

LANTERN QUAY

The Clockwork *Crossing*

Your first session as Dungeon Master

A drawbridge is stuck open. The morning bread is waiting on the other side and a brass bridgekeeper insists the signal says red. Can the party get the crossing moving?

D&D 5E / 2024 RULES / 3-4 LEVEL 1 CHARACTERS / 45-60 MINUTES

AT-TABLE REFERENCE

The Clockwork Crossing

45-60 minutes / 3-4 level 1 characters / D&D 5e (2024)

READ ALOUD

The drawbridge creaks above the canal. Across the water, a baker rests two baskets of bread on a cart. On this bank, a brass figure in a work apron blocks the bridge. Its eye clicks towards a red signal. “Red. Bridge stays up.”

1. Arrive at the bridge

Start at A and read the opening. Ask who goes over to Tess or Brassbutton. Tess gives the party one clear job. Get the bridge down.

2. Find the red cover

Tell them the keeper reads the signal. At B, close inspection shows a loose red maintenance cover over green glass. The clue turns up even if their first check fails.

Tess Calder

Wants the morning bread across the canal. Knows the keeper works from the signal. “The baker has been waiting since sunrise. Can you find out what’s holding us up?”

Checks and saves

Inspect from a distance with DC 10 Perception or Investigation. Bracing the winch alone uses DC 10 Athletics. If the handle slips, DC 10 Dexterity save or 1d4 bludgeoning.

3. Free the crossing

Lift and clip the cover at B, or use the hand winch at C to pull it clear. After seeing green, Brassbutton lowers the bridge. If springs pop loose, the stop button at D disperses them.

4. Pay it off

Lower the bridge, bring across the bread and ask each player what their character does as it arrives. Tess gives the group 8 gp.

Brassbutton

Wants to keep the crossing safe. Knows green means lower the bridge. “You can look in the signal box. Let me know when it shows green.”

Optional springs

Use a failed solo winch check to release one spring for 3 players or two for 4. AC 11, 4 HP, Initiative +1, Speed 20 ft. Attack +3, reach 5 ft., 1d4 bludgeoning. Press D as an action or wait until round 3 to stop them.

INITIATIVE ORDER

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

READ BEFORE THE GAME

Start at the canal

About 10 minutes at the table / Open with the read-aloud text on page 2

Five minutes before the game

Give the group the starter character sheets, or use their own level 1 characters. Set out a d20 and damage dice. Print the table sheet. Keep the keyed map handy for the bridge. Write the party's names and who plays each one.

Open the conversation

Tell the players that you describe what is happening and they decide what their characters try. Read the opening, then ask “What brings you to the canal this morning?” Give everyone time to answer.

Split the session

Give the opening about 10 minutes, the investigation and repair around 20, any combat up to 15, and the ending about 5. Short on time? Let Brassbutton point straight to the cover and go directly to the repair.

Pick one roll when it matters

When the plan can work and a failure would change something, tell the player the possible cost. They roll a d20 and add the bonus for the relevant skill. For the DC 10 checks here, 10 or more succeeds. When the outcome is clear, describe it and keep going.

Say what changes after a failure

If a player's inspection roll comes to 8, say “You can see green glass behind the cover. Brassbutton has a better view through that service door if someone holds it open for him. Who goes over?”

Keep the next choice visible

If the room goes quiet, offer what the characters can see. “You can get up to the signal box from here. The hand winch has a cable to it. What do you try?” Ask the next player what they are doing while the first acts.

THE TRUTH

A gust flipped the red maintenance cover over the green lens. Brassbutton is following the signal. Once the green lens is clear, he can lower the bridge.

Get the bridge down

About 20 minutes / Use the keyed map on page 6

Look at the signal

At B, show the tilted red cover and a sliver of green glass behind it. If a character examines the box from a distance, use DC 10 Wisdom (Perception) or Intelligence (Investigation). On success they spot the hinge. On failure, Brassbutton asks someone to hold open the service door so he can show them the hinge.

Lift and clip the cover

A low step and safety rail reach the box. A character who climbs the step and clips the cover up reveals the green lens. A boat hook can lift it from the rail. A character using Mage Hand can lift the light cover and click the catch into place.

Use the hand winch

At C, Brassbutton shows the party the brake pawl and the loose cable running to the signal cover. One person lifts the pawl and another turns the handle. The cable raises the cover and the catch holds it. A lone character who braces the pawl and turns the stiff handle makes a DC 10 Strength (Athletics) check.

If the winch slips

On a failed check the handle jerks back. The character makes a DC 10 Dexterity save or takes 1d4 bludgeoning damage. The handle catches on the next tooth. They can get a second person, use a lever for support, or try the box.

Follow a different plan

If the party wants to row across, there is a small boat in the canal, reached from the approach. Getting the bread baskets into it can solve Tess's problem. Brassbutton can use a boat hook to lift the cover while someone at the rail guides him.

Finish the repair

When the green glass is clear, Brassbutton can lower the bridge. Ask who clips the red cover in place so another gust can't flip it down again. The mechanism stops rattling and the people on both banks see the bridge deck settle.

End at the crossing

Brassbutton taps the green glass. “Green. Bridge comes down.” Across the canal the baker raises one basket. Ask each player how their character helps bring the bread across. Tess pays the group 8 gp and Brassbutton asks what he should call them the next time they cross.

If the party ferries the bread over by boat, Tess pays the same reward. Brassbutton keeps the bridge up and asks the watch to send a mechanic. Let the players describe where they deliver the first loaf.

OPTIONAL COMBAT

Two rounds at the winch

About 15 minutes / Use if the players want a first taste of initiative

If the table wants a short fight

If a solo winch check fails, coiled springs pop out instead of the handle slipping. A pull with the brake engaged can also release them. Use one spring for 3 players or two for 4. Put them by C.

Put the turns in order

Each player rolls d20 plus Initiative. Roll once for the springs with +1. Highest acts first. Tied players choose their order. You decide ties with the springs. Write the order down. On each turn ask “Where do you move and what do you do?”

Run the springs

A spring jumps towards the nearest standing character by the winch and strikes if it reaches one. It has one attack on its turn. It falls still at 0 HP. At the start of round 3, any remaining springs unwind and stop.

Give them a way to stop it

A character beside the stop button at D can press it as an action. All the springs fall still. If a player attacks, roll d20 plus their attack bonus. A total equal to or above the spring's AC hits.

Keep the fiction in view

At the end of the round, say where the springs and the button are. Remind the next player which parts of the crossing are within reach. Their character can help, move to the button, talk to the keeper or make an attack.

If someone drops to 0 HP

They fall Unconscious. At the start of their turns while unstable at 0 HP, roll a d20. 10+ succeeds. Three successes make them stable and three failures mean death. A natural 1 counts as two failures. A natural 20 restores 1 HP. Healing or stabilisation resets the tally. Tess has a Potion of Healing. Drinking it or giving it to someone takes a Bonus Action and restores 2d4 + 2 HP.

CLOCKWORK SPRING Tiny Construct, unaligned

AC 11 | HP 4 | Speed 20 ft. | Initiative +1 | Passive Perception 10

STR 5 (-3) DEX 12 (+1) CON 10 (+0) INT 3 (-4) WIS 10 (+0) CHA 6 (-2)

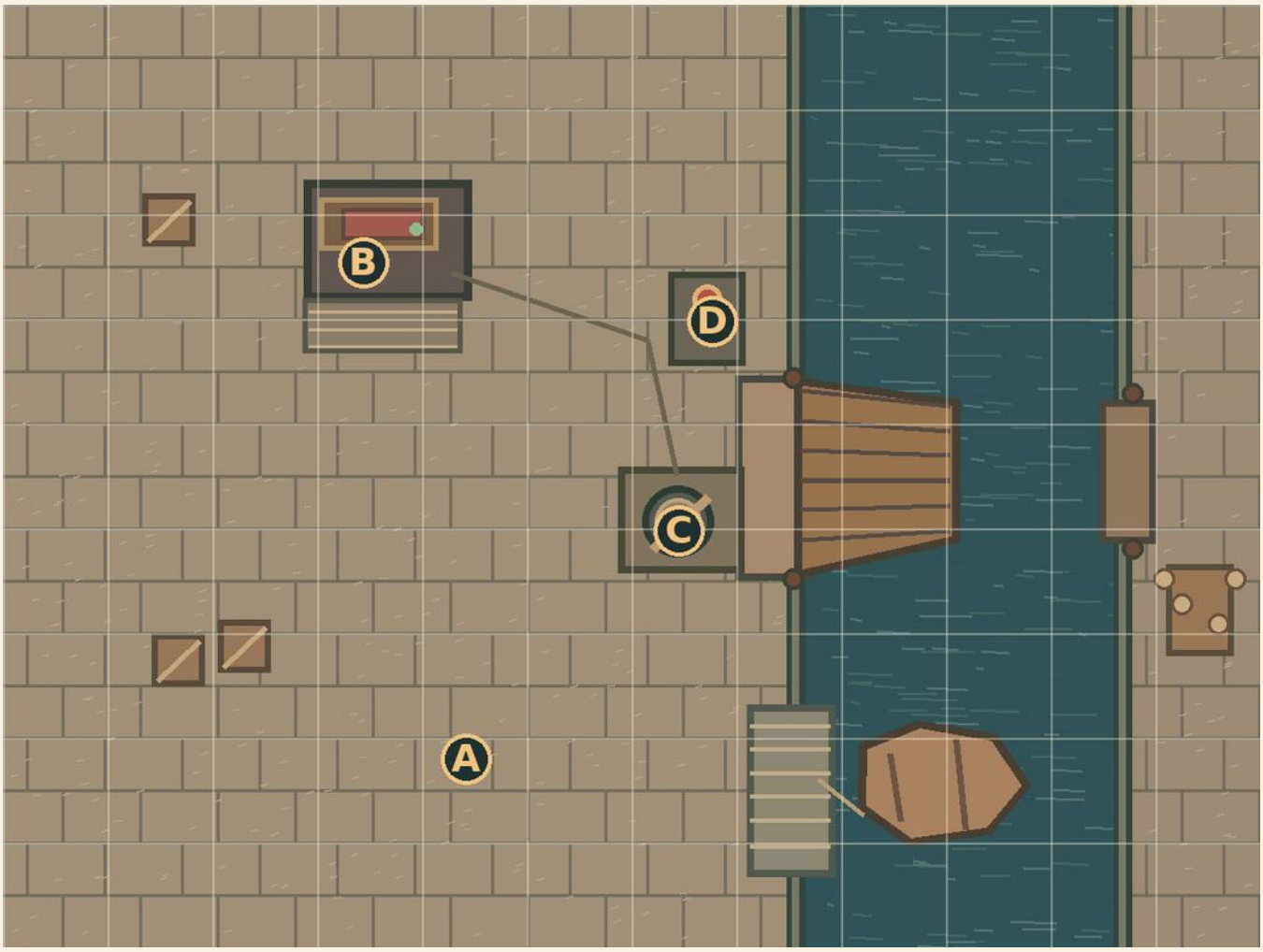
Snap. Melee attack +3, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit 2 (1d4) bludgeoning damage.

Immune to poison damage and the Poisoned condition. It has no languages.

KEYED MAP

The canal bridge

12 × 9 squares / 1 square = 5 ft.



A. Canal approach

Start here. Tess waits with an empty barrow.

B. Signal box

Use the step and railing to reach the red cover. Green glass sits behind it.

C. Hand winch

Pulls the signal cover clear. The brake pawl needs lifting before turning.

D. Stop button

Pressing it makes any loose springs fall still.

Rules material adapted from the *System Reference Document 5.2.1* by Wizards of the Coast LLC. See dndbeyond.com/srd and the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence. The rules summaries are abridged and the setting, scenario and creatures are original.