

THIS IS
**VÖRRPAL
MACE**

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This is Vorpall Mace

Title: This is Vorpall Mace

Number of players: 4

System: D&D 3.5

Setting: Fantasy

Fifty years ago the legendary band, the Clerics, turned back an army of ten thousand orcs with the raw power of their music and prevented the city of Whitecrest from being sacked.

In memory of this great achievement, bards from throughout the region have gathered every five years at the site of the Clerics' feat to celebrate – and to compete with each other in the Battle of the Bards!

Favoured to win this year are the rising stars of the goth rock band Adamantium. Recently returned from a wildly successful tour in the north, the talented sultry quartet seems certain to garner even more accolades.

That is, unless down-on-their-luck Vorpall Mace can stop them.

Glossary

carillon: a huge contraption of bells, keys and pedals which is usually built into a bell tower.

glockenspiel: like a xylophone, but metal. A row of metal plates that you hit with a stick to make notes.

lute: a plucked string instrument. Comes in various pitches and sizes.

octobass: like a double bass, only bigger.

theorbo: a large plucked string instrument with a long neck.

viol: a bowed string instrument. Comes in various sizes.

zither: a medium-sized plucked string instrument which is a flat board with strings; also known as a table harp.

MODULE OVERVIEW

Summary

The four players are members of the bardic rock band Vorpall Mace, which broke up a few months ago after a really terrible gig. At the urging of the keenest band member, the dwarf Feldspar Shalecrusher, the band has just re-formed in order to take part in the Battle of the Bards in and around a neighbouring city. They particularly want to beat their long-time rival, the band Adamantium.

The Battle is a prestigious bardic contest which takes place every five years at the site where a legendary band, the Clerics, turned back a massive army of orcs with the power of their music.

Unbeknownst to Vorpall Mace, a power-hungry lich who is the only (sort of) surviving member of the Clerics has made a pact with Adamantium and intends to use their set in the final of the contest to enslave the minds of the entire audience using a dark ritual. Vorpall Mace will have to stop him.

Note: We suggest that you hand out character sheets for your players to read while you are reading this module. Encourage the players to discuss what kind of band Vorpall Mace is, and what kinds of things they're likely to do during a performance.

The Battle of the Bards

The Battle of the Bards has three stages. The initial qualifying round takes place in the city of Whitecrest, where each band seeking entry into the contest must arrange a gig at which at least one contest judge is present. The judge's approval conveys admission into the next round.

The main Battle is an all-day event taking place on the big stage at the site of the Clerics' performance, a natural amphitheatre by the river near the village of Orcsford. The second round starts early in the morning and ends in the evening – every band which qualified to enter performs a set, and is rated

by all three judges.

The two most highly rated bands enter the final round – a showdown which draws an enormous crowd and is decided by public acclaim.

Module flow

First hour

The module begins at night on the outskirts of the city of Greatmarsh as the band arrives to **sneak the lead singer out of the mage's tower** where she is studying sorcery. Vorpall Mace then heads to the neighbouring city, Whitecrest – it's a three-day journey which should be fast-forwarded. The players **arrive in Whitecrest** the night before the last day of qualifying gigs – they need to **arrange a gig** for the following night.

Second hour

The following day, they will probably go to the Hall of Fame Museum in the afternoon to attend the **auction of an important instrument** and rub shoulders with everyone else. In the evening, apart from performing at **their own gig**, they may go to watch the **gigs** of some competing bands. Several **optional misadventures** may also occur.

Third hour

The day after that is the main **Battle of the Bards** out in Orcsford, half a day out of town. Because Vorpall Mace is one of the best bands, they will play in the late afternoon – before that the players will have an opportunity to interact with fans and other bands at the festival. They will probably get into the **final with Adamantium**, and the final showdown with the villain will happen during Adamantium's set.

Sources of inspiration

Movies like *This is Spinal Tap*, *Scott Pilgrim vs the World*, *Velvet Goldmine*.

For pacing inspiration think “underdog sports movie” – minor success at the start, significant setback in the middle and epic victory at the end.

PLAYER CHARACTERS

The player characters are members of the band Vorpall Mace.

Lead singer: Merilinel Thynne

- Half-elven; noble-born; brooding front-person.
- Studying sorcery under Master Baldwin at family's insistence; doesn't like it.
- Had a stormy break-up with Osbert.
- Had a brief fling with Reginald Sable, lead singer of Adamantium. Bears a personal grudge.
- Instruments: lead vocals; lute.

Lead lutenist: Osbert Weaver

- Human; low-born; self-taught; barmaid's son.
- Was given his first and only lute by a travelling bard called Talbot.
- Does odd jobs to supplement his income.
- Had a stormy break-up with Merilinel.
- Briefly pursued a solo career; Cecilia Arkwright is his agent.
- Instruments: lute, backing vocals.

Bass lutenist: Feldspar Shalecrusher

- Dwarf; not as talented as the others, but the band is his life.
- Owns the band's cart and mule.
- Has a day job polishing gems for a jeweller.
- Encyclopaedic knowledge of music trivia.
- Has been in other bands that have disintegrated; this is his favourite band.
- Instruments: bass lute, backing vocals.

Drummer: Rosalind Mott

- Human; young; enthusiastic; merchant's daughter.
- Newest member of the band.
- Looks up to the other characters in various ways:
- Idolises Merilinel as a role model.
- Looks up to Osbert for his virtuoso lute playing.
- Delighted by Feldspar's encyclopedic knowledge of music.
- Also a fan of Adamantium.
- Instruments: drums.

The mule: Matilda

- Aliases: Vorpall Mule.

IMPORTANT NPCs

Adamantium

Adamantium is a goth rock band and the musical nemesis of Vorpal Mace. They are known for their angst-ridden lyrics, and the sex appeal of the two leads. They can't seem to hold onto their drummers. Their instruments include a zither and an octobass.

Adamantium has been taking direction from Ulric Vine – the lich disguised as their new drummer, The Beat – in more ways than one. Their musical style has evolved under his tutelage to become darker and more dischordant, and yet oddly reminiscent (to diehard fans) of some of the Clerics' early work.

Adamantium may brag to Vorpal Mace that they will be playing a brand new song at the Battle, and they may hint that their set in the final (which of course they expect to reach) will be spectacular – but The Beat is always nearby to ensure that they don't reveal too much of his plan.

Reginald Sable (lead vocals): Androgynous male tiefling; brooding. Mirilinel had a brief fling with him, and now can't stand him. Rosalind thinks that he's dreamy.

Ida Hawthorn (lead zither): Female human.

Filton Clankwhistle (octobass): Male gnome; has a small step-ladder.

The Beat (drums): probably humanoid; wears a concealing cloak with long sleeves and a hood. Likes to bang rhythmically on things. A recent member of the band; not well-known in music circles. Keeps to himself. What no-one except the other members of Adamantium knows is that The Beat is Ulric Vine, a villainous lich who was once the zitherist of the Clerics.

Adamantium are all 6th level Bards with abilities similar to those of the player characters.

Blöodhämmer

Blöodhämmer is an all-dwarf industrial metal band. They are known for their use of sturdy all-metal instruments, including two glockenspiels, a mithril drum, and a carillon (Blöodhämmer have a highly impractical mobile one which they wheel around). It is often difficult for the uninitiated to tell the members of the band apart when they are not performing, since they are all brothers and have very similar enormous red beards.

Olaf Firebeard (lead singer; glockenspiel)

Bjorn Firebeard (glockenspiel)

Sigurd Firebeard (carillon)

Erik Firebeard (mithril drum)

Blöodhämmer are all 4th level Bards with abilities slightly worse than those of the player characters.

Velvet Bow

Velvet Bow is an elven glam rock band. They specialise in intricate melodies and complex harmonies. All four members are inhumanly beautiful, and have immensely dedicated fan clubs. They can play just about any instrument flawlessly, but favour esoteric options such as the flute, harp and viol. The family names of the members of the band are not widely known.

Nemiriel (lead vocals)

Malenor (flute)

Brethildis (viol)

Thalanir (harp)

Velvet Bow are all 4th level Bards with excellent Perform skills.

The Clerics

The Clerics were a legendary rock band – certainly the most famous group of bards ever to play in the region. Fifty years ago, they turned an invading orc horde back from the city of Whitecrest using the power of their music, at a small natural amphitheatre near what is now the village of Orcsford, by the Yarrow river. To commemorate this feat, bards from all the neighbouring cities have gathered at the site every five years for a contest which they call the Battle of the Bards. The final, a showdown between the three best bands, is held at the actual site of the original performance of the Clerics. Qualifying rounds are held in Whitecrest.

The Clerics themselves went on to have a successful career for several years before splitting up and going their separate ways. There is a large section devoted to the Clerics at the Hall of Fame Museum in Whitecrest, and a large contingent of loud and boisterous orcish fans makes a pilgrimage to each contest.

Most people remember the Clerics as a quartet – Frederick, Johannes, Mica and Lauren. There was, however, a fifth Cleric, Ulric, who left the band shortly after their famous performance and became a court bard.

Diehard fans closely followed the solo careers of former Clerics until they gradually faded into obscurity. Twenty years ago, there were rumours that the re-formed band would compete in the Battle of the Bards – but they never showed up to their scheduled gig, and nobody has ever heard from any of the members since. What even the most dedicated fans don't know is that the Clerics really did re-form for one last performance at that fateful contest – there just wasn't anyone there to see it.

The reunion was orchestrated by Ulric. After the famous performance in front of the orcs, Ulric became obsessed with harnessing the band's bardic magic to gain political power. He tried to persuade the other Clerics to join him for many years, but they did not share his ambitions, and this disagreement was the primary cause of the band's eventual breakup. Ulric went on to be an influential court bard in the capital, where he gradually built up a power base.

He spent years studying the potential of bardic

magic, and his research uncovered a ritual which would finally give him his heart's desire: if he were to perform a certain song using a set of instruments of great power, anyone who heard the song would become permanently enthralled and utterly obedient to him. Clearly, the Battle of the Bards would provide an ideal opportunity for him to amass an army of bards before moving on to Whitecrest and eventually the capital – and there were no instruments more powerful than the four that the Clerics used during their famous performance.

Ulric invited his former bandmates to Orcsford, hoping that he could simply persuade them to perform the song with him, unwittingly assisting him with his plan. Unfortunately for him, they were able to uncover the sinister nature of the song before the band's qualifying gig. They lured Ulric to an abandoned warehouse to the edge of town, and the confrontation there deteriorated into an epic musical showdown. If he could not have the band's cooperation, Ulric intended to kill them all and take their instruments.

When the battle ended, Ulric was mortally wounded and the remaining Clerics were dead. With the remainder of his strength, Ulric turned himself into a lich, using Johannes' lute to construct his phylactery – he was not about to let death cheat him out of his victory. His triumph was short-lived – he discovered that the theorbo which Mica had brought with her was a new instrument, not the one she had used thirty years previously.

He cleaned up the scene of the crime and made his escape with the remaining instruments, determined to return once he located the missing theorbo. He has been attempting to do this for decades, and will finally succeed at the auction in Whitecrest – the theorbo on auction is the real thing, and the last piece of the puzzle.

Ulric has recruited Adamantium to help him with the final stage of his plan – he has arranged to make a special guest appearance during their set in the final. He will provide them with instruments, and a new song. In exchange, he has promised them great power and influence in the new world order. Of course Ulric has to ensure that Adamantium makes it into the final – he isn't about to leave anything to chance.

Until then, Ulric is accompanying the band incognito, disguised as their new drummer, The

Beat. To avoid being unmasked before his moment of triumph, he doesn't talk, tries not to draw attention to himself, and acts only through his agents – the two undead servitors Mr Tree and Mr Herb.

Frederick Quicksilver (lead vocals)

Johannes Blackbird (lute)

Mica Carter (theorbo)

Lauren Huldreich (drums)

Ulric Vine (zither): The fifth member. Now a bard lich.

Contest judges

At least one judge has to be present at a qualifying gig to authorise a band's entry into the main contest. All three judges rate each performance in the main Battle of the Bards.

Melinda Starre: a middle-aged human woman. She is warm and encouraging, and has something nice to say about every musical performance, no matter how dire. In high demand during the qualifying round.

Nathaniel Nightshade: a drow (the name is a pseudonym). He is extremely difficult to please – his default reaction to any performance is withering disdain. His acid wit has been known to make grown dwarves cry.

Grog: an enormous orc in a snappy suit. He really likes percussion instruments, and talks loudly about himself in the third person. His opinion of any performance is directly proportional to the volume of the drums.

Cecilia Arkwright

Cecilia has been managing Osbert's solo career, arranging lucrative jobs for him among the nobles of Greatmarsh. She has recently managed to secure a permanent position for him in a duke's court, but he left for the contest before she could tell him about it. She intends to follow him to Whitecrest and make him an offer he cannot refuse.

Ulric's minions

Ulric travels everywhere with two undead servitors which are sufficiently presentable that they can act as his proxies in public. They are reasonably good at disguising themselves and being sneaky. Ulric has sent them out on missions to sabotage the qualifying gigs of the strongest contenders for the final, to ensure that Adamantium is one of the three bands that get in. Mr Tree will also be at the auction, bidding for Mika's theorbo on Ulric's behalf.

Mr Tree: a thin, pale and nervous-looking man. He speaks in a high, wheezy voice.

Mr Herb: a short and rotund man with a disturbing skin condition. He mumbles constantly and can be difficult to understand.

SCENE OVERVIEW

Collecting Merilinel from Master Baldwin's Tower [required]

Time: 30 minutes

Merilinel has been concentrating on her studies of sorcery since Vorpall Mace's breakup, holed up in Master Baldwin's tower on the outskirts of the city. Feldspar has told Merilinel that Adamantium will win The Battle of the Bards if they don't show up, and she has agreed to rejoin the band for this performance. The whole band arrives at night to help her sneak away.

Arrival in Whitecrest [required]

Time: 15 minutes

Transitional scene. Introduce the players to Whitecrest. The city is bustling with bards and their fans. Lampposts are covered with posters for gigs. Remind the players of what they need to do in Whitecrest (see scenes below).

Arrange a gig [required]

Time: 20 minutes

In order to qualify for the final of the Battle of the Bards, the players need to arrange a gig that is attended by at least one of the three contest judges. Time slots and venues are limited. Vorpall Mace also need to arrange for a sound mage to do their sound for the gig and Osbert ideally needs to acquire a new lute or have his lute repaired.

1hr of game time

Auction of Mica's Theorbo [required]

Time: 20 minutes

Feldspar has discovered that a magnificent old theorbo is being auctioned by the bardic museum within the city. It is said to have belonged to Mica Carter of the Clerics. It will be purchased by Ulric Vine (the lich bard).

Vorpall Mace's Gig [required]

Time: 20 minutes

Note: Possibly combined with one of the other gig scenes.

Vorpall Mace need to perform their gig. The venue and time slot will depend on what they arrange, but it might be immediately before or after one of the other gigs. This is your chance to do a trial run of some system mechanics before the showdown at the end. The band needs to make sure that at least one judge is at this gig to approve their entry into the Battle the next day. Ulric has not had time to arrange any specific surprise for Vorpall Mace, since they are an unexpected late entry.

Blöodhämmer Gig [optional]

Time: 20 minutes

Blöodhämmer are playing at The Coalmine. This is a chance for the players to size up the opposition and maybe form alliances with some fellow musicians. The lich bard has arranged for the padlock to the stage to be broken and for the factory next door to be running late in order to complete a large order.

Velvet Bow Gig [optional]

Time: 20 minutes

Velvet Bow are playing at The Basilisk Chamber. This is not only their entry into the Battle of the Bards – it is also a vital gig for them because a lot of rich, important people will be in the audience. The lich bard has arranged for dreammist (a drug) to be put into the smoke machine at the front of stage. This is likely to put an end to the gig and any hope Velvet Bow has of a serious career in the region.

Adamantium Gig [optional]

Time: 20 minutes

Adamantium are playing at Ilythiir. This is a chance for the players to scope out their rivals if they wish. This may be the first time that they see the new drummer, a mysterious hooded figure with tattooed arms. They may also notice members of Adamantium surreptitiously talking to strange figures (servants of the bard lich) who were also seen at the auction.

Osbert's manager makes him an offer [optional, addon]

Time: 5 minutes

Osbert's new manager, Cecilia Arkwright, finds him and makes him a really good offer: she has found him a permanent position in the household of a duke, which will pay very well and is likely to come with accommodation for him and any dependents. Cecilia is already keeping the duke waiting, and wants an answer from Osbert as soon as the contest is over.

Reginald Sable offers Merilinel a place in Adamantium [optional, addon]

Time: 5 minutes

Reginald Sable will offer Merilinel a place in Adamantium, since Vorpall Mace is clearly washed out. Merilinel would never genuinely accept this offer, but it might provide an interesting confrontation or interesting options if Vorpall Mace haven't made the final.

Mr Mott's thugs catch up with Rosalind [optional, addon]

Time: 5 minutes

Mr Mott, Rosalind's father, is a powerful Greatmarsh merchant. The city authorities have never been able to prove anything untoward about his business dealings, but his rivals tend to meet with a lot of unfortunate accidents. His only daughter is the apple of his eye and he is extremely overprotective of her.

Rosalind has neglected to tell the rest of the band that she doesn't have her father's permission to attend this contest – he normally doesn't even

allow her to go into the city without an escort. She sneaked away in the middle of the night, leaving him a note. Of course he immediately dispatched a pair of burly enforcers to find his darling daughter and bring her home.

Rosalind may believe that the two menacing thugs, Georg and Hans, can't lay a finger on her without incurring her father's fury, but they are practical men who know that she is unlikely to come quietly. They are not above using some gentle force as long as it leaves no marks and they have plausible deniability – what Mr Mott never finds out about can't upset him. Of course no such restrictions apply to the rest of the band.

Merilinel's family catches up with the band [optional, addon]

Time: 5 minutes

Merilinel's mother, Clothilda Thynne, is furious that Merilinel has gone back to her inappropriate and frivolous musical pursuits and abandoned her studies yet again. She has taken a fast coach to Whitecrest, accompanied by a few servants and perhaps one of her more dutiful children, intending to track down her errant daughter and give her a piece of her mind.

If Vorpall Mace botched the escape from the tower, she may catch up with them in Whitecrest, otherwise she may only confront them after the final in Orcsford. If the band has done well, Lady Thynne may grudgingly permit her daughter to continue performing, but if they have not she may issue her an ultimatum: come home in disgrace, or be disinherited.

Osbert's lute malfunctions [optional, addon]

Time: 5 minutes

Osbert's lute, which is very old and practically falling apart, may malfunction in some way at just about any moment – in which case he will need to have it replaced or repaired somewhere before Vorpall Mace's next performance.

The drummer's curse [optional, addon, recurring]

Vorpal Mace has terrible luck with drummers, and they should all be keeping a close eye on Rosalind to make sure that nothing happens to her before the big performance.

Stoke the players' paranoia by having all kinds of minor misfortunes happen or *almost* happen to Rosalind – slipping and falling, mild food poisoning, almost getting punched in a bar brawl, and so forth.

If there's time, this trend can culminate in an attempted kidnapping by Mr Mott's thugs or some kind of sabotage by Ulric's minions.

2hrs of game time

Battle of the Bards main event [required]

Time: 15 minutes

All qualifying bands play in the Battle, ordered from the least popular bands in the early hours of the morning to the best bands in the late afternoon. During the festival, bands sell merchandise and give away autographs. Ulric's minions may attempt to sabotage Vorpal Mace.

Battle of the Bards final [required]

Time: 30 minutes

Showdown with Adamantium. Adamantium plays first. If Vorpal Mace have reached the final, they will be backstage, otherwise they will be in the audience. Either way, Ulric will attempt to gain permanent control of every mind in the audience by performing a ritual powered by the Clerics' original instruments during Adamantium's set. At some point Vorpal Mace will notice that something is not right and be forced to respond with a countersong.

Aftermath

Time: 15 minutes

Wrap up the story and flesh out what happens afterwards. Merilinel's mother may show up to congratulate her (if Vorpal Mace is successful) or drag her home (if not). Does Osbert take up Cecilia on her offer? Does Vorpal Mace stay together, or do they fall apart again?

SCENE DETAILS

Collecting Merilinel from Master Baldwin's Tower

Master Baldwin's tower is a small two-storey keep on the outskirts of Greatmarsh. Feldspar, Osbert and Rosalind arrive with Matilda (a.k.a. the Vorpall Mule) and a cart to collect Merilinel. They are all packed and ready to set off to Whitecrest and The Battle of the Bards.

Merilinel, assisted by the rest of the band, needs to get down from her second storey room with her lute and travel bag and cross the garden and then the wall.

Complications

The garden contains a small family of shocker lizards and the wall has a small Fence of Shocking on top. Merilinel knows about both of these hazards but the rest of the band do not.

Optionally, one of the shocker lizards could stow away in Merilinel's luggage – the band may decide to use it as a mascot or a special effect.

Resolution

Either they get away stealthily or enough of a ruckus is caused that Baldwin emerges from his lab and they're forced to flee Greatmarsh in haste. If Baldwin sees them, they will be dodging Merilinel's family or their agents throughout their time in Whitecrest, otherwise Merilinel's mother will only catch up right at the end of the Battle of the Bards.

After three days on the road the group will arrive at Whitecrest.

Fence of Shocking

- +3d6 electricity damage to anyone who comes into electrical contact with the fence.

Shocker Lizards (x4)

- Exceedingly cute but also electrified.
- Size: Small.
- HP: 13
- Attacks:
 - Bite: +3 (1d4 damage)
 - Stunning Shock: 2d8 non-lethal damage to opponent with 5 foot. Reflex save DC 12 for half damage.
- Electricity sense: Will come running if the Fence of Shocking is activated.

Master Baldwin

- Level 14 sorcerer who specializes in electricity and lightning.
- He is not interested in wasting valuable research time chasing his prodigal apprentice, but will inform her family as soon as he discovers her missing (they do always pay on time, after all).

Arrival in Whitecrest

This is a transitional scene to allow you to introduce the players to Whitecrest and allow them to settle in at the inn. They should then decide what they are going to do during their stay.

First glimpse of the city

Whitecrest is a bustling city named for the tall snow-capped peak that lies just outside the city to the north-west. Ever since the Clerics famously turned back an army of ten thousand orcs with the power of their music, Whitecrest has been a gathering place for bards throughout the region.

The city gates are open late tonight, anticipating the crowds which are still making their way inside, ushered by guards.

A noticeable feature in the middle of the city square is a massive monument commemorating the Clerics' feat, which features statues of all the Clerics. People are often surprised that there are five of them – the Clerics are usually remembered as a quartet: Frederick, Johannes, Mica and Lauren. If players consult their bardic knowledge they may recall that there was a fifth Cleric, Ulric Vine, who went solo shortly after the famous performance to take up a position at court.

The current atmosphere

The annual Battle of the Bards contest is only days away and the city is packed with musicians and their fans – and, of course, merchants catering to both. The lampposts are already filled with posters for qualifying gigs, and among the many lesser-known bands three names stand out: Blöodhämmer, Velvet Bow and Adamantium.

Arrival

Vorpal Mace, along with their cart and mule, make their way through the busy streets to the inn where Feldspar has booked rooms for them – the Kettle Drum, which is run by his friend, Korlak Steelfoot. After they have settled in, their most urgent need is to arrange a gig at which at least one contest judge will be present – they need to be approved by one judge to qualify for entry into the contest. They may also need to consult a sound mage to make sure that their music is amplified.

Because they have arrived so late, venue options are limited – they may be able to perform before or after another band at the Basilisk Chamber, the Coalmine or Ilythiir, but if they don't want to do that they can try to persuade Korlak to let them hold a gig at the Kettle Drum.

In the afternoon, the ancient theorbo of Mika Carter is being auctioned at the museum in the city. Feldspar should know about this and be quite interested in attending. This is quite a high-profile event, and everyone who is anyone is likely to be there – Vorpal Mace could leverage it for free publicity, find a judge to come to their gig, or just socialise with the other bards.

Vorpal Mace may also wish to scope out the competition later in the evening by attending one or more gigs held by the other bands, before or after their own.

The Kettle Drum

The Kettle Drum is simple but clean and well-kept. Korlak Steelfoot, the dwarven owner, is an acquaintance of Feldspar's. Most of the other patrons are here to attend the Battle of the Bards and many of them are likely to be fans of one of the major contenders. Korlak is not particularly musically inclined, and even-handedly keeps the peace.

Notable persons

- **Korlak Steelfoot:** the dwarven innkeeper. He has a metal peg leg, the result of a mining accident he doesn't like to talk about. An amiable businessdwarf with a keen eye for profit.
- **Tharg:** a half-orc; Korlak's only employee. He's not very bright, but he juggles a diverse portfolio of inn-related skills.

Arranging a gig

Korlak won't be too eager to host a gig in the Kettle Drum – the last time he allowed one, he was cleaning up the property damage for days. Vorpal Mace may be able to persuade him to make a special exception, possibly by offering him a cut of the door.

Auction at the Hall of Fame Museum

The Whitecrest Hall of Fame Museum has a large, popular exhibit devoted to the Clerics.

It is a stately building in the nice part of Whitecrest. A long line of people is waiting to get inside – harried museum employees are directing auction spectators to the left and those who actually want to see the exhibits to the right.

The exhibits

The museum is packed with the bardic relics of hundreds of bands. The displays feel somewhat cramped – posters in some of the most cluttered sections inform patrons that the museum is being renovated, and is raising funds to build of a new wing.

The largest section of the museum is devoted to the Clerics – here visitors can view a few artifacts and read about the history of the band:

- After the band's dissolution, Frederick Quicksilver (vocals) and Johannes Blackbird (lute) remained friends and often performed together. Mica Carter (theorbo) had a successful solo career. Lauren Huldrich (drums) became a music teacher.
- The lesser-known fifth Cleric, Ulric Vine (zither), left the band shortly after the famous performance and became a court bard.
- Twenty years ago the Clerics were rumoured to be reuniting for a final performance at the Battle of the Bards, but they never arrived.
- They were never heard from since, and are assumed to be dead by now.
- None of the band's instruments were ever recovered, until the theorbo which is currently on auction.

Before the auction

Far too many people have crowded into the auction hall's beautifully furnished interior. The theorbo rests under glass on an embroidered cushion on a small podium.

Notable Persons

- **Zook Weaselfoot:** the director of the museum. He is a tiny gnome with enormous glasses. Zook is hosting and conducting the auction.

- **Lord Grey:** a local nobleman. He knows absolutely nothing about music, but he knows that the theorbo is extremely valuable, which is why he wants it.

- **Mr Tree:** a thin, pale and nervous-looking man who has disclosed little about himself other than that he represents a buyer who wishes to remain anonymous. He is in fact one of Ulric Vine's undead minions; a lichling.

- A large audience of assorted bards and fans. Blöodhämmer, Adamantium and Velvet Bow are all likely to be here – they want to be seen by their fans, and they may throw in a few token bids just for the publicity. The contest judges are likely to put in an appearance as well.

The auction

Zook Weaselfoot will welcome everyone to the auction, and remind the spectators that the proceeds will be spent on a new wing. He will then summarise the history of the instrument, emphasizing that this is the only original instrument used at the Clerics' fabled performance that has ever been found, before declaring the auction open.

The only serious bidders are Lord Grey and Mr Tree, but the famous bands are likely to throw in some small initial bids just for show. If Adamantium and Vorpall Mace end up bidding against each other they may push their finances further than wisdom dictates. Lord Grey may let them stew for a while before raising the stakes.

After a dramatic pause in which it appears that Lord Grey may have won, Mr Tree will begin placing his bids, and it will soon become apparent that his patron is far more wealthy than Lord Grey. Lord Grey will storm out in a temper when the auctioneer refuses to accept further bids from him, knowing that he does not have the funds to place them.

Mr Tree will quietly pack up the theorbo and make a hasty exit, refusing all questions. He will get into a waiting coach and disappear into the city – he is taking the theorbo to Ulric's base of operations; a small rented manor house somewhere in the city.

The players and other bands can afford to bid a few hundreds of gold pieces for the theorbo. Lord Grey can bit a few thousand. Mr Tree can bid tens of thousands if needed.

The Coalmine

The Coalmine is a large, run-down warehouse on the outskirts of Whitecrest. Named for the black coal dust that gathers in it from the surrounding forges and steelworks, the vibe is more grime than grunge. However, the working-class gnomes and dwarves that form the basis of its clientele don't seem to mind, and the cheap drinks ensure that it's full on most weekends. The terrible acoustics and uncultured audience have made this venue unpopular with more refined musicians, but more raucous bands have often found the enthusiastic crowd to their liking.

Decor

- It's a large warehouse covered in soot.
- None, but some patrons claim it has a certain rugged charm (mostly dwarves).

Typical patrons

- Low-class workers and manual labourers (often dwarves or gnomes).
- Dwarven adventurers nostalgic for the mines of their home.
- Human adventurers of both genders out to prove their masculinity.

Features

- Iron bars separating stage and audience.
- Padlocked gate in said bars for use by the more popular bands.

Suggestions to bands

- Play in armour.
- Play loudly.

Playing tonight

- Blöodhämmer

Ulric's sabotage plans

Ulric's minions arranged for the neighbouring armoury to experience a dangerous chemical spill earlier in the day, which has caused an important order to be delayed. The factory employees are working into the night, and their noisy hammering threatens to drown out the sound of the band.

In the event that Blöodhämmer manages to outcream the noise, a secondary threat is in place: the padlock for the stage has been broken, and nothing separates the band from the rowdy fans in the mosh pit.

The Basilisk Chamber

Whitecrest's most famous nobles, successful adventurers and other celebrities frequent this upmarket alternative bar. Many bards got their big break after performing here – but if you don't impress, you won't be invited back. Elvish wine and fine spirits are the drinks of choice and drug use is rife. Dreammist (see below) is the current narcotic fad.

Decor

- Small but incredibly well-appointed stage and dancefloor.
- Chairs covered in expensive brocades.

Typical patrons

- Wealthy and famous adventurers looking to show how wealthy and famous they are by being here.
- Rich, bored noblemen and women looking for excitement.
- Wealthy elves looking for somewhere that serves a decent bottle of wine.
- Talent scouts for nobles from elsewhere looking for up-and-coming young bards.

Features

- Wealthy patrons.
- Expensive alcohol.
- Great acoustics.
- Excellent sound technicians.

Suggestions to bands

- Make sure you impress.

Playing tonight

- Velvet Bow

Ulric's sabotage plans

Ulric's minions have tampered with the smoke machine, contaminating the magical reactants with dreammist. At some point during Velvet Bow's performance, the stage will be flooded with dreammist. This is likely to put an end to the gig and any hope Velvet Bow has of a serious career in the region.

Dreammist

- Vapors of ground mordayn (a dried herb) steeped in a small amount of boiling water. Raw mordayn and water with mordayn and deadly poisonous.
- Gives exotic beautiful visions for 1d20 + 10 minutes.
- Afterwards, Will save of DC17 or feel depressed and desparate for more Dreammist for 1d4 hours.
- Expensive.

Ilythiir

No one knows how Whitecrest's most famous goth club manages to stay open. It's close to empty on most nights unless there is a special event or Adamantium is playing, and many regulars appear to have spent most of their earnings on elaborate outfits rather than at the bar. The presence of the occasional dark elf has led to rumours that club is funded by a drow matriach, and that there is secret entrance to the Underdark concealed in its back rooms. A far less fanciful explanation is that a wealthy Whitecrest noble is a closet fan of the genre and keeps it open for his or her own amusement.

Decor

- Aims to look like a massive basement merged with a system of caves and largely succeeds.

Typical patrons

- Adventurers with mysterious pasts (dressed in black).
- Morally ambiguous spell-casters (dressed in black).
- Anyone aiming to escape their lawful good companions for an evening.

Features

- The occasional drow.
- Actually funded by a drow matriach.
- Actually has a magically hidden secret entrance to the Underdark.

Suggestions to bands

- Dress in black.
- Hire your own lighting equipment.

Playing tonight

- Adamantium

Adamantium's gig

The players may notice at this point that Adamantium's musical style has changed somewhat.

Ulric's sabotage plans

None for the moment, since Adamantium is playing. If Vorpal Mace ends up playing their gig here, Ulric's minions will need to come up with something in a hurry.

Battle of the Bards

The Battle happens just outside Orcsford, in the natural amphitheatre by the river which is the site of the Clerics' most famous performance.

The main event

The main event starts early in the morning – all the bands which have qualified to enter have their moment on the stage. Unless something catastrophic happened to any of them the previous day, Blöodhämmer, Velvet Bow, Adamantium and Vorpall Mace should all be participating. These bands are widely considered the most talented, and will be saved for last – the less popular early time slots will be filled by less well-known contenders.

A bustling festival has sprung up all around the amphitheatre. Bands are selling merchandise and signing autographs. Vendors from Orcsford are selling meat pies, ale and other refreshments.

Ulric's minions may take this opportunity to sabotage Vorpall Mace somehow before their performance.

Adamantium will play a brand new song in this round – one which diverges somewhat from their normal style. It sounds darker and more dischordant – but the player's bardic lore may allow them to see the similarity to some of the Clerics' early work.

The final

The final is a showdown between the two bands rated most highly by all three judges during the main event. One of these bands should be Adamantium, and unless something has gone dramatically wrong the other is likely to be Vorpall Mace.

Should Vorpall Mace not make it into the final, they will probably be in the audience to cheer for Adamantium's opposition – otherwise they will be backstage preparing for their set. Adamantium will be the first band to play, with the other finalist scheduled to perform after them.

A surprise guest star

After the first song of Adamantium's set, the members of the band will put their usual instruments away and reveal a previously unseen collection: an old, ornate lute (held by The Beat), a

zither (Ida), a theorbo (Reginald) and a drum (Filton).

The theorbo is clearly recognisable as the one that was sold at the auction, and if Vorpall Mace consult their bardic knowledge they may be able to identify the others as fitting the descriptions of the other legendary instruments of the Clerics.

Reginald Sable will dramatically reveal that The Beat is none other than Ulric Vine, the Fifth Cleric. Ulric will then briefly address the crowd before leading Adamantium into the second song – his evil mind-control ritual.

Adamantium will attempt to disguise the true nature of this performance, attempting to distract the audience with a lot of flashy special effects – dark rolling mist, magical lightning and the like.

Vorpall Mace should at some point realise that the crowd is being influenced by a magical mind-control effect, and it should be obvious that they need to respond with a countersong.

Ideally Vorpall Mace should make their way onto the stage so that their countersong is also amplified. If they're backstage this won't be too hard. If they're in the audience it might be more difficult. Once they're on stage, a dramatic play-off can begin!

If the countersong succeeds, the crowd can potentially mob the stage to help overpower Ulric, although he may simply flee and leave Vorpall Mace to finish their set.

Resolution

If Adamantium and Ulric complete their ritual, the crowd will be permanently enthralled and enslaved to Ulric's will. If Vorpall Mace manage to escape they may start a bardic resistance against the new lich overlord.

If Ulric is stopped, Vorpall Mace are likely to become instant celebrities and start a bright new career.

Ulric's demise may only be temporary if his phylactery survives – it's hidden inside Johannes Blackbird's ancient lute. Will the players find it, and if they do, will they be able to bring themselves to destroy this priceless bardic artifact?

Aftermath

Some outstanding issues which the players may wish to resolve at the end of the module:

- What happens to Vorpal Mace? Will they stay together, or will they go their separate ways?
- How will Merilinel and Osbert resolve their relationship?
- Will Merilinel confront her mother, and will Lady Thynne accept or reject her daughter's chosen path?
- What answer will Osbert give to Cecilia?
- Will Rosalind be able to evade her father's thugs?

SYSTEM SUMMARY

D&D

Skill checks: Roll d20 and add the player's skill bonus. The target number is a difficulty set by the DM (usually 20 for reasonably difficult tasks). Opposed skill rolls may also be used (e.g. *Hide* vs *Spot*).

Saving throws: Roll d20 plus the appropriate saving throw (*Fortitude*, *Reflex* or *Will*) against a DC given by the rules or declared by the DM.

Combat: Roll d20 plus *Initiative* to determine order of action (higher goes first). Roll d20 plus *Attack* (either *Melee* or *Ranged*) against opponents *AC* to determine whether an attack hits. Roll damage as described in the attack and subtract from target's hit points (*HP*).

This module doesn't feature much combat. Most conflict is resolved via skill checks (especially *Perform*), magical effects or simply narration. See *How a gig works* below.

Bards

Spells

A bard casts arcane spells, which are drawn from the bard spell list. He can cast any spell he knows without preparing it ahead of time. Every bard spell has a verbal component (singing, reciting, or music). The Difficulty Class for a saving throw against a bard's spell is 10 + the spell level + the bard's Charisma modifier (for spells that have a saving throw).

A bard can cast a number of spells from each spell level per day as detailed on their character sheet. A higher level spell slot may be used to cast a lower level spell if needed.

Bardic Knowledge

A bard may make a special bardic knowledge check to see whether he knows some relevant information about local notable people, legendary items, or noteworthy places. A successful bardic

knowledge check will not reveal the powers of a magic item but may give a hint as to its general function. A bard may not take 10 or take 20 on this check; this sort of knowledge is essentially random.

DC for types of Knowledge:

DC 10: Common, known by at least a substantial minority drinking; common legends of the local population.

DC 20: Uncommon but available, known by only a few people legends.

DC 25: Obscure, known by few, hard to come by.

DC 30: Extremely obscure, known by very few, possibly forgotten by most who once knew it, possibly known only by those who don't understand the significance of the knowledge.

Players have their bonus to the bardic knowledge check noted on their character sheets.

Bardic music

Once per day per bard level, a bard can use his song or poetics to produce magical effects on those around him (usually including himself, if desired). While these abilities fall under the category of bardic music and the descriptions discuss singing or playing instruments, they can all be activated by reciting poetry, chanting, singing lyrical songs, singing melodies, whistling, playing an instrument, or playing an instrument in combination with some spoken performance.

Starting a bardic music effect is a standard action. Some bardic music abilities require concentration, which means the bard must take a standard action each round to maintain the ability. Even while using bardic music that doesn't require concentration, a bard cannot cast spells, activate magic items by spell completion (such as scrolls), or activate magic items by magic word (such as wands).

Countersong (Su): A bard with 3 or more ranks in a Perform skill can use his music or poetics to counter magical effects that depend on sound (but not spells that simply have verbal components). Each round of the countersong, he makes a Perform

check. Any creature within 30 feet of the bard (including the bard himself) that is affected by a sonic or language-dependent magical attack may use the bard's Perform check result in place of its saving throw if, after the saving throw is rolled, the Perform check result proves to be higher. If a creature within range of the countersong is already under the effect of a noninstantaneous sonic or language-dependent magical attack, it gains another saving throw against the effect each round it hears the countersong, but it must use the bard's Perform check result for the save. Countersong has no effect against effects that don't allow saves. The bard may keep up the countersong for 10 rounds.

Fascinate (Sp): A bard can use his music or poetics to cause one or more creatures to become fascinated with him. Each creature to be fascinated must be within 90 feet, able to see and hear the bard, and able to pay attention to him. The bard must also be able to see the creature. The distraction of a nearby combat or other dangers prevents the ability from working. For every three levels a bard attains beyond 1st, he can target one additional creature with a single use of this ability.

To use the ability, a bard makes a Perform check. His check result is the DC for each affected creature's Will save against the effect. If a creature's saving throw succeeds, the bard cannot attempt to fascinate that creature again for 24 hours. If its saving throw fails, the creature sits quietly and listens to the song, taking no other actions, for as long as the bard continues to play and concentrate (up to a maximum of 1 round per bard level). While fascinated, a target takes a –4 penalty on skill checks made as reactions, such as Listen and Spot checks. Any potential threat requires the bard to make another Perform check and allows the creature a new saving throw against a DC equal to the new Perform check result.

Any obvious threat, such as someone drawing a weapon, casting a spell, or aiming a ranged weapon at the target, automatically breaks the effect. Fascinate is an enchantment (compulsion), mind-affecting ability.

Inspire Courage (Su): A bard with 3 or more ranks in a Perform skill can use song or poetics to inspire courage in his allies (including himself), bolstering them against fear and improving their combat abilities. To be affected, an ally must be able to hear the bard sing. The effect lasts for as long as

the ally hears the bard sing and for 5 rounds thereafter. An affected ally receives a +1 morale bonus on saving throws against charm and fear effects and a +1 morale bonus on attack and weapon damage rolls. At 8th level, and every six bard levels thereafter, this bonus increases by 1 (+2 at 8th, +3 at 14th, and +4 at 20th). Inspire courage is a mind-affecting ability.

Inspire Competence (Su): A bard of 3rd level or higher with 6 or more ranks in a Perform skill can use his music or poetics to help an ally succeed at a task. The ally must be within 30 feet and able to see and hear the bard. The bard must also be able to see the ally.

The ally gets a +2 competence bonus on skill checks with a particular skill as long as he or she continues to hear the bard's music. Certain uses of this ability are infeasible. The effect lasts as long as the bard concentrates, up to a maximum of 2 minutes. A bard can't inspire competence in himself. Inspire competence is a mind-affecting ability.

Suggestion (Sp): A bard of 6th level or higher with 9 or more ranks in a Perform skill can make a suggestion (as the spell) to a creature that he has already fascinated (see above). Using this ability does not break the bard's concentration on the fascinate effect, nor does it allow a second saving throw against the fascinate effect.

Making a suggestion doesn't count against a bard's daily limit on bardic music performances. A Will saving throw (DC 10 + 1/2 bard's level + bard's Cha modifier) negates the effect. This ability affects only a single creature (but see mass suggestion, below). Suggestion is an enchantment (compulsion), mind-affecting, language dependent ability.

How a gig works

A gig should consist of about three songs, and how well it goes depends mostly on the players' *Perform* checks. If the gig is taking place in a sufficiently large venue, the band will need to consult a sound mage to make sure that the music is amplified properly.

You don't necessarily need exactly twelve rolls per gig – use your discretion when asking players to make checks. The performance should be a team effort, not just four people playing instruments

separately.

Encourage the players to help you narrate the results of checks creatively – if someone rolls well, perhaps they have launched into a spectacular solo. If someone rolls poorly, explain what has gone wrong, and cycle to the next player, giving them the opportunity to help the band recover from the fumble.

These checks don't just represent how well the band members are playing their instruments – they can also encompass other kinds of showmanship, like dance moves or magical special effects. Reward the players for inventing interesting things to include in their performance.

Countersong

Please read *Countersong* under *Bardic music* – it's an important part of the final scene.

Ulric Vine

Lich, 11th-Level Human Bard

Hit Points: 74

Alignment: Neutral Evil

Base Attack Bonus: +8

Stats

Strength: 10 (+0)

Dexterity: 16 (+3)

Constitution: –

Intelligence: 19 (+4)

Wisdom: 14 (+2)

Charisma: 16 (+3)

Saving Throws

Fortitude: +4

Reflex: +7

Will: +10

Combat

Initiative: +3

Melee attack: +8

Ranged attack: +8

Armour class: 19

Special attacks:

Negative Energy Touch Attack:
1d8+5* negative energy damager
plus paralysis.

Fear aura: See below.

Skills

Concentration: +15

Hide: +15

Knowledge (arcana): +18

Listen: +12

Move Silently: +16

Perform: +20

Search: +10

Sense Motive: +16

Spellcraft: +20

Spot: +12

Feats

Toughness: +3 HP (already included).

Skill focus (Perform): +3 to Perform (already included).

Phylactery

Ulric's phylactery is stored inside the neck of his lute, which he appropriated from Johannes Blackbird.

Fear Aura

Creatures of less than 5 HD in a 60-foot radius that look at the lich must succeed on a Will save or be affected as though by a fear spell from a sorcerer of the lich's level.

NOTE: This doesn't affect any of the player characters (they are all level 5 or higher) but will affect almost everyone else at the final except for Adamantium.

Bard spells

Spells per day

4th: 1; 3rd: 3; 2nd: 3; 1st: 3

4th Level

Modify Memory: Changes 5 minutes of subject's memories.

Shout: Deafens all within cone and deals 5d6 sonic damage.

Dominate Person: Controls humanoid telepathically.

3rd Level

Clairaudience/Clairvoyance:
Hear or see at a distance for 1 min./level.

Phantom Steed: Magic horse appears for 1 hour/level.

Dispel Magic: Cancels magical spells and effects.

Crushing Despair: Subjects take –2 on attack rolls, damage rolls, saves, and checks.

2nd Level

Eagle's Splendor: Subject gains +4 to Cha for 1 min.

Entrhall: Captivates all within 100 ft. + 10 ft./level.

Detect Thoughts: Allows

“listening” to surface thoughts.

Hold Person: Paralyzes one humanoid for 1 round/level.

1st Level

Disguise self: Changes your appearance.

Identify: Determines properties of magical item.

Unseen Servant: Invisible force obeys your commands.

Ventriloquism: Throws voice for 1 min./level.

0th Lvl

Summon Instrument:

Summon's one instrument of the casters choice.

Mr Tree and Mr Herb

Mr Tree and Mr Herb are very human-looking lichlings. They represent Ulric's interests in mundane society. Although they seldom engage in combat, they are more than capable.

Mr Tree is a thin, pale and nervous-looking man. He speaks in a high, wheezy voice.

Mr Herb is a short and rotund man with a disturbing skin condition. He mumbles constantly and can be difficult to understand.

Hit Points: 40

Initiative: -1

Armour class: 13 **Attacks:** +7 slam attack (does 2d6+5 damage)

Special

Fire Vulnerability: Take double damage from fire attacks.

Cold Touch: -4 Str, Con and Dex for 4 rounds if Fort save DC 18 fails. Only once per day. Used instead of a Slam attack.

Regeneration: Reform a few minutes later after being killed if not burned.

PLAYER CHARACTERS' BARD SPELLS

0-LEVEL BARD SPELLS

Dancing Lights: Creates torches or other lights.

Detect Magic: Detects spells and magic items within 60 ft.

Ghost Sound: Figment sounds.

Know Direction: You discern north.

Light: Object shines like a torch.

Lullaby: Makes subject drowsy; -5 on Spot and Listen checks, -2 on Will saves against sleep.

Mage Hand: 5-pound telekinesis.

Mending: Makes minor repairs on an object.

Message: Whispered conversation at distance.

Open/Close: Opens or closes small or light things.

Prestidigitation: Performs minor tricks.

Read Magic: Read scrolls and spellbooks.

Resistance: Subject gains +1 on saving throws.

Summon Instrument: Summons one instrument of the caster's choice.

1ST-LEVEL BARD SPELLS

Alarm: Wards an area for 2 hours/level.

Animate Rope: Makes a rope move at your command.

Cause Fear: One creature of 5 HD or less flees for 1d4 rounds.

Charm Person: Makes one person your friend.

Cure Light Wounds: Cures 1d8 damage +1/level (max +5).

Disguise Self: Changes your appearance.

Feather Fall: Objects or creatures fall slowly.

Identify M: Determines properties of magic item.

Obscure Object: Masks object against scrying.

Silent Image: Creates minor illusion of your design.

Sleep: Puts 4 HD of creatures into magical slumber.

Unseen Servant: Invisible force obeys your commands.

Ventriloquism: Throws voice for 1 min./level.

2ND-LEVEL BARD SPELLS

Alter Self: Assume form of a similar creature.

Calm Emotions: Calms creatures, negating emotion effects.

Cat's Grace: Subject gains +4 to Dex for 1 min./level.

Delay Poison: Stops poison from harming subject for 1 hour/level.

Eagle's Splendor: Subject gains +4 to Cha for 1 min./level.

Enthrall: Captivates all within 100 ft. + 10 ft./level.

Shatter: Sonic vibration damages objects or crystalline creatures.

EXTRA NAMES

Bands

Mind Flayer, Androsphinx, Chaos Beast, Wood Orc

Dwarven

Female: Adra Redshadow, Ruby Ogremaul, Hematite Blackanvil, Rona Strongheart, Nita Shalequarry

Male: Dain Blueblade, Gogut Ringcaster, Banauk Moonhelm, Vek Axemaker, Thirut Foeslayer

Elven

Female: Urthel, Celariel, Dúwen, Himeleth, Pelineldes

Male: Serongol, Daechir, Nordaer, Sarthor, Tinuven

Gnome

Female: Salena Tinkerfritz, Stemble Tripwrench, Lisalena Nozzletopple, Camilia Gearfizz, Emmalisa Wrongclock

Male: Firkle Glitzbomb, Janton Copperbyte, Zickin Blunderpiston, Stilton Bentspark, Gilford Scrapspindle

Human

Female: Annora Vilde, Claricia Louethorn, Evelune Ash, Hilde Inhok, Merewen Esthall

Male: Alexander Suthetun, Robert Haneholt, Wymer Forlang, Everard Quelm, Turstin Birche

Credits

Thanks to our playtesters: Michael Dewar (DM), Wayne Human, Marc Pitterman, Neil Muller and David Sharpe.

Also thanks to everyone who made suggestions at the CLAWs module-writing workshop.

This module is inspired by the silliness of D&D bards, and every rock band movie ever made, particularly *This Is Spinal Tap*.