Detection and Disabling. Characters who search around the bag discover the presence of a large, submerged object with a successful DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check. Once detected, a successful DC 10 Intelligence (Investigation) check deduces that removing the bag sets off a giant mouse trap. The mechanism can be jammed, or the bag swapped for an object of equal weight, with a successful DC 13 Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) check.

Trigger. Taking the bait releases a metal bar hidden under the sludge, which snaps forward loudly and strikes anyone standing within 5 feet of the trap.

Effect. All targets in range of the trap when it triggers must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) bludgeoning damage on a failure or half as much damage on a success. Characters who fail the check are restrained by the iron bar, taking an additional 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage at the start of each of their turns until they are freed. As an action, a creature can attempt a DC 12 Strength check to free itself or another creature pinned under the bar.

Treasure

The cloth bag used as bait contains 50gp.

The Rat King's Lair

The Rat King's lair lies just beyond the mouse trap. Describe the following features:

- Rounding a corner, the characters enter a large drain at the intersection of many sewer tunnels.
- In the center of the chamber, atop a throne made of discarded junk, is a human woman draped in a thin black veil.
- Hundreds of brown rats envelop her lower body, nuzzling against her protectively.

> The dame wore a veil, and it wasn't just for show. She was crying like a rat eating onions. Under that lace she had hair so red it would burn you if you got close, more freckles than the stars at night, and legs that went on for days. Well, they looked like they did: it was hard to tell under all those rats.

The **Rat King** is distraught over the death of her father, Captain Brisby, and is likely to turn hostile if surprised (see "Fight It Out", below). If the characters approach tactfully, a successful DC 13 Charisma (Persuasion or Deception) check convinces her to parlay (see 'Talk It Out'). Good roleplaying should reward advantage on this check. Mentioning the Rat King's romance with the Lady of Plagues ensures she talks willingly.

Fight It Out.

If the characters can't convince the **Rat King** to talk, she attacks. If she hasn't already informed them about the attack on the Salvation Parade (see "Talk It Out"), she does so when she's defeated, vengefully laughing that it's too late to stop her rival's attack.

Lair actions. When fighting inside her lair, the Rat King can invoke the rats around her to take lair actions. On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the Rat King can take one lair action to cause one of the following effects:

- Rats lift the Rat King and carry her up to 30 feet without her provoking opportunity attacks.
- Swarms overwhelm enemy creatures in a 15-foot square area within sight of the Rat King. Each enemy inside this area must succeed a DC 10 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. Enemies that fail by 5 or more are also grappled (escape DC 13).

- Rats bite and claw viciously to protect the Rat King. Enemies within 10 feet of the Rat King must succeed a DC 10 Dexterity saving throw or take 3 (1d6) piercing damage.

The rats that empower these actions are separate from the **swarms of rats** the Rat King summons, and are too numerous to target. If the Rat King is defeated, all her rats scatter into the sewers.

Talk It Out

If convinced to talk, the Rat King shares the following information:

- Have the people forgotten how kind the Rat King has been to them, keeping the Xanathar's goons in check here at the Docks?
- Now the Rat King's father, Captain Brisby, has been murdered, and the Rat King framed for the crime. Death by rats? An insult! The Lady of Plagues will pay!
- The Rat King knows that the Lady of Plagues is responsible for the Rat Pox and her father's murder. How? None of your business.
- The Lady of Plagues plans to unleash a new strain of her virus on the Salvation Parade. The Rat King sent her minions to ambush and stop her. If the characters want to help, they should join them. Hurry! The parade is about to start!

If the characters bring up the Rat King's secret relationship with the Lady of Plagues, she tells them more:

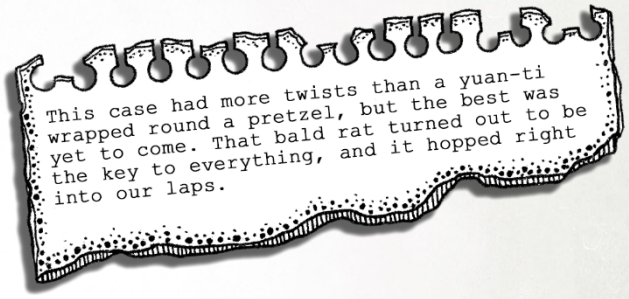
- Yes, well, the Rat King was enamored with the Lady of Plagues once. A kindred soul, yet so misguided. So beautiful.
- The Lady of Plagues came to Waterdeep to cull the city with plague: to "strengthen the stock", she'd said. The Rat King persuaded her to hold back. Wouldn't the common cold do instead?
- In time, the Rat King trusted the Lady of Plagues enough to share her own secrets: her true name, Catarina "Cat" Brisby, and her only relative, her father Captain Brisby. There's no point keeping such secrets now…
- After the Rat King confided in the Lady of Plagues, the sickness took hold in the Dock Ward, and before long her father was found dead. Is she supposed to believe that's a coincidence? No, it was a betrayal.

Roleplaying the Rat King

Catarina "Cat" Brisby is a brooding woman with a chip on her shoulder. Having grown up teased for her fascination with rodents, Cat is used to being an outcast; slow to trust, fast to take offense, and often abrupt in her mannerisms. She's completely unequipped to handle her emotions regarding the Lady of Plagues and the loss of her father.

Optional: A Rat Among Rats

If the characters show the Rat King the unfinished advertisement from the secret laboratory, or the letter from Brisby's strongbox, a misshapen rat scurries from the swarm and begins to panic and run around. Any character who succeeds on a DC 12 Intelligence (Nature) check recognizes it as a **cranium rat**: a telepathic rodent that often gathers in swarms to spy for the mind flayers.



The cranium rat is identical to the one held by the Xanathar's mind flayer aide; in fact, it's a Xanathar spy. The Rat King is genuinely disgusted to see it in her swarm and asks the characters to help her catch it. Each character can take a single action to stop the rat before it flees into the sewers.

If caught, the cranium rat begs telepathically for its life in exchange for information. Even if slain, it sends the following images to one of the characters before it dies:

> Several images flash through your mind in an instant!
>
> First, you see the cranium rat nestled in the arms of the mind flayer as it stands before the Xanathar crime lord. "We can transport the slaves, my Xanathar. We just need the proper distraction to keep the City Watch busy. How about that old enemy of yours, the Rat King?"
>
> Then you see the cranium rat hiding amidst a rat swarm, spying on the Rat King and the Lady of Plagues as they hold hands inside a laboratory. With great care, the Lady of Plagues locks a vial of green gas inside her strongbox.
>
> Next, you see the Rat King introducing the Lady of Plagues to her father, Captain Brisby. As the trio sit down for a meal in Brisby's apartment, you see the cranium rat spying on them through the window.
>
> Then you see the mind flayer standing in front of the Xanathar again. "Unleashing her plague will create the distraction we need. After that, all we need do is turn them against each other…"
>
> Finally, you see a swarm of cranium rats pouring through a window to attack Captain Brisby!

The characters now know that the Xanathar has been playing the Rat King and the Lady of Plagues against each other. If anything seems unclear, the Rat King can fill in the blanks for them (refer to the "Background" section for details).

If the characters question the cranium rat about the Xanathar's motives, they learn that the crime boss plans to smuggle a shipment of slaves down Cloak Lane soon after the Salvation Parade.

Regardless, and assuming she's still alive, the Rat King rushes above ground to stop her lover from unleashing the disease!

Treasure

The Rat King carries *pipes of the sewers*, which she offers as thanks if characters help reveal the truth. She also carries one *potion of healing* for every character in the group, which she gives to any characters headed to the Salvation Parade.

The Salvation Parade

As the characters return to the streets of the Dock Ward, they find the Salvation Parade in full swing. Describe the following:

- Throngs of Ilmater worshipers fill the streets, handing out blankets and care baskets to the Rat Pox-afflicted bystanders along the curb.
- The kind murmurs of the marchers soon give way to startled shrieks as the crowd parts. A fearsome woman in a beaked mask appears above them, holding a glass vial above her head. Her cloak billows behind her dramatically although there is no wind.

> She was madder than a hobgoblin trapped in a barrel, but something about her said she wasn't ready to drop that vial. Maybe it was the smoke getting in her eyes, but I could've sworn she was crying behind that mask.

The **Lady of Plagues** is flanked by three **cultist** henchmen. As the crowd scatters around her, she screams this information:

- How quick the Rat King was to blame the Lady of Plagues for her own misfortune! Quick to blame, to label, to put her in a box. Now her people will suffer for her presumptions!

The Lady of Plague is poised to attack, but if the characters try to negotiate, she shares more information:

- The Lady of Plagues was betrayed by the Dock Ward's precious protector, the Rat King; the only other person who knew about her "masterpiece". She thinks the Rat King released her disease against her will and framed her.
- Yes, the Lady of Plagues created the disease, but she's an "artiste," not a mass murderer. It's designed to turn people into rats, but it seems it hasn't done so yet. What a disappointment! This new strain won't prove so ineffective.

If the characters found all the clues and uncovered the Xanathar's plot, the presence of the Rat King stops the Lady of Plagues from attacking (see "Development"). If not, three **swarms of rats** emerge from hiding to face the Lady of Plagues and her followers.

Roleplaying the Lady of Plagues

Maladie Song sees herself as an artiste with an 'E'. Germs are her medium of choice, and the human body is her canvas. She's confident, fiery, pretentious, and oh so dramatic. Beneath her signature beaked mask, she's a classic fairytale beauty with ivory skin, long waves of deep black hair, and ruby lips, but a childhood disease marred the left side of her face, about which she is very sensitive.

The Street Brawl

The **swarms of rats** converge on the **cultists**, and violence breaks out across the street. Use these tips for combat between the rival parties:

- The Lady of Plagues faces the characters directly. Resolve her actions as normal.
- The cultists pair off against the rat swarms. If they're not disrupted by a character, roll 1d20 for each pairing at the end of each round. On an odd result, the cultist hits the swarm. On an even result, the swarm hits the cultist.
- If characters disrupt combat between a cultist and a swarm of rats – by attacking with a melee weapon, for example – the creatures attack the character instead.
- If a cultist or swarm of rats is left unpaired with a rival, the creature attacks the nearest character instead.

Treasure

The Lady of Plagues wears a *cloak of billowing* and carries several vials of Rat Pox antidote.

Development

Character who defeat or talk down the Lady of Plagues can secure the Rat Pox antidote she carries. Swordcaptain Morrow sends the cure to be replicated, and the Dock Ward is saved. Any characters infected by the virus are now cured.

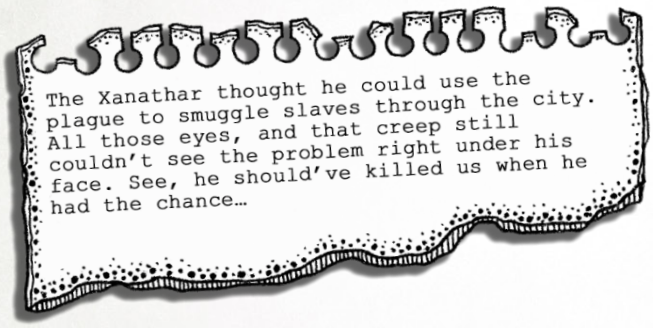
If the characters kill the Lady of Plagues, the Xanathar secretly drives his slaves through the commotion. The players are successful, but the true villain escapes justice.

If the characters found all the clues and uncovered the Xanathar's plot, the jilted lovers cautiously approach each other and make up. The characters can now play a bonus encounter to foil the Xanathar's plans!

Regardless, the lovers retire from their roles if they survive. Before they hang up their spurs, they can teach any ranger or druid characters their mystical ways. These characters can now take the Rat King or Circle of Plagues archetypes (see appendix A: New Player Options).

Bonus: Foil the Xanathar

Characters who uncovered the Xanathar's plot can head to Cloak Lane to rescue the slaves.



There's no time to warn the City Watch about the Xanathar's operation. If they're alive, the Lady of Plagues and the Rat King gladly join the characters. Any remaining cultists disappear into the crowd, unwilling to openly defy the kingpin.

Arriving at Cloak Lane, the character with the highest passive Perception notices a line of tied and gagged humanoids being led quietly through shadows by the Xanathar's goons: two **apprentice wizards** and four **guards**. The criminals fight to the death to carry out their mission.

Treasure

The criminals carry 150 gp in loose coin and jewelry.

Development

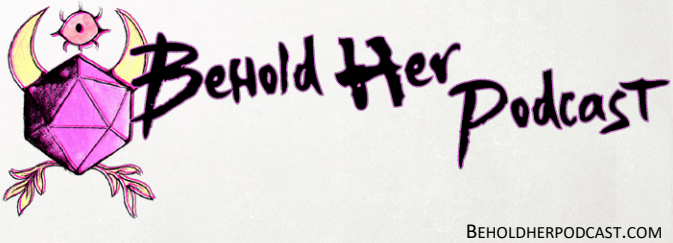
Any defeated goons inform the characters that the Xanathar is sure to find out what they've done and won't ever forgive them. As they say this, the characters spot a watching cranium rat darting around a corner. Should the characters cross paths with the Xanathar's network in the future, their reputation as troublemakers precedes them…

About the Authors

Lysa Chen has designed Dungeons & Dragons adventures for Wizards of the Coast, the Adventurers League, the Dungeon Masters Guild, and the Role Initiative. With roots in event organizing for her local AL scene, Lysa's passion lies in growing and creating a more inclusive D&D community. She serves as the Associate Community Manager for the Adventurers League and produces and hosts *Behold Her*, a monthly podcast about women in the world of tabletop games. When she's not writing, Lysa works as a floral designer in New Jersey. You can follow her on Twitter @mercyfuldm, or visit her website at lysachen.com

Will Doyle co-authored *Tomb of Annihilation,* and designed many of the maps for *Storm King's Thunder.* He has created adventures for Dungeon magazine and the D&D Adventurers League, including several multi-table D&D Epics events. Will lives in the UK with his fiancée Stacey and their daughter, Roxanne. You can follow him on Twitter @beholderpie, or check out his blog at beholderpie.blogspot.com.





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Rewards

Characters can earn the following rewards by playing this adventure.

Experience

Total up all combat experience earned for defeated foes, and divide by the number of characters present in the combat. For non-combat experience, the rewards are listed per character.

Combat Awards

Name of Foe	XP Per Foe
Apprentice Wizard	50
Cultist	25
Guard	25
Lady of Plagues	200
Rat King	200
Spy	200
Swarm of Rats	50
Thug	100

Non-Combat Awards

Task or Accomplishment	XP Per Character
Find all the murder site clues	25
Persuade the Rat King to explain herself	50
Negotiate peace with the Lady of Plagues	50
Solve the Harbor Holdings vault puzzles	75
Decipher the coded advertisements	75
Watchman Locks survives the adventure	75
Free the slaves	50

Treasure

The characters receive the following treasure, divided up amongst the party. Gold piece values listed for sellable gear are calculated at their selling price, not their purchase price.

Treasure Awards

Item Name	GP Value
Swordcaptain Morrow's reward	200
Treasure from the Xanathar's thugs	50
Treasure from Doctor Wards laboratory	50
Lockbox treasure from Harbor Holdings	50
Coin bag from mouse trap	50
Treasure from the slave escorts	150

Pipes of the Sewers

Wondrous Item, uncommon (requires attunement)

These wooden pan-pipes are decorated with carved reliefs of hundreds of scuttling rats. While you're attuned to the pipes, you always know directions to the nearest sewer outlet. This item can be found in the *Dungeon Master's Guide.*

Cloak of Billowing

Wondrous Item, common

This magnificent sable cloak is inlaid with stitched alchemical formulae and smells of turpentine. This item can be found in *Xanathar's Guide to Everything.*

Potion of Healing

Potion, common

This item can be found in the *Player's Handbook.*

Appendix A: New Player Options

Background: Detective

The grand cities of the North are rife with sleaze, scandal, and skulduggery, giving rise to a gamut of crimes that the traditional City Watch are ill-equipped to deal with. In such cases, the private detective steps from the lamplight to investigate, employing a diverse range of mental and social talents to unravel each mystery.

Skill Proficiencies: Perception, Investigation
Languages: Two of your choice
Equipment: A magnifying glass, a bottle of ink, a quill, a folded parchment notepad, a set of common clothes including a greatcoat and hat, and a pouch containing 8 gp.

Feature: Master Sleuth

If you spend ten minutes talking to a stranger, you uncover hidden information about them by studying their mannerisms, tiny scuffs on their clothing, and so forth. At the DM's discretion, you deduce one of the following pieces of information about them: a recent location they've visited, an object they've handled, or a person they've spoken with.

Suggested Characteristics

Detectives typically have above-normal intelligence, and can seem distant or aloof in the presence of lesser minds. They're often marginalized to the extent of becoming loners, or have crippling flaws they strive to keep hidden.

d8	Personality Trait
1	Before I leave a room, I often turn to ask one last question.
2	I don't play by the rules.
3	I find ignorance amusing.
4	I like to reveal my findings to a captive audience.
5	I'm witheringly sarcastic.
6	I rarely reveal my true feelings.
7	I solve crimes because life bores me.
8	I'm oddly superstitious.

d6	Ideal
1	**Justice.** I'm sworn to bring criminals to justice (Lawful).
2	**Intellect.** The mind is a muscle that must be exercised to achieve brilliance (Any).
3	**Greed.** I need coin to dig me out of this pit (Neutral)
4	**Redemption.** I'm trying to undo all the bad things I've done in my life (Any).
5	**Recklessness.** If they break the rules, so can I (Chaotic).
6	**Curiosity.** We don't learn anything unless we experiment (Any).

d6	Bond
1	The same nemesis is secretly behind many of my greatest investigations.
2	I wear a signature article of clothing, moustache style, or accessory.
3	My assistant travels everywhere with me.
4	I've a trauma in my past that still haunts me.
5	I'm immaculately dressed.
6	I'm attracted to people who live fast and dangerously.

d6	Flaw
1	I have a self-destructive vice that I indulge in secret.
2	I lack empathy for my prey.
3	I underestimate or look down upon the common folk.
4	All my relationships end in ruin.
5	I'm cripplingly obsessive.
6	I don't know how to handle failure.



Ranger Archetype: Rat King

The Rat Kings are the unseen guardians of the city's sewers and back-alleys. You represent the primal spirit of the urban sprawl, where the weak perish and the mob rule. As a ranger, you were drawn from the wilds to prowl the stone jungle. According to legend, each city has its own mysterious Rat King (who may be male or female).

Rat King Magic

Starting at 3rd level, you learn an additional spell when you reach certain levels in this class, as shown in the Rat King Spells table. The spell counts as a ranger spell for you, but it doesn't count against the number of ranger spells you know.

Rat King Spells

Ranger Level	Spell
3rd	*comprehend languages*
5th	*darkness*
9th	*fear*
13th	*greater invisibility*
17th	*mislead*



Urban Prowler

When you choose this archetype at 3rd level, your favored terrain feature is modified to include urban terrain, which you gain automatically as an additional favored terrain. You also gain the ability to forage for food in urban environments.

Rat Swarm

At 3rd level, you can summon a swarm of rats to accompany you and defend you in combat.

To summon the swarm, you must perform a ten-minute ritual within an urban environment. You can perform this ritual a number of times equal to your Wisdom modifier (a minimum of once), but you can only have one swarm active at a time. You regain all expended uses when you finish a long rest. You can use your action to dismiss the swarm, causing it to disassemble and vanish.

The swarm acts on its own initiative in combat. On its turn, you can use your Reaction to command the swarm to attack a creature you can see or move its speed to a location you can see. If you don't give the swarm a command, it focuses on protecting you.

While you have a swarm present, you always have the *animal messenger* spell prepared and can cast it as a ritual. This spell doesn't count against the number of spells you can cast each day.

Eyes Everywhere

Beginning at 7th level, you can cast *clairvoyance* without expending a spell slot or requiring material components. The target of the spell must be within an urban settlement that you currently occupy, and the invisible sensor is replaced by a single, obedient rat. The spell ends if the rat is killed. You can use this power once, but regain the expended use when you finish a long rest.

Master of Swarms

Starting at 11th level, you can have more than one swarm of rats active at the same time. All swarms under your control act on the same initiative. On the swarms' turn, you can use your Reaction to command all the swarms under your control, assigning a different order to each swarm.

Rat Runs

Beginning at 15th level, you can travel magically between urban locations. While within a large, urban settlement, you can climb into any sewer outlet and emerge instantly from another outlet in the same settlement. You can use this power once, but regain the expended use when you finish a long rest.

Druid Archetype: Circle of Plagues

Druids of the Circle of Plagues understand that nature benefits from regular culls. Just as the field grows stronger when charred, so life grows stronger when decimated by plague. Contagion thrives where carriers are plentiful, so druids from this circle often dwell within urban hubs.

Rite of Rebirth

When you choose this circle at 2nd level, you gain primal control over the circle of life and death. You learn the *infestation* cantrip. Once per turn when you kill a living creature using a spell that deals necrotic or poison damage, you can add a d6 to your pool of primal energy. The number of d6s in your pool cannot exceed your druid level. When you or an ally within 30 feet of you that you can see drops to 0 hit points and falls unconscious, you can choose to spend dice from your pool to heal them. Roll the spent dice and add them together. The target regains hit points equal to the total.

Warden of Pestilence

Starting at 2nd level, you gain advantage on saving throws against disease and poison. If you succeed on a saving throw against disease or poison, you are immune to its effects for 24 hours.

Plague Mastery

At 6th level, you gain mastery over the *detect poison and disease* and *lesser restoration* spells. These spells are always prepared, and don't count against the number of spells you can prepare each day. When you expend a spell slot to cast one of these spells, you regain an expended slot of that level during your next short rest. At 9th level, you also gain mastery over the *contagion* spell.

Master of Pestilence

Starting at 10th level, you are immune to disease and gain resistance to poison damage.

Pestilent Rebirth

At 14th level, your Rite of Rebirth triggers a necrotic backlash against your enemies. When you use Rite of Rebirth, all enemies within 15 feet of the target must make a Constitution saving throw, taking necrotic damage equal to the hit points regained on a failed save, or half as much necrotic damage on a successful one.



Appendix B: Monster/NPC Statistics

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)	11 (+0)

Skills Arcana +4, History +4
Senses passive Perception 10
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

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

Cantrips (at will): *firebolt, 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.

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.

Cultist

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

Armor Class 12 (leather armor)
Hit Points 9 (2d8)
Speed 30 ft.

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

Skills Deception +2, Religion +2
Senses passive Perception 10
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Dark Devotion. The cultist has advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

Actions

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

Guard

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 16 (chain shirt, shield)
Hit Points 11 (2d8 + 2)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)

Skills Perception +2
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages any one language (usually Common)
Challenge 1/8 (25 XP)

Actions

Spear. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +3 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

Lady of Plagues

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 12 (leather)
Hit Points 26 (4d8+8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Skills Insight +4, Medicine +4, Nature +4, Perception +4
Damage Resistances poison
Senses passive Perception 14
Languages any two languages
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Spellcasting. The lady of plagues is a 3rd-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 12, +4 to hit with spell attacks). She has the following druid spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *infestation, guidance*
1st level (4 slots): *cure wounds, entangle, healing word, longstrider*
2nd level (2 slots): *barkskin, lesser restoration*

Actions

Scimitar. Melee Weapon Attack: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 4 (1d6 + 1) slashing damage. On a hit, the target must succeed a DC 10 Constitution saving throw or take 2 (1d4) poison damage and be poisoned until the end of its next turn.

Rat King

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 15 (studded leather)
Hit Points 22 (3d8+9)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)

Skills Animal Handling +4, Perception +4, Stealth +5
Senses passive Perception 14
Languages any two languages
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Actions

Multiattack. The rat king makes two melee attacks or two ranged attacks.

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

Longbow. Ranged Weapon Attack: +4 to hit, ranged 150/600 ft., one target. Hit: 6 (1d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Summon Swarm (recharge 6). The rat king summons a swarm of rats under its control. The swarm acts on its own initiative.

Spy

Medium humanoid (any race), any alignment

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 27 (6d8)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Skills Deception +5, Insight +4, Investigation +5, Perception +6, Persuasion +5, Sleight of Hand +4, Stealth +4
Senses passive Perception 16
Languages any two languages
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Cunning Action. On each of its turns, the spy can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). The spy deals an extra 7 (2d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the spy that isn't incapacitated and the spy doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Actions

Multiattack. The spy makes two melee attacks.

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

Hand Crossbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

Swarm of Rats

Medium swarm of Tiny beasts, unaligned

Armor Class 10
Hit Points 24 (7d8 – 7)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (–1)	11 (+0)	9 (–1)	2 (–4)	10 (+0)	3 (–4)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, slashing
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, prone, restrained, stunned
Senses darkvision 30 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages —
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Keen Smell. The swarm has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Swarm. The swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a Tiny rat. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

Actions

Bites. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +2 to hit, reach 0 ft., one target in the swarm's space. *Hit:* 7 (2d6) piercing damage, or 3 (1d6) piercing damage if the swarm has half of its hit points or fewer.

Thug

Medium humanoid (any race), 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.

Appendix C: Handouts

Handout 1: Quarantine Zone Map



STRAIGHT TALK FROM THE DOCKS

Death Toll Grows in Dock Ward

The brutal vendetta between the Rat King and the Lady of Plagues claimed more victims last night, as gangsters loyal to both bosses dueled openly in the Dock Ward streets. City Watch officials again blamed their inability to bring the fugitives to justice on the Rat Pox quarantine, which they claim has hampered their ability to attend to crimes across the Ward. In an exclusive, private interview with this publication, the Xanathar crime boss made the following statement: "The underperforming City Watch have really dropped the ball here. I know everything there is to know about crime, but even I can't see how these punks are getting away with it. DO SOMETHING CITY WATCH!"

Rot Rises as Hope Falls

With swathes of the Dock Ward under quarantine and no end in sight to the Rat Pox, residents have taken matters into their own hands... or claws. Those undergoing the final stages of the Rat Pox transformation were seen on Coldstream Plaza building a statue of the so-called Lady of Plagues out of trash.

"We're calling it the Temple of Rot," squeaked one resident, who sprouted a tail during this interview. "We've given up fighting. Maybe if we worship the person who started all this, she'll take pity and lift the disease."

Pox-ridden dock denizens set up tents around the statue, chanting songs of worship and taking turns groveling at the statue's feet. However, some were skeptical this display would affect the disease.

"I think they're starting to get rat brains, too," said one mouse-eared man. "It's Rat Pox. Rat. If you ask me, the Rat King did this, and these hippies are wasting their time."

Will the Lady of Plagues be able to lift the curse? Only time will tell.

Scarlett's Hake, Herring & Cod

Fancy something fishy to reel in that dishy catch? Head down to Scarlett's Hake, Herring & Cod on Pier 3 for the best dinner on Toril!

Harbor Holdings

Valuables burning a hole in your pocket? Stash them in safety at his local, family-owned bank. Good rates, better security, total peace of mind. 118 Coinpenny Alley.

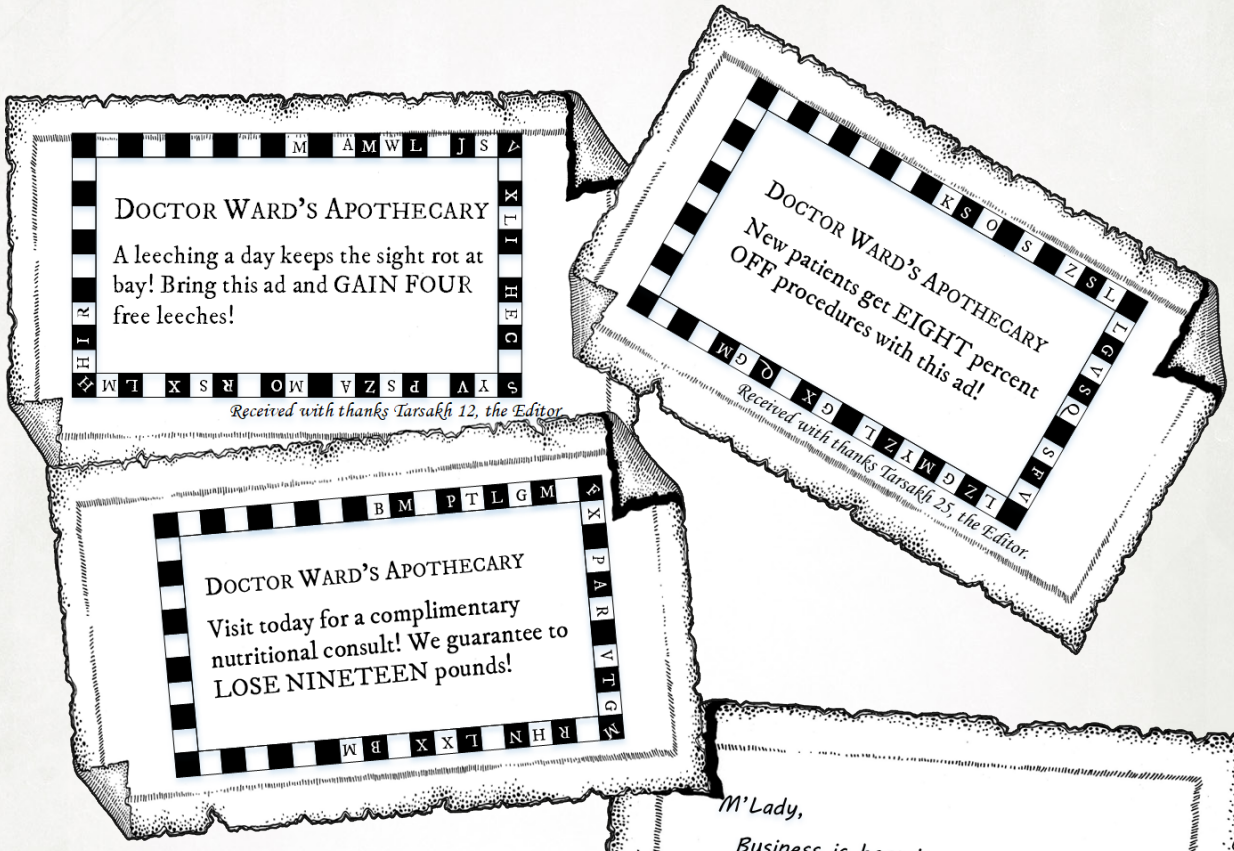
Doctor Ward's Apothecary

Stabbed in the back? Wounds too dirty for your doc? Get THIRTEEN percent OFF stitches today! Find us on 133 Dark Lane.

Rat King, Friend or Foe? See Page 4.

Top 10 Accessories for your Goldfish Bowl. Advice on Page 2.

Handout 3: Doc Ward's Papers



Doctor Ward's Apothecary

A leeching a day keeps the sight rot at bay! Bring this ad and GAIN FOUR free leeches!

Received with thanks Tarsakh 12, the Editor

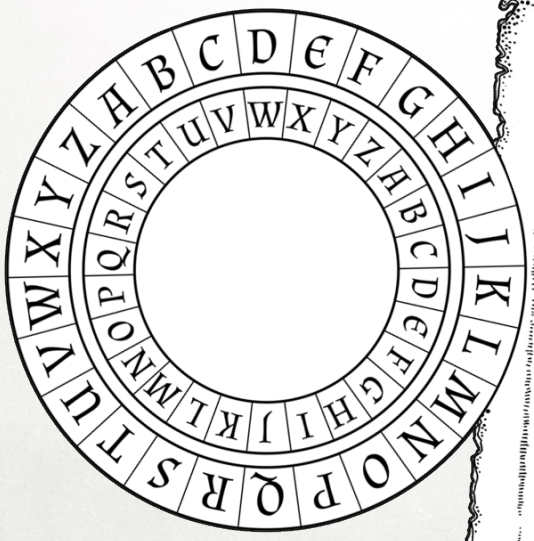
Doctor Ward's Apothecary

New patients get EIGHT percent OFF procedures with this ad!

Received with thanks Tarsakh 25, the Editor

Doctor Ward's Apothecary

Visit today for a complimentary nutritional consult! We guarantee to LOSE NINETEEN pounds!



M'Lady,

Business is booming, just as you planned. The gutter gangs remain oblivious to our ruse, and keep sending goons for 'emergency surgery'. I must say, your latest strain has proven most effective. If I may, I beseech you to abandon hope for your lover – she has proven herself a traitor – and continue your original plans for this city!

For your records, our latest experiments have been:

Stedd Buckman, Xanathar's Guild Mugger

Dorn Goldentooth, Murderer-for-Hire

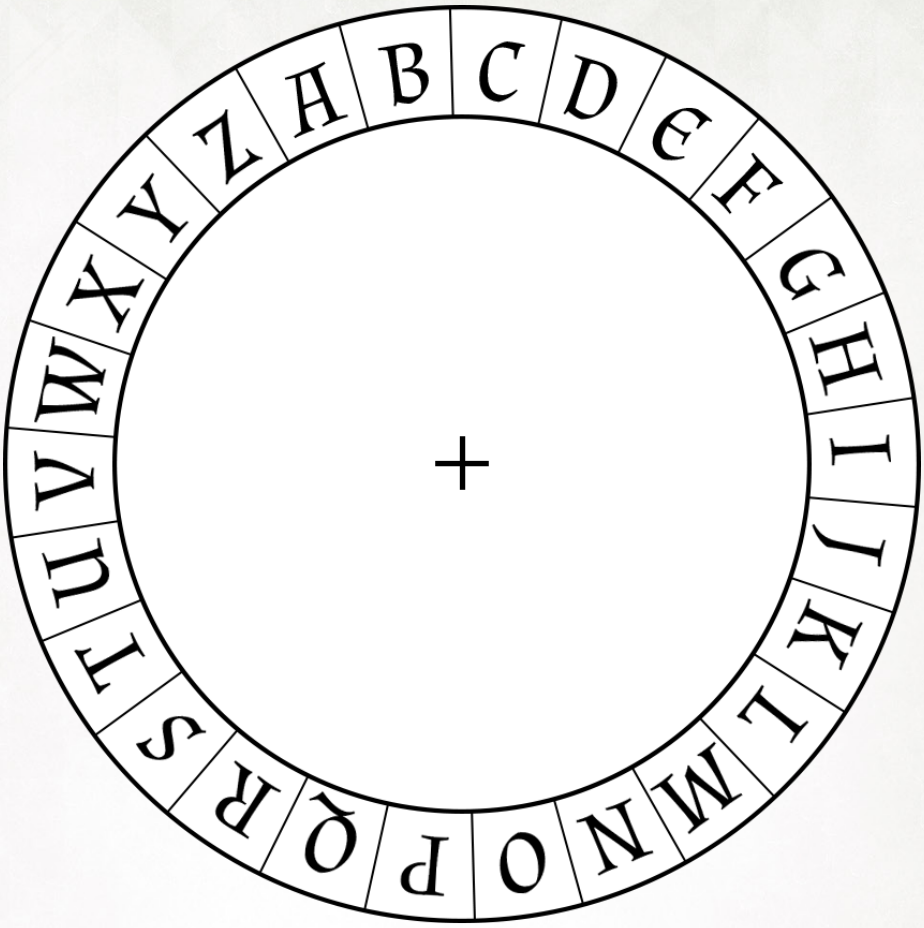
Aesir Jassan, Cutpurse and Fiddler

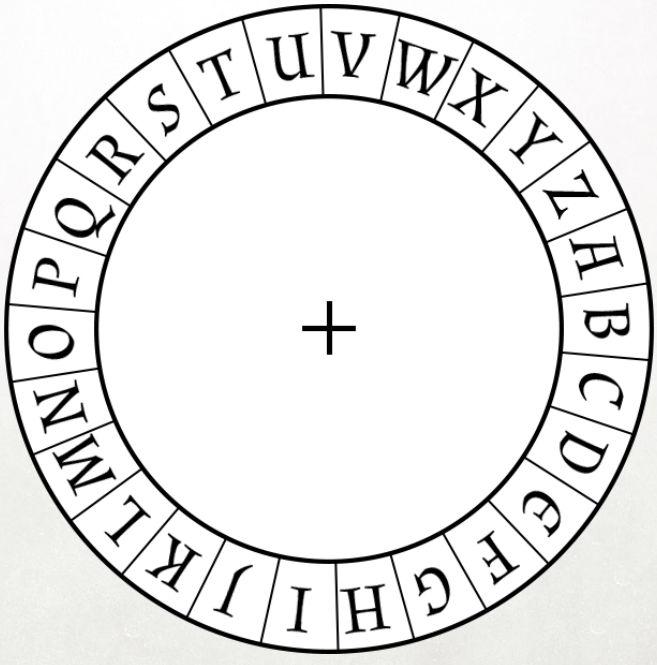
Bree Tealeaf, Poisoner

Your helpful servant,

RK

Handout 4: Cipher Wheel (Requires Assembly!)





HH

HARBOR HOLDINGS SECURITY CHECK

PLEASE COMPLETE ALL SECTIONS IN INK

1) Security Hint: Her Favorite Meal

C _ _ _ S _
_ R _ _ _ _ R _
G _ _ P _ _

2) Security Hint: My Daughter's Hair

(Please draw a line through the word)

R D E E R R E R D E E R R E
E R E E D D D R E R D E D D
E D E D R E E R D E E R R R
R D R E E E D D E E D R D E
E D R D E D R D E D D E D R
R R R D R R E R E E D R E E
E R D E D D R E E D D E E R

3) Security Hint: My Daughter's Name

TRACANAI

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

Handout 5: Security Box Papers

My dear Cat,
If you read this letter, it means something has happened to me. I couldn't believe Maladie would betray you, so I determined to find the true source of the Rat Pox. I know I'm close, and if my suspicions are correct, dangerous people have their many, many eyes on me. I know you asked me to destroy your letters, but I couldn't bear to do it. I've kept every single one safe here at Harbor Holdings. Please read them and remember happier days between us, between Maladie even. If I'm gone, she's all you have left. Trust her.
Love,
Your father
PS – I kept Mr. Squeaks all this time. May he remind you that we'll be with you always.

Father, I imagine this letter comes as a surprise to you. Maybe you're surprised to hear I'm alive after running away all those years ago. But I heard about mother. And I couldn't forgive myself if I didn't reach out to you, try to have you in my life again. Even if it's dangerous. And it is. You see... this might be the biggest surprise yet... I am the Rat King.

Father, our letters have been a great comfort to me in my loneliness. I protect the district, but the kind people fear me, and the nasty ones too. You know, it occurs to me... Please promise you'll destroy these letters. It's not safe for people to know you are my family.

Father, I'm sorry I haven't written in so long. I've met someone. It's strange. I've always felt so distant from others, but there is something about her. She understands me, and I can't believe it but... I trust her? I am beginning to understand how you must have felt about mom.

Father, I told you Maladie had been studying a type of pox that turns the victim into a rat. Finally, I've persuaded her to shelve it for good. I think she really wants to be with me. I want you to meet her. Can we meet at the usual place three bells after sundown?

Father, Heard about the outbreak. Am outraged. Can't even write. Do NOT leave your apartment. Do NOT do anything. Stay safe. I will write again when I've made that traitor pay.

