

HATRED SURFACING

Below is a more elaborate take on the first Zhentarim faction mission found in Chapter 2: Trollskull Alley, where the party is asked to investigate a string of murders in the Dock Ward.

THE MISSION

You can have Davil Starsong give the party this mission the first time they meet with him to join up with the Zhentarim (as described in Chapter 2: Trollskull Alley). If they have already joined, you can have Davil send a winged snake at any point of your choosing, with a note that reads: "Got a job for you. Meet me at the Portal. Bring your friends. DS."

When the party meets with Davil, he'll tell them:

"Someone is killing elf and half-elf sailors in the Dock Ward – three bodies so far, each decapitated by a blade in the dead of night. Look into it, will you? Methinks the City Watch could use a little help. Do a good job, and I'll make sure there's some gold in it for you."

As the mission is described in Chapter 2, the characters only need to hang out in the Dock Ward for three nights before they spot a drunken half-elf, who leads them straight to the murderer, Soluun Xibrindas. While this is certainly quick and easy, it doesn't do much to activate the party.

On the following pages, we'll instead split the mission into three phases: a skill challenge to figure out where Soluun Xibrindas will strike next, a skill challenge to lay a trap for him, and finally a face-to-face encounter with the murderous dark elf. To set things in motion, you can have Davil also give the party the following information:

"Far as I've heard, the first murder happened a week ago near The Sleeping Wench, the second only three days ago near The Bloody Fist, and the third just last night near The Thirsty Sailor. If I were a betting man, I'd wager another body will show up soon – and once again near a dockside tavern. Don't know the taverns well enough to say if there's a pattern, but if you can figure out which tavern the murderers chooses next, you might be able to lay a trap for them."

Keep in mind that this is a tough challenge – a **drow gunslinger** is no joke – so have Davil Starsong strongly urge Zhentarim characters to bring their friends along for the job.

FINDING SOLUUN XIBRINDAS

If the characters follow Davil's advice, they'll need to learn more about the first three murders and the taverns in the Dock Ward. Handle this like a skill challenge – one that works a bit like a game of Cluedo. By asking the right questions and succeeding on appropriate skill checks, the characters can learn pieces of information, which together tells them:

- Each of the first three murders happened late in the night and in dark alleys near Dock Ward taverns frequented by elves and half-elves.
- There are 10 taverns in the Dock Ward.
- Only four of the 10 taverns fit all the criteria: open late, near a dark alley and popular with elves and half-elves.
- The murderer has already struck near three of these four taverns, leaving only one: Muleskull Tavern on Ship Street.

Start the skill challenge by asking each player to describe how their character tries to figure out where the murderer will strike next. Are they trying to learn how the first murders happened? What taverns are there in the Dock Ward – and which one looks like a likely spot for the next murder? They can be as vague ("I ask around to learn more about the Dock Ward's taverns") or as specific ("I read last week's broadsheets to learn more about the first murder") as they want, as long as a skill check can be assigned to the action.

Second, ask how much gold they spend performing the action (on bribes, hirecoaches, materials, etc.). This determines the DC for the skill check – spending less than 1 gp on an activity puts the DC at 15, 1 gp or more brings the DC to 13, and spending 10 gp or more makes the DC 10. If you think a DC is too high or too low for what a character is trying to do, don't be afraid to change the DC or give a character advantage/disadvantage as you see fit.

Here are examples of actions and matching skill checks:

- **Asking around (factions, tavern patrons, the Watch, etc.).** Charisma (Any) or Intelligence (Investigation).
- **Looking around (for elves and half-elves, good ambush spots, etc.).** Wisdom (Insight or Perception).
- **Recalling or researching information (broadsheets, libraries etc.).** Intelligence (History or Investigation).

Success. On page 6 of this document, you'll find a sheet of 'Clues and Information' relating to the murders and the taverns of the Dock Ward. On a successful check, the character learns a piece of information – either the piece of information that best fits the question they've asked (if they've asked a specific question), or a piece of information chosen at random, if their intentions were vague. You can cut these out and hand them to your players as they learn information, or simply read them to your players. For easy reference, you can also use the 'Dock Ward Taverns' table below, which summarizes the specifics of each tavern.

Failure. A failed check doesn't necessarily mean that it was impossible for a character to find the information. Often it just means that they wasted time and gold trying – failing to convince a guard to give them the report on the first murder, getting lost while looking for a specific tavern, and so on. As such, a character can attempt the same skill check multiple times, at the cost of more gold and time. As a rough guideline, each attempt at learning more about one of the three murders or broad information about all the Dock Ward's taverns takes around half a day (information on the left column of page 6), while attempting to learn the specifics of a single tavern shouldn't take more than an hour or two (information on the right column of page 6).

DOCK WARD TAVERNS

d10 Tavern	Alley	Open Late	Elves
1 The Sleeping Wench	✗	✗	✗
2 The Bloody Fist	✗	✗	✗
3 The Thirsty Sailor	✗	✗	✗
4 Muleskull Tavern	X	X	X
5 Selûne's Smile	–	–	X
6 The Bearded Mermaid	X	–	–
7 The Hanged Man	–	X	–
8 The Pickled Fisherman	X	–	–
9 Soaring Pegasus Tavern	–	X	X
10 The Skewered Dragon	X	X	–

TROUBLESHOOTING

This investigation-turned-skill-challenge isn't meant to be particularly hard, it's just meant to get the players engaged. So be lenient with your players if they're having trouble figuring out which tavern is the right one, and stay open to any innovative or creative solutions they might present, even if it means skipping the entire skill challenge.

In the same vein, there doesn't need to be any 'real' consequences (except for wasted gold) if the party can't figure out that Muleskull Tavern is the target quickly enough – the murderer only strikes when the party have found the right tavern. If the party continues to set up ambushes at the wrong taverns, either because they're just guessing or are convinced they've found the right one, you can always move things along by having Soluun Xibrindas strike at whichever tavern the party has decided on, even if it doesn't exactly fit his usual *modus operandi*.

TRAPPING SOLUUN XIBRINDAS

When the party has gathered enough clues, they'll hopefully be able to deduct that Muleskull Tavern is where the murderer is most likely to strike next. The cozy tavern lies on Ship Street close to the harbor and caters to elf and half-elf sailors as one of the only places in Waterdeep that sells true Silverymoon Bloodwine. At all hours of the day, at least half a dozen elves and half-elves are drinking within, under the keen eye of the sharp-eyed proprietor Alhazin Meadowsong (female high elf **commoner**).

If the party decides to set up a trap for the murderer, either by waiting for a likely target to leave the tavern (a dead-drunk half-elf named Heldar obliges an hour or so past midnight), or by using themselves as bait, you can once again make it into a skill challenge. Ask the players to tell you how each character helps setting up the trap, what they are doing and what skill that action uses. Some examples are:

- **Acting as bait.** Charisma (Deception or Performance).
- **Looking for possible victims.** Wisdom (Insight) or Intelligence (Investigation).
- **Staying unseen.** Dexterity (Stealth).
- **Watching the tavern.** Wisdom (Perception).

At your discretion, a character might perform more than one check, such as a character keeping watch outside the tavern making both a Wisdom (Perception) check and a Dexterity (Stealth) check. In total, five successful DC 13 skill checks are needed to complete the skill challenge. The number of failures before reaching five successes determines how well the trap works (see the 'Consequences of Failure' table).

CONSEQUENCES OF FAILURE

Failures Result

- 0 The party spots Soluun Xibrindas before he makes his move, giving them a surprise round.
- 1 The party spots Soluun Xibrindas just as he makes his move, going straight to initiative.
- 2 The party spots Soluun Xibrindas after he makes his move, giving him a surprise round.
- 3 The party doesn't spot Soluun Xibrindas at all, either scaring him away before anything happens or arriving too late to stop the murder.

While the players make their skill checks, note each success and failure and use this information to describe what happens. It's a good idea to end the skill challenge on a Perception check, since that'll be the pivotal check in most cases – and it's also a good check to ask for, if your players are running out of ideas. See 'Example: Laying a Trap' for inspiration on how to run this skill challenge.

Once the skill challenge has been resolved, and the party has hopefully successfully sprung their trap and surprised Soluun Xibrindas in the middle of his gruesome act, you're ready to run the party's encounter with the dark elf.

EXAMPLE: LAYING A TRAP

Here's a condensed example of how this skill challenge might play out at the table.

DM: Okay, so you're trying to set up an ambush at Muleskull Tavern. We'll run this as a skill challenge. Tell me what you're doing and we'll figure out what skill check you make. The more successes, the better your trap. Who's first?

Bard: Can I try to disguise myself as a drunken half-elf?

DM: Yes! You want to use Deception or Performance?

Bard: I'll take Deception. But hey, do I automatically succeed if I cast *disguise self*?

DM: No, but I'll give you advantage on the check.

Bard: Sweet. I do that then. *Rolls dice*. That's a 21.

Rogue: I'd like to hide in an alley near the tavern, keeping my eyes open for anything suspicious.

DM: That sounds like a Stealth or Perception check.

Rogue: Stealth it is. *Rolls dice*. That's an 18.

Fighter: Can I use Athletics to climb one of the buildings overlooking the alley to get a better vantage point?

DM: Go for it.

Fighter: *Rolls dice*. 16!

Cleric: I'm not sure how I can help... Maybe... Can I maybe pray to Tymora, asking her to bless our plans with luck?

DM: Good idea! I like that. Let's call that a spellcasting ability check. So your Wisdom plus your Proficiency bonus.

Cleric: Great! *Rolls dice*. Ah, not so great. 11. That's what you get for worshipping the goddess of luck.

DM: Ouch. Okay, you have three successes and one failure. Let me get a Perception check from the Fighter and the Rogue.

Fighter: *Rolls dice*. That's 17.

Rogue: *Rolls dice*. And I got a 14.

DM: Great! Okay, so here's what happens. The Bard disguises himself as a drunken half-elf, stumbling out from Muleskull Tavern. Outside, the Fighter has climbed to the top of one of the smaller buildings overlooking the alley, the Rogue is hiding in the nearby shadows and the Cleric is posted at the opposite end of the alley. Close by, the Cleric's prayers go unheard and he doesn't see the shadowy figure that levitates down to the ground, as the Bard is halfway through the alley. The stealthy approach is, however, spotted seconds later by both the Rogue and the Fighter, giving you all time to act just as a gleaming blade is poised to strike at our disguised drunk's neck. Roll initiative!

FIGHTING SOLUUN XIBRINDAS

While the success of the party's trap will determine the exact circumstances of this encounter, it'll nearly always take place in the same dark alley near Muleskull Tavern. Whether you have Soluun levitate down from a dark rooftop above or hiding in a shadowy doorway, is up to you. If the party completed the skill challenge without any failures, they'll get a surprise round against Soluun, spotting him before he spots them. If they failed once, just go straight to initiative. And if they failed twice, Soluun uses his surprise round to make an attack with his scimitar against his intended victim.

Night Dock Ward Map. Using the Night Dock Ward Map, you can place Soluun Xibrindas in the dark alley in the bottom right of the map. Many of the Dock Ward's street lamps have been smashed, leaving most of the streets and alleys in complete darkness. The buildings overlooking the alley are 20 feet tall, requiring a DC 13 Strength (Athletics) check to climb. Empty crates and barrels can grant cover or hiding places to combatants.

Soluun Xibrindas' tactics. Initially, Soluun eagerly engages the party with his scimitars, but if dropped to below half hit points, he'll use his poisonous pistol to dissuade pursuers, before fleeing towards the harbor. If surrounded or grappled, he'll use *levitate* as a last resort, floating up to a nearby rooftop. If it looks like Soluun might get away, you can either allow him to do so, or have either the Watch or Ziraj the Hunter arrive (see below).

If caught and interrogated, Soluun might speak to his motivation for the murders ("these *iblish* are weak, cruel traitors, who stole the surface from us, condemning us to slave for The Spider Queen in the Underdark!"). He won't, however, willingly reveal anything about Jarlaxle and Bregan D'aerthe, his drow heritage making even magical charm or torture unlikely to change his mind.

The Watch. The noise of battle will eventually alarm the City Watch – and might do so early, if you fear that Soluun will kill the party, or if you just want to add some tension to the scene. When the squad of five **veteran** watchmen arrive (perhaps led by Hyustus Staget, if the party met him during Chapter 1), they immediately move to arrest anyone still on the scene, unless the party can convince them that they've done nothing wrong. If the party has just saved the half-elf Helder from certain death, he'll drunkenly attest to their innocence, giving them advantage on any Charisma checks made to convince the guards.

If party members are hauled off to jail – which is not unlikely, if they're caught standing over one or more dead bodies – they'll only be held for a day or two. As long as they tell the truth (or something close to it) and don't attack the Watch or resist arrest, witness accounts gathered from both the dead and the living, or well-placed bribes made by Davil (which he'll deduct from the party's reward, of course), will eventually convince the Watch to let the characters go.

Ziraj the Hunter. The encounter with Soluun Xibrindas is also a good opportunity to introduce another Doom Raider to the party: Ziraj the Hunter. If Soluun is winning the encounter or seems to be escaping, you can have a couple of oversized arrows suddenly hit him in the back, killing the dark elf instantly. Looking up to a nearby rooftop, the party can see the musclebound half-orc hunter. Ziraj jumps down with a loud thud and walks over to retrieve his arrows. If asked, he'll give his name and a brief explanation. "I'm Ziraj, a friend of Davil Starsong. Thanks for leading me to this cretin. You made the hunt easier. Farewell." If the party has more questions, Ziraj will tell them to "ask Davil" before climbing back on the rooftops and disappearing into the night.

CONCLUSION

Even if Soluun avoids death or capture at the hands of the party, his nightly escapades come to a stop, as he realizes he's been taking too big a risk (or perhaps Jarlaxle discovers his extracurricular activities, and has him sent back to the Underdark). If the party successfully killed or captured Soluun, Davil Starsong is happy to have stopped a murderer while hopefully gaining some clout with the authorities. He rewards each character with 50 gold pieces, and each Zhent character gets 1 renown.

Davil's rewards aren't the only treasure the party can acquire during this quest. If they're successful, they might come out of the encounter with a pair of *boots of elvenkind* and a poisonous pistol with enough pistol bullets and *smokepowder* for 20 shots. The pistol is powerful, dealing more than 3d10 damage per shot, but because the shots are limited, it shouldn't be an issue. Still, if you're worried about giving the players a weapon so powerful, you can have the poisonous effect of the bullets wear off with exposure to sunlight (as is often the case with items of dark elf make), removing the poison damage from the attack.

DM's CHEATSHEET

THE MISSION

- Davil tells the party someone has killed three elves and half-elves in the Dock Ward in the last week.
- Davil explains that the first murder happened near The Sleeping Wench, the second murder happened near the Bloody Fist, and the third murder happened near the Thirsty Sailor, all within the last week.
- Davil suggests the party tries to figure out which tavern the murderer will strike at next and lay a trap.

FINDING SOLUUN

- Skill Challenge to find the tavern Soluun will strike at.
- Ask each player what they want to discover, how they try to discover it and assign a skill check to the action.
- Ask each player how much gold they spend on the action.
<1 GP = DC 15. >1 GP = DC 13. >10 GP = DC 10.
- 1st victim: half-elf fisher Sigyrna by The Sleeping Wench.
- 2nd victim: unnamed elf sailor by The Bloody Fist.
- 3rd victim: half-elf dancer Star by The Thirsty Sailor.
- All the murders happened near taverns popular with elves and half-elves, after midnight and in dark alleys (see page 6 or use the table below for information on taverns).

DOCK WARD TAVERNS

d10 Tavern	Alley	Open Late	Elves
1 The Sleeping Wench	×	×	×
2 The Bloody Fist	×	×	×
3 The Thirsty Sailor	×	×	×
4 Muleskull Tavern	X	X	X
5 Selûne's Smile	—	—	X
6 The Bearded Mermaid	X	—	—
7 The Hanged Man	—	X	—
8 The Pickled Fisherman	X	—	—
9 Soaring Pegasus Tavern	—	X	X
10 The Skewered Dragon	X	X	—

CATCHING SOLUUN

- Muleskull Tavern is a cozy tavern on Ship Street owned by elf female Alhazin Meadowsong.
- Skill Challenge to lay trap for Soluun.
- 5 skill checks against DC 13 needed to succeed.
- 0 failures = party surprises Soluun. 1 = start encounter with initiative. 2 = party is surprised. 3 = trap fails.

FIGHTING SOLUUN

- Encounter starts in or near dark alley.
- Soluun attacks with his scimitars, but flees if reduced to half hp or less and uses his pistol to dissuade pursuers.
- The Watch might show up to arrest everyone.
- Ziraj the Hunter might show up to kill Soluun.
- Soluun says nothing if caught, but has a pair *boots of elvenkind*, a poisonous pistol, four packets of *gunpowder* and 20 pistol bullets.

CONCLUSION

- If the party is successful, Davil rewards each character with 50 gp and each faction member gains 1 renown.

SOLUUN XIBRINDAS

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 18 (studded leather, shield)

Hit Points 84 (13d8 + 26)

Speed 30 ft.

STR **DEX** **CON** **INT** **WIS** **CHA**

13 (+1) 18 (+4) 14 (+2) 11 (+0) 13 (+1) 14 (+2)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +4, Wis +3

Skills Perception +3, Stealth +8

Senses Darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Elvish, Undercommon

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Boots of Elvenkind. Soluun is wearing *boots of elvenkind* granting him advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to move silently.

Fey Ancestry. Soluun has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put Soluun to sleep.

Gunslinger. Being within 5 feet of a hostile creature or attacking at long range doesn't impose disadvantage on Soluun's ranged attack rolls with a pistol. In addition, Soluun ignores half cover and three-quarters cover when making ranged attacks with a pistol.

Innate Spellcasting. Soluun's spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12). He can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *dancing lights*

1/day each: *darkness*, *faerie fire*, *levitate* (self only)

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, Soluun has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Actions

Multiattack. Soluun makes two scimitar attacks.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Poisonous Pistol. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, range 30/90 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d10 + 4) piercing damage plus 11 (2d10) poison damage.

CLUES AND INFORMATION

THE FIRST MURDER

The first murder happened one week ago near The Sleeping Wench on Belnimbra's Street. The victim was Sigyrna Moontouched, an old half-elf fisher who regularly visited the tavern. She had left the tavern a few hours after midnight and was found dead in a dark alley nearby.

THE SECOND MURDER

The second murder happened three weeks ago near The Bloody Fist on Snail Street. The victim was an unnamed elven sailor from out-of-town, who apparently visited The Bloody Fist for its Myth Drannor Palefey Ale. He was found dead in an alley in the early morning.

THE THIRD MURDER

The third murder happened last night near The Thirsty Sailor on Fish Street. The victim was a young moon elf dancer named simply Star, who was one of The Thirsty Sailor's popular elf and half-elf dancers. His shift ended two bells after midnight, and he was found dead in an alley soon after by one of his coworkers.

DOCK WARD TAVERNS

There are 10 taverns in the Dock Ward: The Sleeping Wench, The Bloody Fist, The Thirsty Sailor, Muleskull Tavern, Selûne's Smile, The Bearded Mermaid, The Hanged Man, The Pickled Fisherman, Soaring Pegasus Tavern and The Skewered Dragon.

DOCK WARD TAVERNS NEAR ALLEYS

Seven of the Dock Ward's taverns have alleys nearby: The Sleeping Wench, The Bloody Fist, The Thirsty Sailor, Muleskull Tavern, The Bearded Mermaid, The Pickled Fisherman and The Skewered Dragon.

DOCK WARD TAVERNS THAT CLOSE LATE

Seven of the Dock Ward's taverns are open past midnight: The Sleeping Wench, The Bloody Fist, The Thirsty Sailor, Muleskull Tavern, The Hanged Man, Soaring Pegasus Tavern and The Skewered Dragon.

DOCK WARD TAVERNS THAT CATER TO ELVES

Six taverns are popular with elves: The Sleeping Wench, The Bloody Fist, The Thirsty Sailor, Muleskull Tavern, Selûne's Smile and Soaring Pegasus Tavern.

THE SLEEPING WENCH

A small tavern on Belnimbra's Street, run by female human Sarah Two-Knives, that keeps late hours, is frequented by sailors of all races and is near several dark alleys.

THE BLOODY FIST

A ramshackle tavern on Snail Street, run by male dragonborn smuggler Ethylbas, who keeps late hours, draws elves and half-elves with exotic imports and is near several dark alleys.

THE THIRSTY SAILOR

A noisy tavern on Fish Street, run by half-elf couple Jens and Petra, that closes late, has a popular troupe of elf and half-elf dancers and is near several dark alleys.

MULESKULL TAVERN

A cozy tavern on Ship Street, run by female elf Alhazin Meadowsong, that attracts elves and half-elves with Silverymoon Bloodwine, keeps late hours and is near a dark alley leading to the docks.

SELÛNE'S SMILE

A small tavern on Deepwater Street, run by male elf singer Canthillon, who draws in elves with his serene singing, but closes early and isn't near any alleys.

THE BEARDED MERMAID

A rowdy tavern on The Way of the Dragon, run by a male shield dwarf Kyril, which keeps late hours and is near allies, but is more popular with dwarves than elves.

THE HANGED MAN

A nearly empty tavern on Net Street, run by male human drunkard Utarrek, which keeps late hours, but doesn't have many guests (of any races) and isn't near any alleys.

THE PICKLED FISHERMAN

A large tavern on Boat Street, run by female halfling Antonetta, that serves pickled foods particularly popular with halflings, is near several dark alleys, but close early.

SOARING PEGASUS TAVERN

A beautifully decorated tavern on The Way of the Dragon, run by male human Peregrin, that draws in the finer crowds – including elves and half-elves – of the Dock Ward and keeps open late, but isn't near any dark allies.

THE SKEWERED DRAGON

A dark, bawdy tavern on the corner of Fillet Lane, run by half-orc Denk the Backbreaker, that keeps open late and is near several dark alleys, but is mostly frequented by humans.