Pests at the Cross Arms Tavern

written by CresthavenRPG Guru | June 24, 2025



A Cresthaven RPG Adventure for 3-5 Characters of 1st-2nd Level

Adventure Background

In the village of Cresthaven, nestled in the heart of a post-apocalyptic high fantasy world, stands the Cross Arms Tavern and Inn, a beacon of warmth and hospitality in an otherwise harsh realm. Known throughout the region for its hearty meals, strong ale, and comfortable beds, the inn has served as a sanctuary for weary travelers and bold adventurers for decades.

Recently, however, disturbing rumors have begun to circulate among the inn's patrons. Strange noises echo from the cellar during the night, and several guests have reported glimpsing shadowy figures scurrying through the lower levels. The innkeeper, Elyria Thornwick, grows increasingly desperate to preserve her establishment's hard-earned reputation as word of these mysterious disturbances spreads.

New to Cresthaven or short on time? If players do not wish to create their own characters, this we offer a selection of pregenerated adventurers perfectly suited for the challenges ahead. Simply hand them out, introduce the inn, and dive into the story within minutes.

The True Threat

Unknown to the villagers above, a cunning ratling named Ergiz has discovered the network of natural tunnels that run beneath Cresthaven. Using these forgotten passages, he and his pack of giant rats have been infiltrating the Cross Arms Inn's cellar, pilfering supplies and terrorizing anyone who ventures below. Ergiz's ultimate goal is nothing short of complete conquest—he intends to claim the inn as his own underground stronghold, driving out the surface dwellers and establishing his dominion over this strategic location.

The adventurers will soon find themselves thrust into this escalating conflict, tasked with navigating the dark tunnels beneath the village, confronting Ergiz and his verminous army, and ultimately saving the Cross Arms Inn from falling under the ratling's malevolent control.

Adventure Hooks

The Desperate Plea

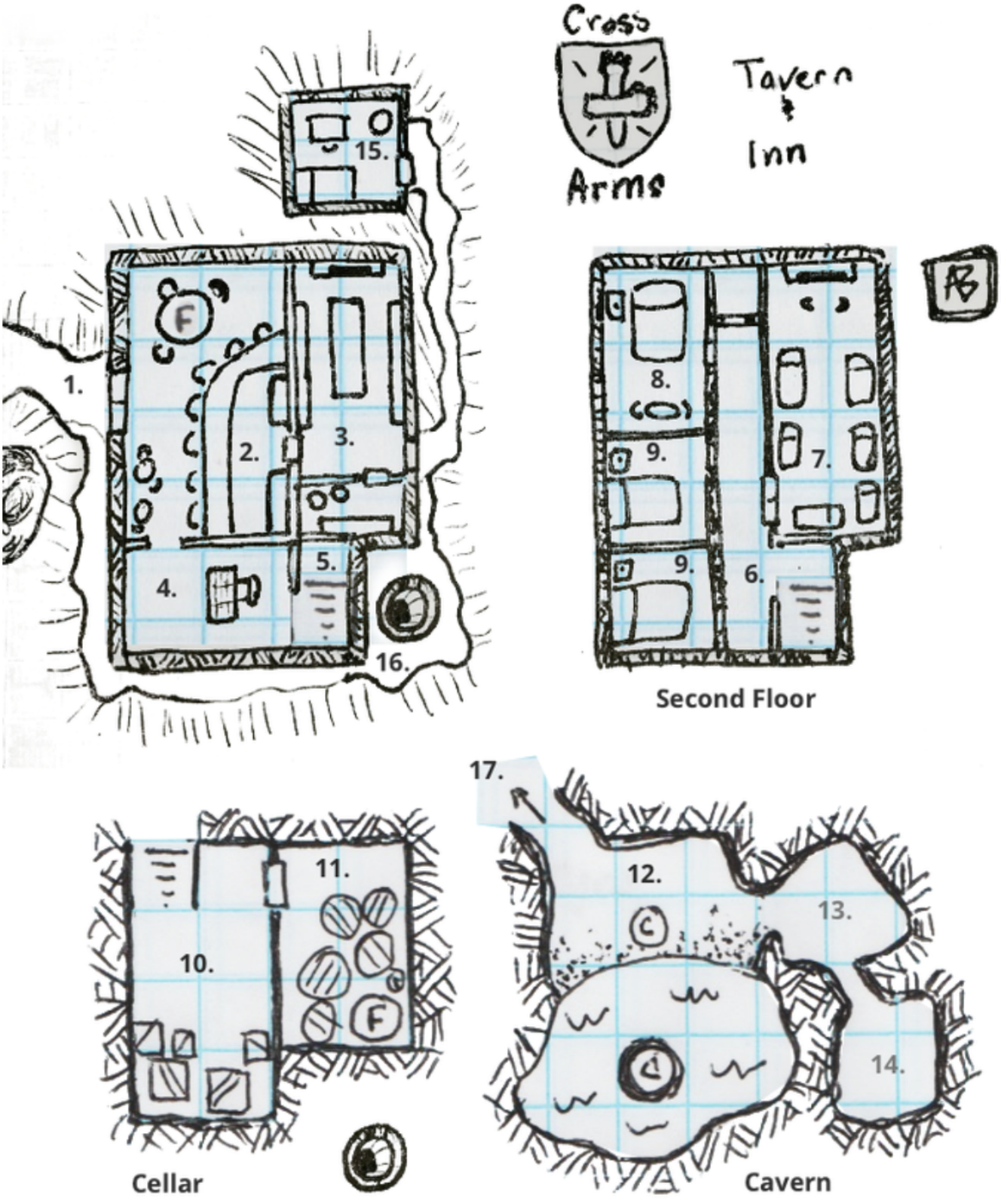
The party arrives at the Cross Arms Inn seeking food and lodging, only to witness the dramatic collapse of Bree, a dwarven serving girl who emerges from the cellar bearing terrible bite wounds. The innkeeper's desperate plea for help provides the perfect opportunity for heroic intervention.

Rumors and Rewards

Word has spread to nearby settlements about the strange happenings at the Cross Arms Inn. The party may have heard these rumors and come specifically to investigate, drawn by the promise of reward or simply the call to adventure.

Personal Stakes

One or more party members may have personal connections to the inn—perhaps they've stayed here before, know someone who works here, or have business interests that would be affected by the inn's closure.



Adventure Start

Read or paraphrase the following when the party enters the inn's main hall:

> The Cross Arms Inn's main hall buzzes with the comfortable sounds of evening revelry. Flickering candlelight dances across weathered wooden tables where patrons share tales over foaming tankards of

> ale. The air carries the mingled aromas of roasted meat, fresh bread, and the sweet smoke of burning hardwood.
>
> Suddenly, the cheerful atmosphere shatters as a floor hatch near the bar crashes open. A small dwarven woman staggers up from the cellar below, her apron torn and stained with blood. Deep bite marks mar her left arm, and her eyes are wide with terror.
>
> “Don’t let them eat me!” she screams before collapsing to the floor.

The injured dwarf is **Bree Ironfoot**, a serving girl employed by the inn. She bears several rat bites (treat as minor wounds) and is suffering from shock. A successful DC 10 Medicine check will stabilize her condition and allow her to speak coherently.

Fleming Thornwick, the innkeeper’s husband, immediately rushes to Bree’s aid. He looks desperately toward any capable-looking individuals in the room and pleads:

> “By the gods, someone must help us! These attacks are ruining our livelihood. Please—won’t someone make themselves useful and put an end to this nightmare?”

Key NPCs

Elyria Thornwick, Innkeeper

Medium humanoid (human), neutral good

A sturdy woman in her forties with graying brown hair typically pulled back in a practical bun. Elyria has run the Cross Arms Inn for nearly two decades and takes immense pride in her establishment’s reputation.

Personality: Determined, practical, and fiercely protective of her inn and employees.
Bond: The Cross Arms Inn is her life’s work and greatest treasure.
Flaw: Tends to downplay problems to avoid scaring away customers.

Fleming Thornwick, Inn Manager

Medium humanoid (human), neutral good

Elyria’s husband and business partner, Fleming handles much of the inn’s day-to-day operations and guest relations.

Personality: Gregarious, optimistic, but easily flustered in crisis situations.
Bond: Devoted to his wife and their shared dream of running the perfect inn.
Flaw: Sometimes promises more than he can deliver to please customers.

Bree Ironfoot, Serving Girl

Small humanoid (dwarf), lawful good

A young dwarven woman who works in the inn’s cellar and kitchen. She was the first to encounter Ergiz’s raiders directly.

Personality: Hardworking, honest, but now deeply traumatized by her experience.
Bond: Considers the inn’s staff her chosen family.
Flaw: Has developed an intense fear of rats and confined spaces.

Area Descriptions

1. The Tavern Hall

As you enter the bustling brew hall of the Cross Arms Tavern, the sounds of merry conversation and clinking mugs fill the air. Patrons sit at sturdy wooden tables, sharing laughter and tales of adventure. The bar back, lined with bottles of various spirits, catches the warm light of flickering candles. The room is dimly lit, creating an inviting atmosphere.

DM’s Information: The tavern hall is filled with friendly patrons and staff, offering a warm and welcoming ambiance. Elyria, the innkeeper, can be found behind the bar, attending to guests. No immediate threats or secrets are present in this area.

2. Bar Back

Behind the bar, you find a cluttered assortment of bottles, kegs, and ingredients. The air is filled with the rich aroma of ale and spirits. Wooden shelves hold a variety of drinkware, from tankards to wine glasses, and the bartender deftly mixes drinks with practiced skill.

DM’s Information: The bar back contains various ingredients for mixing drinks. The bartender can provide information about the recent disturbances in the cellar. No immediate threats or secrets are present in this area.

3. Kitchen

Stepping into the kitchen, you’re enveloped in the savory scents of freshly cooked food. Pots and pans clatter as the cooks move about their business, preparing meals for the inn’s guests. A roaring fire in the hearth adds to the warmth of the room.

DM’s Information: The kitchen staff can provide information about the recent disturbances in the cellar. Various ingredients and foodstuffs are present, which may be useful or valuable to the party. No immediate threats or secrets are present in this area.

4. Innkeeper’s Office / Front Desk

Entering the innkeeper’s office, you see a large ledger on the desk, along with a guestbook and a set of keys hanging on the wall. The room is neatly organized, with a sense of order and responsibility.

DM’s Information: The ledger contains records of recent guests and transactions. The guestbook may hold clues about recent arrivals or unusual activities. No immediate threats or secrets are present in this area.

5. Stairs Up

A flight of wooden stairs leads upwards to the upper floors of the inn, where guests stay in private rooms. The stairwell is lit by the soft glow of lanterns, casting a warm and inviting light.

DM’s Information: Access to the upper floors of the inn where guest rooms are located. No immediate threats or secrets are present in this area.

6. Stairs Down

Descending down the brew ramp, you enter the dark and cool cellar of the Cross Arms Inn. The air is damp, and the scent of aging ale lingers. The sound of dripping water echoes in the distance.

DM’s Information: The cellar holds various supplies and casks of ale. Access to hidden tunnels beneath the inn leading to the caverns. No immediate threats or secrets are present in this area.

7. Hostel

The hostel is a communal sleeping area with rows of simple beds. The room is dimly lit, and a sense of camaraderie permeates the air as travelers from different lands rest and share stories.

DM’s Information: The hostel is an affordable lodging option for travelers. Guests may offer information or interact with the party. No immediate threats or secrets are present in this area.

8. Rimi Borgeson’s Room

In Rimi Borgeson’s private room, you find modest furnishings, a simple bed, and a small window overlooking the inn’s courtyard. The room exudes a sense of comfort and tranquility. A small locked chest sits at the foot of the bed.

DM’s Information: The room belongs to a guest named Rimi Borgeson, who may have information about recent events. Clues or items related to the mystery could be discovered here. Rimi has a 20% chance of being in his room; otherwise, he can be found downstairs by the fireplace in the main hall.

The locked chest contains modest personal belongings and a small purse with 15 gold pieces. Note that robbing guest rooms is not very heroic behavior and

would damage the party’s reputation if discovered.

9. Private Room

This more upscale guest room features a comfortable bed, a small table with a vase of fresh flowers, and a window offering a view of the village square. The room exudes an air of luxury and relaxation. An ornate locked chest rests beneath the window.

DM’s Information: The room is occupied by a guest, who may have information or be involved in the unfolding events. Clues or items related to the mystery could be discovered here.

The locked chest contains personal effects and valuables: a silver locket worth 25 gold pieces, a small bag of gems worth 40 gold pieces, and travel documents. Note that robbing guest rooms is not very heroic behavior and would damage the party’s reputation if discovered.

10. Cellar

Descending a creaky wooden staircase, you enter the inn’s cool, subterranean belly. The air carries a damp chill and the musky scent of aged wood. Rows of sturdy shelves line the walls, groaning under the weight of a hearty bounty. Plump sacks of grain, neatly stacked jars of preserved fruits, and wheels of pungent cheese fill the foreground. Further back, casks of ale stand in stoic rows, their polished wood gleaming faintly in the soft glow of lanterns hanging from the low ceiling.

At the far end of the cellar, a heavy, metal-banded door stands slightly ajar, a sliver of darkness peeking through the gap.

DM’s Information: This cellar serves as the lifeblood of the inn above, brimming with provisions that keep the establishment running smoothly. Keen-eyed adventurers might spot various supplies that could prove useful on their journey, from sturdy rope and lanterns to bandages and basic rations. While the cellar presents a potential source of much-needed supplies, it’s important to remember that these goods belong to the innkeeper and his patrons. Looting the cellar could provide a temporary solution, but it would likely damage the party’s reputation and potentially sour their relationship with the establishment.

If the party decides to search the cellar, a **Wisdom (Search) check DC 14** will uncover a few unsettling details amidst the bounty:

Ripped Sack: One of the sacks of grain lies open, its contents scattered across the floor. Claw marks mar the canvas, hinting at a hungry nighttime visitor.

Gnawed Crates: Several wooden crates holding vegetables or preserved meats show signs of gnawing, suggesting some unwelcome creature has been pilfering the inn’s supplies.

A successful **Wisdom (Animal Handling) check DC 15** will uncover that the damage seems to have come from some type of large rodent.

11. The Barrel Store

The air is thick with the pungent aroma of old wood and fermented ale, emanating from rows upon rows of towering barrels stacked throughout the room. A faint skittering sound echoes in the silence, drawing the party's attention to several oversized rats gnawing on spilled ale near the base of a barrel. As the adventurers approach, the rats scuttle away, vanishing into a network of shadowy spaces behind the barrels.

Investigation: A thorough search of the storehouse (**Wisdom (Search) check DC 15**) reveals a suspicious gap near the base of one of the barrels. This gap leads to a burrow, just wide enough for a medium-sized humanoid to squeeze through without a backpack (approximately 3 feet/1 meter in diameter). The burrow slants downwards for roughly 15 feet, with rough, damp earth lining the narrow walls.

Hidden Depths: Delving deeper into the burrow, the passage takes a sharp turn, plunging another 20 feet down into a larger cavern. Here, the pungent aroma of ale fades, replaced by the earthy scent of the underground.

Navigating the Burrow:

Tight Squeeze: The narrow diameter of the burrow (3 feet/1 meter) requires characters to leave their backpacks and most gear behind. Players should carefully choose only the essential items they think they will need for the journey ahead, as retrieving abandoned equipment will require returning to this location.

Climbing the Descent: Instead of a straight drop, describe the initial 15 feet as a slanted descent. This allows for a more dynamic traversal and the possibility of a **Strength (Climb) check DC 10** to avoid slipping and taking minor damage (1d6 damage) at the bottom.

If the players decide to use a rope to aid in their descent, give them a +3 to their climb checks.

Second Descent: For the second 20-foot drop, you have two options:

Strength (Climb) check DC 15: This option requires a successful **Strength (Climb) check DC 15** to avoid falling completely. If the players have rope, they gain advantage on this roll as they "have the right gear." A failed check results in a fall for 20 feet of 2d6 damage (Dexterity 10 save for half damage) and a loud splash into the shallow pool below (area 12). This would alert the parrot and set it off.

12. Cavern Pool

As you venture into this chamber, the only source of light is a slender beam filtering down from a well hole in the ceiling. It illuminates a serene pool

of water, its surface smooth and undisturbed. The light refracts off the pool's surface, casting mesmerizing shimmering patterns onto the walls and ceiling. The atmosphere exudes tranquility and wonder.

As your eyes adjust to the dim light, you hear a sudden squawk: "RRAACK Intruders! They're here to steal my booty!!! RRRRAAACKK". You see a parrot, tethered to a stand, flapping its wings frantically and repeating its warning.

DM's Information:

The Pool: Hidden in the water is a Ring of Invisibility, protected by a Water Elemental. If any characters come close to the water, either by walking near it or descending via the well, one character will be attacked.

"The water begins to swirl and form into a snake-like tendril. It strikes out, wrapping [character] in water and dragging them down into the pool."

Strength Check: The entangled character can make a **Strength check DC 17** to break free. **Dexterity Check:** Another party member can make a **Dexterity check DC 15** to catch the entangled character before they're dragged down.

The Parrot: The parrot has 3 HP and no attacks. It can be calmed or befriended by a druid but will continue to squawk and alert Ergiz of intruders if not calmed or killed.

Ergiz's Reaction: If the parrot is not calmed, Ergiz, a ratling, will hastily pack up his belongings and attempt to escape. He will use a magical item called the "Horn of Laughter" to hinder the party's pursuit.

"As one after another of the party is felled in laughter, only [characters' names] are unaffected. They see a small rat-man appear from the cave, carrying a large sack. The creature is quickly making its way across the cavern towards the tunnel on the opposite wall."

Ring of Invisibility

Donning the ring grants the wearer the ability to become invisible at will, mimicking the effects of a 2nd level magic user spell. This invisibility lasts for 1 hour and can be activated twice per day. Any hostile action by the wearer, including an attack or casting a spell, breaks the invisibility.

Foul Odor: As a somewhat unfortunate side effect, the ring emits a pungent, noxious odor whenever its invisibility power is activated. Anyone within 10 feet of the invisible wearer must make a **Constitution saving throw DC 10** upon activation. On a failed save, the creature is considered Dazed for 1d4 rounds, hindering their ability to react effectively. Creatures that succeed on the save are merely subjected to the unpleasant aroma.

Player Condition: Dazed Character Effects: All enemies gain Advantage against you. You lose your next attack.

Removing Condition:

- **Short Rest:** A short rest might allow the character to shake off the dazed condition.
- **Magical Restoration:** The spell “Lesser Restoration” or a similar effect could remove the dazed state.

Roleplaying the Ring: The ring’s invisibility is a powerful tool for stealthy maneuvers, but the accompanying stench creates a unique challenge. Imagine the dramatic tension as the players attempt a covert operation, only to be betrayed by a sudden, undeniable whiff of…well, you get the idea. This can lead to humorous situations or desperate attempts to mask the odor with perfumes or other means.

13. Giant Rats’ Nest

As you step into the cramped chamber, you immediately notice nests made of hay and straw scattered around the room. Giant rats rest within these nests, their eyes glinting in the dim light. The faint squeaks of young rats can be heard, adding to the tense atmosphere. The adult rats watch you cautiously, clearly concerned for their nest.

DM’s Information:

Giant rats defend their nests aggressively if disturbed. Clues related to Ergiz’s presence and plans could be discovered here.

If the players move cautiously and do not disturb the nests, the rats will remain wary but not attack.

If the players approach the nests or make sudden movements, the rats will become aggressive and prepare to defend their young.

Potential Discoveries:

- **Scraps of Parchment:** A small piece of parchment with hastily scribbled notes about a planned heist on the King’s Road.
- **Ergiz’s Personal Item:** A small, distinctive ratling-sized glove or a unique pin that links back to Ergiz.

14. Ergiz’s Lair



If Ergiz has escaped, read this section:

As you step into the small earthen chamber, the dim light from a lone lantern hanging from a crude hook in the ceiling barely illuminates the room. The place is in disarray, with shelves emptied of their contents and only a few scattered papers left behind. It's clear that whoever was here left in a hurry. The air is still and silent, save for the faint creaking of the lantern swaying slightly.

Among the scattered debris, you notice a single piece of parchment pinned to the wall. It catches your eye with its meticulous handwriting. Upon closer inspection, it appears to be a checklist detailing, point by point, how to be a highwayman. The notes are thorough and reveal the strategic mind of the room's previous occupant, Ergiz. The most valuable treasures and critical documents seem to have been taken, leaving only traces of the rat-man's hurried escape.

If Ergiz has not been alerted to the players, then read this section:

As you enter the small earthen chamber, the dim glow of a lantern hanging from a crude hook in the ceiling casts long shadows across the room. The walls are lined with shelves cluttered with stolen treasures, maps, scrolls, and scribbled notes. Sitting at a makeshift desk in the center of the room is a small rat-like creature, frantically working on a piece of parchment. His fur is patchy, and his eyes dart nervously around the room. At the sudden intrusion, he freezes, his eyes wide with fear.

The creature, Ergiz, leaps up from his chair, knocking over a stack of

papers. He looks at you with a mix of terror and desperation, clearly panicking.

DM's Information:

Ergiz's lair holds valuable treasures and crucial information. The room's secrets become apparent only after thorough investigation. Ergiz may ambush the party, seeking to protect his hoard.

Ergiz's Reaction:

Dialogue: Ergiz raises his hands defensively and speaks quickly, his voice high-pitched and pleading: *"Wait, wait! Don't hurt me! I-I-I'm just a humble thief trying to make a living. You don't want to kill me. Think of the mess! The smell! Please, let's talk!"*

Actions:

Offering Information and Treasure: Ergiz points to a small chest and a few scattered coins. *"Take it! Take all my gold, my treasures! Just leave me be! 65 gold pieces, 43 silver pieces, and this golden pin—it's all yours!"*

Using the Fog of Laughter: If the players seem inclined to attack or capture him, Ergiz will nervously edge towards a small vial on his desk. *"I have this… this magical item! It creates a fog that makes everyone laugh uncontrollably! I'll use it if you come any closer!"*

Escaping: If the players are distracted by the Fog of Laughter, Ergiz will make a run for a small hidden tunnel at the back of his lair, leading out to the wilderness. *"You'll never catch me! I'll disappear into the night, and you'll never see me again!"*

Bargaining for His Life: If cornered and injured, Ergiz will drop to his knees, clutching his wounds. *"Please, I'll do anything! I'll never return to this life, I swear! I'll go far away, where you'll never see me again. Just let me live!"*

Outcome Based on Player Actions:

If the Players Accept His Plea: Ergiz hands over his treasures and information about his schemes. He promises to leave and never return, scurrying away through his escape tunnel.

If the Players Use the Fog of Laughter: The players must make a **Wisdom saving throw DC 15** to avoid falling into fits of uncontrollable laughter. If they fail, Ergiz will use the distraction to escape.

If the Players Attack: Ergiz will fight back feebly, surrendering as soon as his HP drops below 6. He will offer all his remaining gold and swear to leave forever.

Adventure Conclusion: Return to the Cross Arms Inn

Read or paraphrase the following when the players emerge victorious:

As you emerge from the dark tunnels beneath the Cross Arms Inn, your boots caked with earth and victory hard-won, the fading light of day spills across your dirt-smeared faces. The scent of hearth-roasted meat and fresh ale greets you as you push open the inn’s doors.

Inside, the tavern grows quiet. A stillness settles as every patron turns to look. A beat passes. Then:

“They did it!” cries Fleming Thornwick, voice cracking with disbelief and joy. “They saved the inn!”

A cheer erupts. Mugs are raised. Chairs scrape back. Elyria rushes forward, eyes wide and watering as she grips your hands. “You’ve done more than save this place. You’ve restored hope.”

That night, the Cross Arms Inn throws open its taps and kitchens. Plates overflow, tankards are refilled without charge, and stories of your bravery ripple through the crowd like wildfire. You eat and drink for free, honored as heroes of the village. Bards will sing of this day, of the brave souls who ventured beneath and cast out the vermin that threatened their home.

Distributing Experience Points

Each player earns XP for their role in defeating enemies, solving problems, making moral choices, and restoring the inn’s safety. These awards are per character and assume a party of 3 to 5 players.

Final XP Summary (Per Player)

Combat and Threats

- Water Elemental hazard: 210 XP
- Giant Rats (8 total): 100 XP
- Ergiz, the ratling boss (combat or successful parley): 300 XP
- Fog of Laughter encounter: 50 XP
- Parrot encounter resolved creatively: 25 XP

Exploration and Discovery

- Rescuing Bree: 25 XP
- Retrieving the Ring of Invisibility: 75 XP
- Discovering King’s Road Heist plans: 75 XP
- Finding Ergiz’s checklist and notes: 50 XP
- Discovering secret tunnel in the Barrel Room: 25 XP

Roleplay and Social Resolution

- Avoiding unnecessary violence (e.g., rat young, parrot): 50 XP
- Strong roleplaying or clever problem-solving: 100 XP
- Restoring order to the inn: 100 XP
- Completing the full adventure arc: 100 XP
- Returning stolen goods and protecting the inn’s reputation: 75 XP
- Avoiding looting: 75 XP

Total Estimated XP per character: 2,035 XP

All players should now reach **Level 2**.

Leveling Up

After the celebrations fade and the inn quiets down, your characters take time to rest and reflect. As the firelight flickers and new songs are sung in your honor, you feel your abilities deepen. You have reached Level 2.

To level up, each player should:

- Increase hit points based on their class
- Unlock any new abilities, spells, or features available at Level 2

Apendix

Ergiz the Ratling 2nd Level Thief

- **Armor Class (AC):** 16 (natural agility and light armor)
- **Hit Points (HP):** 12 (2d8)
- **Speed:** 30 ft.

Attributes:

- **Strength:** -1
- **Dexterity:** +4
- **Constitution:** +1
- **Intelligence:** +2
- **Wisdom:** -1
- **Charisma:** +0

Attacks:

- **Dagger:** -1 attack bonus, 1d4 -1 damage
- **Short bow:** +4 attack bonus, 1d6 damage
- **Poisoned Dagger (special):** -1 attack bonus, 1d4 -1 damage, plus DC 15 Constitution save or become incapacitated with vomiting and diarrhea for 1d4 hours

Equipment:

- Leather armor
- 2 daggers
- Shortbow and 20 arrows
- Thieves' tools
- Disguise kit
- Lantern (hanging in his lair)
- Small chest with 65 gp, 43 sp, and a small golden pin
- Horn of Laughter (magical item)

Personality Traits:

- Cowardly and quick to surrender if overpowered.
- Highly intelligent and strategic, often has backup plans for escape.
- Ambitious and dreams of becoming a notorious highwayman.

Actions:

- **Attack:** Ergiz attacks with his dagger or shortbow.
- **Use Item:** Ergiz uses his Horn of Laughter to create a distraction.
- **Flee:** If given the chance, Ergiz will surrender and make a run for his hidden escape tunnel.

Reactions:

- **Surrender:** If his HP drops below 6, Ergiz will immediately offer to surrender, offering his gold and treasures in exchange for his life.

Encounter Strategy:

- Ergiz will try to avoid direct combat and use his environment to his advantage.
- He will use his high Dexterity and Cunning Action to stay out of reach and create opportunities to escape.

- If cornered, he will attempt to use the Horn of Laughter to incapacitate his pursuers and make his getaway.

Horn of Laughter

When this horn is blown an unfortunate flatulence sound is produced. Every humanoid with 30 feet must make a DC 12 Wisdom Save or perceive everything as hilariously funny. Falling into fits of laugher for 2d4 rounds falling prone, and becoming Dazed and unable to stand up for the Duration.