

THE MERCHANT'S SILENCE

A Foundry VTT compatible Quest for D&D 5th Edition

Setting	Waterdeep, Dock Ward
Party Level	3-5 (optimized for 4th level)
Party Size	3-6 players (see Scaling sidebar)
Theme	Mystery / Investigation / Moral Complexity
Duration	3-4 hours (single session)

Designed by Andres Valbuena | 2025

QUEST HOOK: STRANGE BUSINESS AT THE SCARLET SAIL

READ ALOUD:

The Dock Ward reeks of brine and rotting fish this morning, but there's something else in the air—a tension that prickles the back of your neck. Where the Scarlet Sail Trading Company's warehouse should bustle with longshoremen and cargo, there is only silence. The crimson sails that give the company its name hang limp and furled. No ships have departed in three days. The massive warehouse doors, usually thrown wide to welcome commerce, remain barred and dark. A half-eaten meal sits abandoned on a dock worker's stool, crawling with flies. Even the seagulls seem to avoid this stretch of pier, as if they sense something wrong.

The quest begins when Merchant Prince Davros Thann summons the party to his counting house in the Sea Ward. Thann is owed a significant debt by the Scarlet Sail Trading Company, and their sudden silence threatens his own ventures. He provides a letter of introduction and offers payment in trade bars stamped with the Thann family crest.

Initial Quest Objectives

- Investigate the Scarlet Sail warehouse and discover why operations have ceased
- Determine the fate of Captain Mira Pinty, the company's owner
- Report findings to Davros Thann and ensure his debt is addressed

Foundry VTT Implementation

Create a parent journal 'The Merchant's Silence' with sub-entries: Quest Hook (share immediately), Investigation Notes (update as clues found with @UUID links), NPC Directory (reveal as met), Locations (map pins), Clues & Evidence (GM-only). Use Foundry's permission system to reveal entries dynamically.

THE TRUTH (GM INFORMATION)

Captain Mira Pinty is dead—murdered by her business partner, Jon Blassen.

Three nights ago, Mira discovered that Jon had been using their legitimate shipping operation to smuggle Tears of Lathander—a dangerous alchemical narcotic. When she confronted him, Jon panicked, struck her with a paperweight, then strangled her. The murder was not premeditated—Jon is a coward, not a killer by nature—but now he's in too deep.

What Jon Has Done Since

- Hidden Mira's body in basement cold storage, wrapped in sailcloth under ice and salt
- Locked down the warehouse and dismissed workers, claiming 'inventory audit'
- Bribed remaining workers (Torin and Jessa) with 20gp each and implied threats
- Contacted his Xanathar Guild handler requesting 'cleaners'
- Begun forging documents to frame Mira's death as an accident

Evidence in the Warehouse

- Mira's body in cold storage (DC 15 Investigation to find hidden compartment)
- Bloodstains in Jon's office, poorly cleaned (DC 12 Investigation or Survival)
- Smuggling ledgers in locked desk (DC 14 Thieves' Tools or DC 18 Strength)
- Mira's blood-stained coat in trash bin (DC 10 Perception)
- Crates of Tears of Lathander behind legitimate cargo (DC 13 Investigation)
- Mira's personal journal detailing her suspicions (no check if quarters searched)

DC Calibration

Easy info (DC 10-12): Available to anyone asking right questions. Moderate secrets (DC 13-15): Require effort or leverage. Hard evidence (DC 16+): Demand expertise or exceptional roleplay. DCs assume 4th-level party; adjust ± 2 for significantly different levels.

KEY NPCs

Davros Thann — Quest Giver

Disposition: Neutral (business-minded) | **Voice:** Clipped, precise, wastes no words

A middle-aged human with silver-streaked temples and ink-stained fingers. Values efficiency above all else.

Memorable Trait: Constantly checks a pocket watch, as if billing the party for his time.

Secret: Suspects smuggling—doesn't care, as long as his debt is paid. Will pay 100gp extra for leverage over Jon.

Sample Dialogue: *"I don't require justice, adventurers. I require liquidity. Take longer than three days, and I'll hire someone more... motivated."*

Jon Blassen — Antagonist

Disposition: Hostile (paranoid, desperate) | **Voice:** Oily charm that cracks under pressure

A wiry half-elf with darting eyes and perpetual sweat. Started skimming to feel important, got in too deep with the Xanathar Guild. Now a murderer, and the weight is crushing him.

Memorable Trait: Compulsively straightens objects on his desk in perfect parallel lines.

Secret: Didn't mean to kill Mira. If cornered without escape, he'll break down sobbing and confess everything.

Sample Dialogue: *"Mira? She's... on a buying trip. Calimshan. Very sudden." *laughs too loudly, wipes palms on trousers* "Is there something I can help you with? We're very busy. Inventory."*

Torin — Dock Worker (Sympathetic Witness)

Disposition: Nervous (wants to help, terrified) | **Voice:** Mumbling, avoids eye contact, trails off mid-sentence

A young human with rope-burned hands and haunted eyes. Captain Mira gave him a chance when no one else would. He heard her scream three nights ago, then silence.

Memorable Trait: Keeps touching a small wooden pendant—a gift from his mother.

Secret: Will break if shown kindness or promised protection for his family. Knows where Mira's body is.

Sample Dialogue: *"Captain was... she was good to us. Too good to deserve..." *trails off, glances at warehouse* "My mum, she's sick, and if something happened to her because I—" *voice breaks* "Please. Just leave it alone."*

Jessa — Dock Worker (Hostile Witness)

Disposition: Loyal to Jon (self-interested) | **Voice:** Sneering, confrontational

A stocky dwarf woman with a missing ear and permanent scowl. Doesn't care about right or wrong—cares about getting paid.

Memorable Trait: Spits on the ground before speaking, as punctuation.

Secret: Will immediately warn Jon if party seems suspicious. Has no real loyalty—will flip instantly if Xanathar connection is exposed.

Sample Dialogue: **spits* "Boss said no visitors. Move along before I fetch someone who'll move you." *rests hand on belt knife* "Questions are bad for your health in the Dock Ward."*

Marla Greenbottle — Tavern Owner (Information Broker)

Disposition: Friendly (loves gossip, loves coin more) | **Voice:** Warm and chatty, with strategic pauses for tips

A plump halfling with laugh lines and flour-dusted apron. Runs The Angry Eel, where every secret eventually surfaces over ale.

Memorable Trait: Wipes the same spot on the bar endlessly while listening, never breaking eye contact.

What She Knows: Mira and Jon had a screaming argument three nights ago. Mira stormed out, Jon followed. She never came back. Strange men have been watching the Scarlet Sail since.

Sample Dialogue: *"Oh, the Scarlet Sail? Terrible business." *wipes bar, waits* "Course, I hear all sorts of things." *meaningful pause* "Thirsty work, listening. Very thirsty. What can I pour you?"*

INVESTIGATION PATHS

The quest offers four non-linear paths. Players may pursue any combination, and information gained in one unlocks options in others.

Path 1: The Direct Approach (Dock Workers)

Scene: Scarlet Sail Warehouse exterior, daytime | **NPCs:** Torin, Jessa

READ ALOUD:

The Scarlet Sail warehouse looms before you, its red-painted doors firmly shut. A faded sign creaks: 'Pinty & Trade, Honest Goods, Fair Prices.' Two workers linger outside, a nervous young man clutching rope like a lifeline, and a scarred dwarf woman watching your approach with undisguised hostility.

Skill Checks:

- Persuasion DC 15 (Torin): Admits 'something bad happened to the Captain' but won't elaborate without protection
- Persuasion DC 18 or promise of protection (Torin): Reveals Mira is dead and where body is hidden
- Intimidation DC 13 (Jessa): Warns 'Jon doesn't want visitors—leave before you regret it'
- Insight DC 14: Notice Torin is terrified (not just nervous) and Jessa is hiding something specific

Consequence: If players push too hard or fail Intimidation by 5+, Jessa warns Jon. Triggers 'Hostile Warehouse': Jon flees while 4 thugs buy time.

Path 2: Tavern Information Gathering

Scene: The Angry Eel tavern | **NPCs:** Marla Greenbottle, sailors, 1 hidden Xanathar spy

READ ALOUD:

The Angry Eel squats at the end of a crooked alley, windows fogged with pipe smoke. Inside, the air is thick with spilled ale, fried fish, and unwashed sailors. A halfling woman works the bar with practiced efficiency, her eyes missing nothing. In the corner, a hooded figure nurses a drink alone, watching the room's reflection in a polished knife blade.

Skill Checks:

- Investigation DC 12: Learn Scarlet Sail ships carried 'special cargo'
- Persuasion DC 13 + 5gp drinks: Marla reveals the argument between Mira and Jon
- Perception DC 15: Notice hooded figure (Xanathar spy) watching party specifically
- Persuasion DC 16 or 20gp bribe: Marla mentions Xanathar thugs near warehouse

Consequence: Gathering info attracts Xanathar attention. Spy follows party when leaving. If not spotted (passive Perception vs. +5 Stealth), ambush: spy + 2 thugs in nearby alley.

Foundry VTT: Tavern Scene

Configure with dim lighting (lanterns, hearth), ambient tavern sounds. Place Xanathar spy token as invisible to players. Trigger ambient music change if spy is spotted.

Path 3: Breaking In (Stealth/Intrigue)

Scene: Scarlet Sail Warehouse, nighttime

READ ALOUD:

Moonlight silvers the harbor as the Dock Ward settles into uneasy sleep. The warehouse is dark save for a single lantern in an upper window, Jon's office. Two guards patrol in lazy circuits, more concerned with warmth than alertness. A side door, rooftop hatch, and main entrance offer potential entry.

Entry Options:

- Roof access: Athletics DC 13 to climb, leads to unlocked hatch
- Side door: Thieves' Tools DC 15, or DC 20 Strength (noisy)
- Bribe guard: Persuasion DC 14 + 20gp, grants 10 minutes inside
- Distraction (fire, noise): Draws guards away for 5 minutes

Inside:

- Stealth encounter: 2 thugs patrol (passive Perception 12)
- Jon's Office: Smuggling ledgers in locked desk, bloodstains on floor
- Cold Storage Basement: Mira's body hidden under ice and salt
- Cargo Hold: Crates of Tears of Lathander behind legitimate goods

Consequence: If caught, combat OR Deception DC 16 ('Jon sent us'). Failed bluff or combat alerts Jon—begins destroying evidence.

Path 4: Going Through Davros Thann

Scene: Thann counting house, Sea Ward (return visit)

If party returns with partial information or requests more resources, Davros can provide leverage.

Skill Checks:

- Persuasion DC 14: Davros admits 'Mira was always honest. Jon is the snake.'
- Investigation DC 13 (shipping records): Manifests show weight discrepancies—proof of smuggling
- Persuasion DC 15 with murder evidence: Davros offers 100gp bounty for proof of crimes

Consequence: Davros provides letter authorizing party to 'audit' Scarlet Sail. Grants legal cover but tips off Jon that someone official is asking questions.

RANDOM TABLES

Dock Ward Complications (d6)

Roll when players linger or need an encounter:

d6	Complication
1	Xanathar thug tails party, reports to Jon (increases warehouse security)
2	City Watch patrol (2 guards, 1 veteran) stops party for questioning
3	Drunken sailor mistakes PC for 'the one who owes me money'—scene draws attention
4	Rival merchant offers 50gp for 'any dirt on the Scarlet Sail'
5	Former Scarlet Sail worker (fired by Jon) shares rumors of 'strange cargo'
6	Jon's spy attempts to misdirect party with false information

What Is Jon Doing? (d4)

Roll based on how much warning he's had:

d4	No Warning / Some Warning
1	Drunk, weeping over Mira's portrait / Burning documents in fireplace
2	Rehearsing lies in a mirror / Packing valuables to flee
3	Meeting with Xanathar contact / Barricaded with 2 thugs
4	Attempting to move Mira's body / Already fled (empty office)

RESOLUTION: MULTIPLE ENDINGS

Each ending has distinct consequences. There is no 'correct' choice—only trade-offs reflecting the party's values.

Ending A: Legal Justice

Requirements: Evidence of smuggling + proof of murder

READ ALOUD:

The City Watch arrives in force, six guards and a stern magistrate who takes one look at the evidence and orders Jon clapped in irons. As they drag him away, his composure shatters. 'I didn't mean to,' he sobs. 'She wouldn't listen. I just wanted her to stop screaming.'

Outcome:

- Jon arrested, tried, executed within the tenday
- Xanathar Guild loses smuggling route (they will remember)
- Davros Thann seizes Scarlet Sail assets
- Workers (including Torin) lose jobs—company dissolved

Rewards:

- 200gp in Thann trade bars
- +1 Reputation with City Watch
- Magistrate's Commendation (+2 Persuasion with Waterdeep officials)

Future Hook: *Xanathar Guild marks party as enemies. 20% ambush chance in future Dock Ward visits.*

Ending B: Vigilante Justice

Requirements: Confront Jon directly without authorities

READ ALOUD:

Jon backs against the wall, hands raised, eyes wild. 'You don't understand—the Xanathar will kill me if I talk. They'll kill all of us!' Behind him, four thugs emerge from shadows, cudgels ready. The smell of lamp oil fills the air.

Combat:

- Jon Blassen (Veteran, AC 15, add Deception +5)
- 4 Thugs (MM p. 350)
- Hazards: cargo nets (DC 12 Dex or restrained), oil barrels (3d6 fire, 10ft radius)
- Round 4: 2 additional thugs arrive

Rewards:

- 200gp in Thann trade bars
- Warehouse loot: 150gp smuggled goods, silver dagger (25gp), potion of healing
- Mira's Compass (uncommon): Once/day points to nearest water within 10 miles

Ending C: The Cover-Up Deal

Requirements: Negotiate with Jon

READ ALOUD:

Jon's eyes narrow, calculating through his fear. 'So you want to deal. I can respect that. Pragmatists. Mira never understood pragmatism, that's what got her killed.' He unlocks a strongbox and begins counting coins.

Negotiation:

- Persuasion DC 17: 300gp to 'forget what you saw'
- Intimidation DC 15: 400gp + 50gp/month as 'business partners'

Consequences:

- Mira's murder unsolved; body 'lost at sea'
- Smuggling continues with party's complicity
- -1 Reputation with City Watch if discovered
- Jon will eventually ask for 'favors' that escalate in criminality

Ending D: Expose Everything

Requirements: Report to BOTH City Watch AND Xanathar Guild

READ ALOUD:

You've played a dangerous game, feeding information to both sides, letting them tear each other apart. Jon vanishes into the night with nothing but the clothes on his back. When the dust settles, a note appears under your door: 'Impressive. The Xanathar remembers those who play the game well.'

Rewards:

- 200gp Thann trade bars + 150gp from Xanathar informant
- +1 Reputation with BOTH City Watch AND Xanathar Guild (rare)
- Xanathar's Token (uncommon): Once/week, advantage on Intimidation vs. Waterdeep criminals

Future Hook: 'Jon's Revenge' — At levels 7-9, Jon returns with resources and a plan.

Scaling the Encounter

3 players or level 3: Remove 1 thug from each combat, reduce Jon's HP by 15, lower DCs by 1. 5-6 players or level 5: Add 1 thug to each combat, give Jon a potion of healing, increase key DCs by 1.

WAREHOUSE LAYOUT

Spatial guidance for GMs creating maps or running theater-of-the-mind.

Ground Floor (60 ft. × 40 ft.)

Main Entrance (South): Double doors, 10 ft. wide, barred. DC 20 Strength to force.

Side Door (East): Locked. DC 15 Thieves' Tools or DC 20 Strength (noisy).

Cargo Area (Central): 30×30 ft. with stacked crates (5 ft. high, difficult terrain). Contraband hidden behind legitimate cargo.

Loading Dock (West): 15 ft. platform, 3 ft. elevation. Cargo nets, oil barrels.

Stairs (NE Corner): To second floor office and basement trapdoor.

Second Floor — Jon's Office (20 ft. × 15 ft.)

Desk: Locked drawer (DC 14) contains smuggling ledger.

Floor: Bloodstains near desk (DC 12 to notice).

Window: Overlooks alley. Jon's escape route. 15 ft. drop.

Trash Bin: Contains Mira's bloodstained coat (DC 10 Perception).

Basement — Cold Storage (30 ft. × 20 ft.)

Access: Trapdoor, heavy (DC 12 Athletics to lift quietly).

Temperature: Magically cooled. Disadvantage on Dexterity checks after 10 minutes without cold weather gear.

Hidden Compartment (North): DC 15 Investigation. Contains Mira's body under ice and salt.

Lighting: None. Complete darkness.

Tactical Features

Stacked crates offer half cover. Cargo nets can trap combatants. Oil barrels create fire hazards. Loading dock elevation advantages both sides. Cold storage darkness favors darkvision.

FOUNDRY VTT IMPLEMENTATION

Scene Configuration

Scene	Lighting	Ambient Sound	Features
Thann House	Bright	Quill scratching, city	Pocket watch SFX on Davros
The Angry Eel	Dim (lanterns)	Tavern chatter, mugs	Hidden spy token
Warehouse (Day)	Dim (windows)	Creaking, seagulls	Evidence as map notes
Warehouse (Night)	Dark (token vision)	Wind, harbor bells	Patrol waypoints
Cold Storage	Dark	Dripping, silence	Body discovery trigger

Sample Evidence Macro

```
ChatMessage.create({ content: `<h3>Evidence: Mira's Body</h3><p><em>Captain Mira lies in cold storage, dagger wound between her ribs.</em></p><p><strong>This was no accident.</strong></p>` });
```

Recommended Modules

- Monk's Active Tile Triggers — Evidence discovery automation
- Token Attacher — Link evidence to NPC tokens
- Sequencer — Dramatic reveal effects
- Simple Calendar — Track three-day timeline

APPENDIX: STAT BLOCKS & ITEMS

Modified Stat Blocks

Jon Blassen (Veteran, MM p. 350): AC 15 (chain shirt), add Deception +5. Carries hidden poisoned dagger (DC 11 Con or poisoned 1 min). Cowardly, flees/surrenders at 20 HP.

Xanathar Spy (Spy, MM p. 349): As written.

Thugs (MM p. 350): As written.

Magic Items

Mira's Compass

Wondrous item, uncommon

Brass compass showing a ship instead of directions. Once per day, speak 'homeward' to point toward nearest navigable water within 10 miles. Grants advantage on Survival checks to navigate by sea.

Xanathar's Token

Wondrous item, uncommon

Tarnished copper coin with beholder's eye on one face, 'DEBT' on the other. Once per week, gain advantage on Intimidation against Waterdeep criminals. May attract unwanted attention.

Magistrate's Commendation

Document, uncommon

Official document with Magistrates' Court seal. +2 to Persuasion with Waterdeep officials. Expires one year from issue.

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Quest Design Document | Waterdep Quest

DESIGN NOTES

Beyond the typical quest design elements present such as non-linearity and consequential player agency, I specifically designed this model for use on Foundry. But I also did my best to make sure this quest can be integrated into any adventure that features Waterdeep.