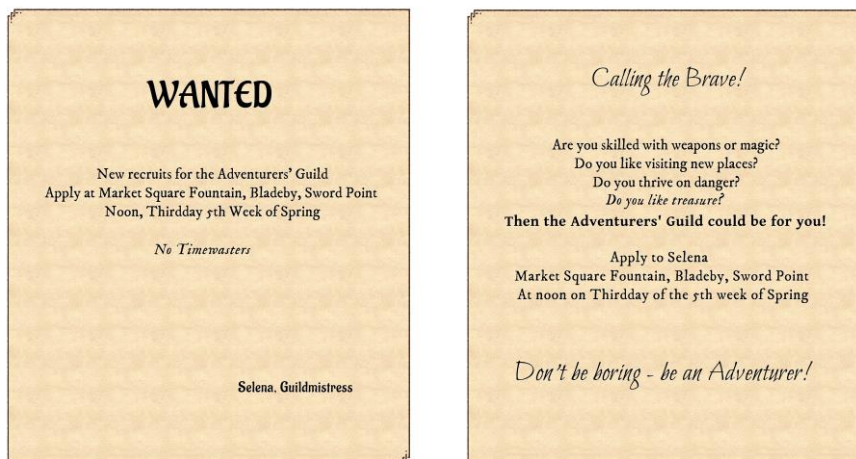


Adventure 13A01: Strikefast

Opening montage: The recruitment poster



J'zakko is in Shadowport, clinging to the top of an alley wall as a group of city watch guards search for him. He sees the poster on the wall opposite. J'zakko reflects that this has been happening a little too often lately - it's almost as if J'zakko is cursed... Maybe joining the Adventurers' Guild is worth a try?

Kavan is in Forge, the dwarf city. He was hunting in eastern Moonwreck when his horse threw a shoe. He is fitting a new one, purchased from a local smith, when he sees the poster tacked to the stable wall. "Why don't I give that a try?" he thinks.

Gwindor sees the poster in a tavern in Axis where he has been performing. He phones home and tells them about it. Should he join? "Yes, do it" comes the response.

Yrion is mooching around the Golden Citadel when he sees the poster. He has been officially exonerated after Yria caught the weapon thief based on his tip-off about the crooked watch-goose, but he is not keen on going back to working for **Yeglin** the quartermaster. Hmm, Bladeby. That's close to Gooseport, where the crooked merchant **Valsar Rumblebridge**, who was responsible for Yrion's temporary exile, is based. Rumblebridge doesn't know that he's been rumbled. Maybe he and Yria could use the Adventurers' Guild as a base to investigate his activities further.

He shows the poster to **Yria** and explains his plan. Yria is still the star of the junior cohort, but she is getting tired of being told what to do. There are also the whispers and the sly insinuations - not sufficient to justify a Paladin's Challenge - about the tentacles

on her back and their possible demonic origins ("hello - they're golden..."). It would be good to get out of the Citadel for a while.

Soril is wrapping up a scribing job in Axis. He has been helping the **Tallmarks**, one of the Great Families, as they prepare for a visit by the Emperor's tax assessors. There is no reason to stay, and the Adventurers' Guild might lead to some useful contacts.

Getting to Bladeby

J'zakko takes passage on a ship. He offers to help with the rigging, and the captain is so impressed by his climbing skills that she waives his fare.

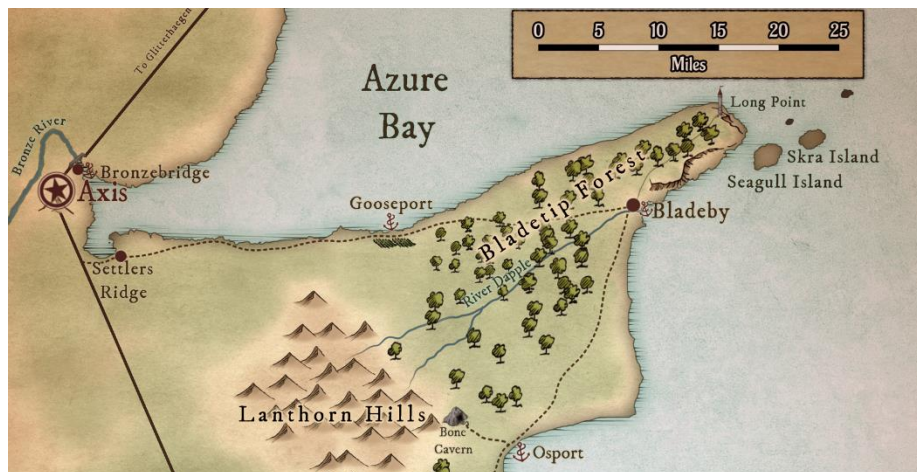
Kavan has a long journey through the Undermarch to Anvil, down to Axis and then on to Bladeby. Luckily his horse cuts the journey time in half.

Gwindor walks the entire way from Axis. It's cheaper than taking a boat and he makes a few coins at the inn in Gooseport.

Yrion fast talks Yeglin into paying for his passage to Bladeby, convincing him that it was his idea to send him away. Yria pays for her own fare like an honest paladin.

Soril gets a lift with a friendly farmer. In Gooseport he finds another farmer who is going to Bladeby to sell produce in the market, and offers to help her set up.

Bladeby, Thirdday, 5th Week of Spring, year 43 of the Thirteenth Age



It is a sunny day. Bladeby is a small fortified town standing on a 200' high promontory overlooking a harbour on the northeast tip of Blade Point. It has a large and impressive town square where a market is in full swing - market stalls, two busy taverns (the Kobold's Helmet and the Goose Egg), cattle market. There's a fountain (powered by magic) but Selena is not there.

J'zakko - tall, black clothing, black leather armour, boots, lots of knives - prowls around the market, looking uneasy. He's the only koraxi here and he feels out of place. A thief hails him from a dark alley. She introduces herself as **Larkspur** and asks him to stage a

distraction so that she can steal a lockbox from a farmer's stall. J'zakko isn't entirely sure about this, but he has an idea for a diversion, and when Larkspur offers to pay him up front, he agrees to help. He heads over to a butcher stall and buys a steak, tears a bit off and mashes it so that it is squishy. Then he searches the town's back alleys for helpers.

Kavan stables his horse behind the town hall and strolls into the town square, looking for Selena. His distinctive armour, crescent moon shield and morning star attract some attention. A harassed server called **Tarsty** begs him to help out at the Kobold's Helmet, but Kavan refuses - he has more important things to do.

Gwindor - a cheery-looking fellow with a drum and a spear - proves to be considerably less cheery when he feels someone tugging at his cloak. Thinking it's a pickpocket, he spins around and knocks a small child with a wood elf appearance to the ground. The child bursts into tears, whining that she thought he looked nice and would help her free a poor cat who is trapped in a cage under a stall selling live animals. Gwindor ignores her and heads over to the Golden Goose, where he accompanies a pipe player.

Yrion - tall with silver-grey hair and shabby patched clothes - has abandoned his sister and is strolling around the market. A richly dressed man with a posh accent gives him a scented note and asks him to deliver it to an attractive fair-haired server at the Kobold's Helmet. He warns him to be subtle because the woman's father is the barman and is somewhat over-protective. Yrion demands 5 silver pieces up front. He pretends that a pie he ate disagreed with him and makes his way over to the outhouse behind the tavern. He dextrously opens the missive, finding it to be a somewhat salacious love letter addressed to "**Evaline**", from **Estrel**.

Soril - average height, slightly built, dark brown skin, neat but dusty clothes - has been in the square for some time, having helped his farmer friend set up her stall. He is hanging out near a scribe who refuses to help a young peasant man called **Gulvor** with his poetry, saying that he always throws it away because it's not good enough. Soril offers his services, taking Gulvor over to the fountain and reviewing his half-finished work, an inept but heart-felt ditty to a barmaid called Evaline.

Yria - short-haired, fierce looking, with somewhat skimpy armour - sits by the fountain. A seller of magical ingredients at a stall nearby accidentally knocks over a cage on a pole, releasing an iridescent butterfly. He begs Yria to help him catch it, because she looks tall - preferably alive, because it's more valuable that way. Yria looks over at the young bobcat nestled in the shoulder holster that she wears. "Muffins, fetch," she says.

Yrion sidles into the Kobold's Helmet via the back entrance. He cheekily joins the barman behind the bar and starts serving drinks. Far from taking offence, the barman (**Derol**) gratefully accepts his help. This gives Yrion a chance to slip Evaline the note when she comes to take her next order. Evaline is none too pleased to see that it's from

Estrel, and suggests getting him to stand by the bullpen wearing something red, which will anger **Lentullus** the bull. She gives Yrion a red scarf and pens a few words to make it believable. Yrion is leaving the bar, on the pretext of taking an order to a particularly rowdy table of dwarves, when he is accosted by Kavan, who is looking for adventurer types.

Also approaching the tavern is Soril with Gulvor in tow. With a few expert strokes of the pen he has completed Gulvor's ditty, and Gulvor is so pleased with it that he decides to serenade Evaline at once. He leaps on a table and declaims the following:

Evaline, oh Evaline,
In this tavern you're the queen,
Your laughter rings o'er clinking mug,
I'd really like to give you a hug.

In fire's glow, you're a sight so fine,
Serving up mead and beer and wine.
Oh Evaline, with your forearms stout,
I'd really like to take you out.

Your eyes outshine the candles' flicker,
Yet my shy words get only thicker.
As you wipe the tables, clear the slate,
This peasant's heart can't help but wait.

Evaline, oh Evaline,
You're the queen of every scene.
An honest ode from a soul that mopes
For Evaline, barmaid of my hopes.

Sadly this does not get the reception that he hoped for. Evaline is busy and tells him not to bother her, and the rowdy dwarves throw beer mugs at him for distracting the bar staff. Yrion and Kavan have stopped to listen; Yrion remarks loudly that the poem really isn't very good. Soril consoles the heartbroken Gulvor by offering him a drink at the Golden Goose.

J'zakko has found his helpers - two scrawny stray dogs. Riled by the combined smell of cat and steak, the dogs chase after J'zakko, who leads them back towards the cattle market, where Lentullus, a large, black, fierce-looking bull, is penned. J'zakko expertly pings the squishy piece of meat onto the bull's hindquarters and the dogs give chase. Lentullus bellows and bursts out of his pen.

Muffins bounds after the butterfly, which has settled on the awning over the farmer's stall. He leaps up onto the carefully balanced piles of vegetables that Soril spent all morning setting up. Potatoes, carrots, turnips and artichokes go flying. Muffins misses

his footing and leaps back to the ground with a yowl. Meanwhile the butterfly flits daintily across the square to the live animal stall, Muffins haring after it. He crashes into the cage containing the sleeping cat, which proves in fact to be a large and angry lynx which bursts out and starts chasing poor Muffins. Yria calls him back, but Muffins is too scared to listen. He dashes straight out into the path of the oncoming bull.

J'zakko, seeing that a cat-brother is in danger, makes a spectacular roll and scoops him up out of harm's way. Yria barrels into the pursuing lynx, knocking it over. The lynx picks itself up, sees the approaching danger, and turns tail, oddly running for cover in the magic merchant's stall.

Meanwhile the would-be adventurers square off the against the bull. Gwindor, alerted by the commotion, has strolled over with his new friend the bard, but decides to hold off for now. Yria runs towards J'zakko, eager to be reunited with Muffins; the bull tries to gore her *en passant*, but misses. "I can deal with the bull - get the dogs," calls Soril. Kavan raises his arms and one of the dogs is enveloped in a cold bright mist full of swirling shapes. It loses consciousness and collapses. J'zakko is distracted handing the traumatised Muffins back to Yria, and Yrion is running to intercept the other dog, so Soril is left to deal with the bull on his own. He picks up an apple from the stall and makes some magical gestures over it, then offers it to the bull, looking it in the eye. The bull quietens and accepts the apple.

At this point a cloaked figure gets up from her seat at one of the tavern benches and throws off her hood, revealing an imperious-looking grey-haired high elf woman. She steps delicately through the rolling vegetables as she makes her way to the fountain. Derol and the live animal stallholder come over to her - "Are we clear now, Miss Selena?" "Yes, you're clear. Thank you and sorry for the damage." She eyes up the heroes. "Hmm, I'll guess you'll do. **Torban**, you can turn back now." Lentullus the bull shimmers and transforms into a burly druid. "**Willan**, Estrel, Larkspur, we're headed back to HQ." The magic merchant, the richly dressed man and the thief nod their agreement. "Torban, **Drella**, you stay here and help with the clear up. The rest of you, follow me!"



Yria, who is tired of being ordered around and who finds Selena to be unnervingly like her mother, refuses, saying that she'd rather eat in town - Yrion diplomatically explains that they want to help tidy up. As the others head over to the south-western part of town, they are joined by the small child that Gwindor knocked over, who proves to be Willan's daughter **Elly**, and the lynx **Tufty**, who is his familiar. Drella, a woman of dwarven appearance who was one of the guards outside the town hall, takes a complaint from the farmer that her lockbox has been stolen. Larkspur looks smug.

The Adventurer's Guild

is a large two-storey half-timbered building located in a square in the south-west corner of the town. Its large courtyard contains a shooting range, fighting arena, and climbing wall. Selena welcomes the PCs who are present and offers them food and drink, brought by the wizened **Dimity**, a wood elf. She explains that they were looking for people who are willing to help out and who show initiative in dealing with situational problems. Gwindor is on probation for striking a child and failing to contribute to the bull situation. Dimity brings the drinks - ale for J'zakko and Kavan, wine for Gwindor, elderflower cordial for Soril - and some tasty bread and cheese.

Yrion and Yria talk to Drella, who is blasé about Larkspur stealing the farmer's lockbox, saying that it's just desserts for the farmer sleeping with her wife. Yrion disagrees - it's wrong and unprofessional. He and Yria decide that they don't like the Adventurers' Guild very much. Yrion decides to befriend the stray dogs that J'zakko found and persuades them to follow him back to the guildhall. If Yria can have a pet, he can too.

Everyone assembles in the guildhall parlour. Selena is giving the party their first mission (vermin control), when the door bursts open and a wounded woman with dark hair and tribal tattoos enters. She is **Evienne**, the leader of another group of adventurers that had been sent to retrieve an artefact from the hoard of a dead dragon in an old Living

Dungeon called the Swirl on the orders of **Andriol Greymist**, an imperial wizard. After being attacked by aberrations, they found the artefact - an old warhammer of dwarven or gnomish make - but were ambushed on the way back by goblins riding giant bats, who made off with it. Evienne's group got a couple of hits in, so she thinks that the raiders may have holed up in Bladetip forest somewhere to rest and heal. Selena changes the party's mission: find the raiders and retrieve the artefact.

The party question Evienne's group - **Berindor**, a handsome drow ranger; **Labek the Overwhelming**, a full-of-himself Folk sorcerer; **Oroth**, a guilt-ridden Vat-born Order of the Wyrms paladin; and **Brannet**, a taciturn dwarf rogue - about the details of the ambush. They learn its location; a water meadow near Grimwart's Cave, an old troll hide-away. The goblins - at least 6 - wore cloth masks and specifically targeted Evienne, who had the artefact in her backpack. When a goblin was knocked off his bat by Berindor's arrows, two of the others swooped in to rescue him. Kavan, Soril and Yrion realise that this is all very odd behaviour for goblins, and wonder whether they could have been some other small humanoids, but Evienne says that she could tell they were goblins by their smell.

The party prepares to leave. Yrion expresses his distaste for Larkspur's actions to Selena, who says she will have a word. Gwindor phones home.

Grimwart's Cave

The journey through the forest is uneventful, though it is fully dark by the time the party arrive at Grimwart's Cave. They decide to camp for the night. The heroes learn the following about each other:

- Yrion is definitely a Golden Order combat paladin, despite his shabby appearance.
- Soril has done a lot of travelling. He is a wood elf wizard from the Wild Wood (home of the High Druid) and a vegetarian.
- Kavan is a cleric from the Moonwreck Kingdom. He has also travelled a lot and is a good cook. He livens up the party's evening meal with roots and mushrooms collected en route.
- Gwindor is another traveller. He is not keen on the wilderness and prefers being in places with lots of people.
- J'zakko climbs trees very quickly when spooked.
- Yria is highly defensive of Yrion. Nobody mentions her tentacles.

The Ambush Site

is a strip of water meadow by the river a little southwest of the rocky outcrop containing Grimwart's cave. There is a lot a trampled greenery.

The party split up to search the area. Yria finds a feathered totem that probably fell out of Evienne's backpack. Gwindor uncovers some glass shards with a fragment of label still attached, which reads "Eau de Goblin". J'zakko spots an arrow embedded in a tree to the northwest. But it is Soril's keen eyes that identify a trail of broken twigs and blood spots heading into the wood, made by something being carried at slightly above head height - presumably the wounded "goblin".

The Temple



The trail leads into the thickest and deepest part of the wood. The trees are huge and the undergrowth is dense. There are strange rustlings and calls. Eventually the party arrives at a gloomy clearing overhung by trees. It is full of mossy chunks of rubble, beyond which are the remains of a large, ancient building. Only the foundations and the bottom 20-30' are left, but the vine- and ivy-covered walls are impressively cyclopean, housing large blank spaces where windows used to be. A dark entrance way beckons.

J'zakko sneaks up to a side window to take a look. Inside is a chaos of rubble and tall dark pillars which must once have held up an impressive roof. It was clearly a temple of some sort – there is a raised circular dais with a large flat-topped rock that could have been an altar. Next to it is the base of a gigantic statue turned on its side, two massive feet still attached. A path that is largely clear of rubble runs from the entrance to the dais; pillars rise up on either side, some with stone support beams still running between them. A second path leads from the dais towards a dark entrance in a set of walls framing a secondary building - a tower or priest's quarters perhaps.

The party form up - Yria and Yrion at the front, followed by Kavan, Gwindor, Soril and J'zakko. Just as they are about to step into the entrance way, Soril tells them to stop. His sharp eyes have spotted a wire stretched across the path. J'zakko investigates; it's a fairly basic alarm trap, which he quickly defuses. J'zakko takes the lead in case of any more surprises and the party advances cautiously along the path. They are about half

way to the dais when there is movement in the shadows under the support beams. Several large bats detach from their perches and glide into the entrance to the secondary building, while clouds of smaller bats dive towards members of the party. As the heroes draw their weapons, there is a sound of scrabbling feet and high-pitched voices – definitely not goblins – raised in alarm. Soril recognises the language - it's Gnomish and they are saying "We are discovered! To arms! To arms!"

Round 1:

Anticipating the emergence of enemies, J'zakko bounds forward to the entrance to the secondary building and climbs up the rubble beside it. He can see a small camp with a circle of tents in a clearing in the rubble, with four gnomes swinging on to hovering dire bats. A cloud of bats swarms over him and he is distracted.

Kavan moves to the dais and casts two Invocations - War and Healing.

A cloud of bats menaces Yria. She swings her great sword, knocking several out of the air. The other bats disperse.

Soril casts an Alarm cantrip near the entrance to the secondary building, in the hope that the noise will distract passing bats. Sadly the swarm that attacks him is not distracted, and he takes a few scratches.

Yrion runs towards the entranceway and prepares to take on the approaching gnomes. He takes minor damage from a bat swarm.

Round 2:

Four gnomes riding giant bats (**Gozer**, **Stralk**, **Nembit** and **Eggbreath**) fly out of the entrance.

Gwindor swipes at Gozer but misses. Kavan has more luck with Stralk, bringing him to the ground.

J'zakko leaps on the third (Nembit), bringing him down. Yrion tells him to surrender.

Yria hits Eggbreath. Soril is menaced by bats again.

Round 3:

Gwindor hits Gozer and beats out a tattoo on his drum. "Move it!" he shouts at Kavan, who tries unsuccessfully to disengage from Stralk. J'zakko joins Kavan and together they knock out Stralk, but Gozer's bat gets its claws into Gwindor, giving him a nasty bleeding wound.

Yrion grabs Nembit and threatens to kill him if the gnomes don't surrender. He drags him towards the entrance to the gnome camp. Nembit frantically indicates the explosive tripwire stretched across it.

Yria knocks out Eggbreath. Soril swipes at the smaller bats that are attacking him, but is still distracted.

Round 4:

An elderly gnome holding a staff and a crossbow emerges from a tent in the camp beyond the entrance way. He sees Yrion holding Nembit, and the other gnomes unconscious on the floor. He raises his hands and gestures for the two other saddled-up gnomes to stand down. "All right, you got us. We'll parley."

Negotiation

The gnome leader (**Avish Handcrank**) explains that they stole the artefact on behalf of the Gnome Mage. It's a gnomish weapon and belongs to her. The Archmage can't have it. They heard about it from a tip-off from an adventurer - he doesn't know which one - on the night before the original party set off. Avish says that they can have the artefact, but nothing else, if he and the other gnomes can go in peace. He begs the party not to let the Archmage have it.

The heroes agree to the trade and Avish brings out the weapon from his tent. It's a one-handed warhammer covered in deeply incised runes. Yria picks it up. A voice whispers in her ear: "Please! Don't take me back! He'll kill me!"



The weapon introduces itself as Strikefast ("strike hard, strike fast!"). "He" turns out to be the Archmage - Strikefast overheard the original party speculating about why the Archmage has started sending out so many adventurer groups to collect magical artefacts, and has come to the conclusion that he plans to melt them all down and use their magical essence for some grand arcane ritual. Yria explains that they have to take Strikefast back to satisfy the Adventurer's Guild - if they don't, they could earn the enmity of the Archmage. It's either that or throw Strikefast into the sea, or a lava lake, or something. "No, no!" says Strikefast; the runes flare brightly, and Yria suddenly finds herself swinging the hammer at Kavan's shield. Clang!

Session Notes: 13A01 Strikefast

After some discussion, Yria decides to keep Strikefast for herself. There remains the question of what to tell Selena. Yria and Yrion are all for not going back to the Adventurers' Guild at all, but the others point out that there are advantages to keeping in with it, not least the sigil that prevents the legions from taking an unhealthy interest in breaches of the peace by guild members in civilised areas. There is also the problem that if Yria is seen carrying Strikefast, the Archmage may send out more goons to get hold of it. But Soril has an idea for that; he can cast a ritual version of the Disguise Self spell to conceal Strikefast from at least casual inspection.

The heroes concoct a story about Strikefast being cursed and causing Yria to run off into the forest; Yrion followed her to "look after her". They will make their way to Gooseport to spy on dodgy merchant Valser Rumblebridge. The rest of the party returns to Selena with their tale of woe. She is surprisingly sympathetic, given that the party failed in their mission - she commends their handling of the fight and makes some acid comments about the paucity of Andriol's briefing regarding Strikefast's nature (she doesn't seem to like the Archmage that much).

All the heroes are inducted into the Adventurers' Guild, including the missing Yria and Yrion, and they are given 20 gp each. Selena says that she doesn't have another mission for them right now, but the sigils will allow the Guild to contact them when she does. In the mean time they should train up and prepare for their next adventure.