

# The Old World from A - Z

## B is for Bawd

The ignorant view the Bawd as nothing more than a dealer in illicit or degenerate pleasures. While some aptly fulfill this vulgar definition, in truth, the Bawd is far more than this: The Bawd is an expert on human nature, whose tools are social connections, they live, profit, fail, and die by their wits and relationships.

### Bawds and their Role in Society

Among the poor, everyone is looking for an opportunity - the same may very well be true about the rich as well. The Bawds are those who constantly seek out and exploit whatever opportunities arrive. Let's follow the day of a Bawd in Altdorf to better illustrate how a Bawd turns relationships into cold hard cash - who profits and who loses in the every day ebb and flow of chance, friendships, and acquaintanceships.



Gustav awakens late - his head pounding from the revelry of the night before. He leaves the room at his friend's house, a woman, with whom he often refers his other friends to. In return, Gisela, a cousin of his, doesn't mind should he crash out after a late night. Besides, his presence reassures her that she won't be subject to violence by some of her patrons.

Gustav, a little worse for wear, but feeling lean and hungry, feeling that ache for gold. Walking down the alleyway, he notices a window of a bakery left open, a knife on the counter. Without missing a step he deftly grabs the knife from the windowsill and pockets it, seeing this crime of opportunity as a blessing to himself and a lesson to the baker to beware of unscrupulous characters.

The money in his pocket from last night is sadly not his - he turns down a side street to a local tough. Ten gold was borrowed the week before last to pay some bills, a tab at an inn which he had failed to pay. An exchange of gold, and Gustav is on his way.

He stops at the market, looking for 'lil Edvard, a local street urchin. Gustav asks if any customers have been about, but there haven't. Edvard also mentions that he knows of any other opportunities about right now, and Gustav drops a couple of pennies into Edvard's palm. Edvard and his friends will keep an eye out and pass on any pertinent information for the next week or so.

There! A familiar face! Gustav sees hundreds if not thousands of faces every day - a name... After a few seconds it comes to him: Adlebracht! Gustav runs his hands down his shirt to straighten the wrinkles out and combs his hair into some semblance of order with his hands before bursting in front of Adlebracht! Greetings, a quick reminder of past revelries and recognition finally appears on Adlebracht's face. Gustav quickly recalls the details he knows of the man with the events about town. Women? No... happily married as well as some mistresses... Drink? No... too suspicious... Gambling? Ah, yes! Dogs... he fancies dogs! Some quick talk, and a promise of a short yet exciting interlude sways Adlebracht from his day's tasks. Within minutes Gustav has steered Adlebracht through side streets, paving over Adlebracht's misgivings with banter and jokes. Before Adlebracht can change his mind, Gustav is handing him a pint of ale and they are standing amongst a group of young men circling a small pit. He confides what information he knows, plays up the risks, colors the details to ensure Adlebracht's interest. His advice proves good, after a half an hour Adlebracht has won gold as the bodies of the dogs are hauled out of pits. Pleased at his success, Adlebracht gives a few gold to Gustav, whom Gustav escorts back to where they have met. A little later, Gustav will have to kick back some of his change to his friends at the pit, but it's still a nice tidy sum for an hour's work.

Gustav pauses to freshen himself up before heading to the Four Winds Coach House. He awaits the coaches, yet sees no one he's familiar with. Still, he does manage to point some people in the right direction receiving a few pennies and escorts one lady to a local inn, where the landlord gives him some pennies for guiding her to his establishment. While he waited at the coaching inn, he tried to peddle off some fake jewelry he carries with him, but no luck, although a small pillow was sold to a boarding traveler worried about the damage the trip would do to her derriere. Disappointed with the day's returns, he wanders off in search of other sources of funds.

An hour spent at local taverns looking for clients, getting information, and learning of the word on the street proves equally disappointing. Just after leaving however, he over hears a conversation. The "Fish", a local gang of hoods are going to give Stuttering Steffan a beating. Gustav pauses - turns about and mentions to them that he's heard that Steffan has been lurking about a different area - a few schillings are passed and Steffan's location is known. Gustav leaves, wanders to the local market, and then passes a few pennies on to Little Edvard, who then rushes off to inform Stutterin' Steffan that the Fish are after him, and they seem to know where he's been

about.

Steffan than pauses for a dinner, something to fill his stomach, for soon wealthy revelers will head this way looking for the pleasures that these streets offer.

Bawds are resourceful individuals who live through contacts and social networks, they comprise part of the informal infrastructure of city life. It's their business to know who does what and where. Need company for the evening? They can find the man or woman for your needs. Need someone muscular for a job? They can put you in touch with the right person. A forged document? They know where one might just find it. Need to find a stolen item? For a fee, they may be able to put you in touch with the person who recovered it. Need a quiet way out of town? They know just the alley. Bawds are the intermediaries between the clientele and specialists, as well as between specialists: they know the pickpockets, the dealers, the smugglers, the muscles, the parties, the slumming nobles, the thieves, the watch, the merchants, and everyone else who winds their way through the streets and warrens of the city.

Their roles in this city are myriad:

Guides around town for those looking for something particular or to get a general feel.

Petty criminals, extorting, pandering, bribery, theft, even violent crimes.

Informants for all, for anywhere between a penny and a bag of gold, they may reveal what you want to know.

Entertainers who can tell a yarn or gossip wildly - others can sing, dance, or play an instrument.

Dealers in forbidden pleasures, whether flesh or drugs, a bawd if not in possession of these knows somebody who is.

Contacts for those wanting discreet help, be it hired muscle or a murder for hire.

Bawds wheel and deal, receive cuts from those they do business. For those in a business befitting a low profile, Bawds serve as a means of filtering out their clientele and isolating them from public knowledge. A bawd must work hard to ensure that others around them respect their judgment and their discretion. Not all bawds are honest, in fact honesty can be a liability. What they all seek is a veneer of respectability. Some bawds cooperate closely with criminal elements, leading their clientele into ambushes or signaling to pick pockets, selling shoddy goods or working closely with con artists to exploit their customers, but these individuals don't often last long. Others also provide information to the watch, and for these individuals, life is very short indeed.

There are a lot of misconceptions about bawds. Women often serve as Bawds, using their charm to lure in business, or using their femininity to put customers at ease, as a comely young woman is less likely to intimidate than a dangerous looking young man.

Nor is it true that all Bawds are poor! The wealthy often seek out diversions from those who are willing to do anything for money. Wealthy gentlemen, known as ramblers, with too much time and money on their hand often go "a rambling" through a city or town, trying out its seedy nightlife. So common is this now that they often publish "Rambling guides" that highlight a town's pleasures, its best and worst places to drink, women and men of moral turpitude worthy of note, and other bits of information to those with peculiar tastes. The writers of these books are little more than literate bawds with a sense of adventure.

## **Why Become a Bawd?**

### **So what is the allure of being a Bawd?**

An Aversion to Hard Work - Back breaking work at the docks isn't for everyone. Nor is slaving away for some alchemist or physician who seems more concerned about how clean their equipment is rather than passing on the knowledge you were taught. Whatever the reason, you've found that the lifestyle of a bawd, the social interactions is a lot easier than slaving away for someone who doesn't acknowledge your contribution. And with a work ethic like this, you'll probably find it difficult to ever move on!

Living by Your Wits - Some people are enamored with the thought of getting by with the tools one is given: Wits. Fast talking, con jobs, manipulating people, always staying a step ahead, some people never feel alive unless they've got something to constantly keep them on their toes - and this life is one requiring a bawd to always stay on top, always stay alert, and always keep the eyes peeled for the next big opportunity.

Seduced by the Lifestyle - Some do the job because they love the fringe benefits, the cons, the drugs, the sex, the stolen goods... Being a Bawd is about meeting peoples' needs, and for some bawds, meeting your own needs along the way is one of the perks! Many students and others who hire bawds often themselves become bawds, deriving so much pleasure and knowledge from their own experiences.

Social Butterfly - Some people unwittingly become Bawds. They just like to socialize, meet new people, and over time people turned to them for information or for other services: they didn't seek the career out, the career sought

them out. These Bawds are often the most successful, with an easy going casual lifestyle, one that seems less driven by profit and more driven by the force of their personality.

Specialized Knowledge - Not everyone succeeds in their career, some fail to make the next move. Students who train in medicine or the like can often find that less legitimate groups and individuals often find a use for their skills.

### **Who would become a Bawd?**

*Alchemist's Apprentice* - Slaving over hot furnaces, sweeping up powders, meticulously cleaning various alchemical apparatuses, and not getting paid! It doesn't take much to distract the uncommitted or unhappy apprentice to an alchemist. Few legitimate and established alchemists would risk their livelihood and reputations to manufacture illegal drugs and chemicals - but many apprentices are not so principled.

*Noble* - Surrounded by excess - the danger of indulgence is great. Some have not the sufficient moral fiber to escape their desires and revel in the carnal. The noblemen who have become bawds see themselves as "gentleman adventurers", or more commonly, "ramblers". For those most part, the nobility that embrace this lifestyle are regarded well by their kin as connoisseurs of the finer things in life, ales, art, pipeweeds, wine and the like. While many have darker motivations and pursuits, this is the image commonly espoused of the rambler. As of late, the rambler have turned to pen and ink, sampling the pleasures of town and cities, the inns, taverns, and more tellingly, houses of ill-repute, and documenting their suggestions for other rambler who purchase these "Rambling Guides".

*Physician's Student* - Physician's Students often pick up knowledge about illnesses and diseases that often provide them with contacts among those who provide sexual services, while others use their knowledge of medicines and drugs to provide illicit concoctions for their clientele. Both of these services allow for numerous opportunities at exploring the seedier or more decadent sides of the Old World. Such activities rarely meet the approval of their mentors; usually those disgruntled or shamed students who have left their masters become bawds, a few manage to continue their apprenticeship by pursuing their bawdish career secretly on the side.

*Student* - Few students are as dedicated to their studies as their tutors would like, many more indulge in the more carnal of studies. Many, free from the bounds of their parents and other authority figures revel in the liberties they can take. Studies can be neglected, and it is a short journey from employing the services of a bawd to performing the services of a bawd.

*Wizard's Apprentice* - The demands of being a Wizard's apprentice are particularly grueling. Many begin with an inflated sense of the power they'll shortly wield, the long hours of menial chores and mind-numbing studying. Like the other students, a handful become disillusioned and turn to other pursuits they find more pleasing.

### **It's a Living...**

How does a bawd make their living? Where does their wealth come from? How do they pay their bills? Some bawds barely scrape by, other fabulously wealthy, or of noble heritage and never worry about their wealth. A few live by barter, trading through an exchange of services. Other sources of revenue: the provision directly by them of sexual services, which usually provides a few silver or gold per night. For those who provide protection for those engaging in prostitution things prove more fortuitous, each of their workers providing them a few silver or gold coins on a good night, the amount depending greatly on the quality of the workers, they're honest, and the demands the bawd makes. Those dealing in information make far less generally, a few copper and silver a day if lucky, those acting as guides and escorts make anywhere between nothing all the way up to handsome rewards offered by nobility. Those dealing in gambling can win hundreds in minutes, only to lose it all seconds later. The last significant way of profiting for bawds is drugs, which like all the other revenues for bawds greatly depends on the whims of their clientele. For these bawds, revenues are inconsistent and uncertain.

A few run houses of ill repute, others provide escorts for the wealthy and noble. Some successful bawds run drug dens or associate with smugglers and drug manufacturers. Some earn their wealth and power through the dealing of information and social networking, these powerful individuals sit suspended in a web that they've woven, anchored by reciprocity and obligation to those around them. These brokers in secrets, guilt, and shame are among the most powerful of bawds.

### **Moving On...**

The life of a bawd is feast or famine, with little insulation from crisis. It is easy to run afoul of the authorities as well as criminal elements; a few close scares are often sufficient to urge a bawd onto other career choices.

*Bodyguard* - Those who work as escorts of nobles often find themselves defending their charges in a bar fight. It is not hard for one to transition from being a guide to being a guard. Those that do so are often the more thuggish of bawds, the ones who rely upon strength and intimidation to meet the needs of the clientele.

*Fence* - Most fences were formerly bawds, it's a smooth transition from dealing in services to dealing in goods. Many bawds dabble in stolen goods, after a while some deal solely in such illegal merchandise.

*Other Rogue Careers* - Many bawds turn to other careers, gambling being exceedingly common, while others turn to lives of petty crime, committing burglaries and other crimes of opportunity. Some take up the life of a footpad, luring the hapless into dark alleys where evil befalls them.

### **Adventuring Seeds and Vignettes**

*A Bad Batch* - A bawd unwittingly begins selling some bad drugs. The players may need to hunt the bawd down to stop the flow of poisonous drugs. Or the players may have to defend the bawd from vengeful friends and family. Why were the drugs poisoned? Who is the source? Was someone out to set the bawd up? This could lead eventually to a crime war.

*High Stakes* - The wealthy PCs encounter a friendly and out-going bawd. A few nights of revelry concludes with the players being suckered into a high stakes gambling game. Unbeknownst to them, the whole game has been arranged by a wealthy nobleman deep in debt. With the assistance of the bawd, the players, wealthy with loot but lacking noble title have been drawn into a game they are certain to lose. The bawd commiserates with them on their loss, acts ashamed to have gotten them involved in a costly game, and works to assist them in paying off their steep debts, although his real motivation is to find out their sources of income. Failure to pay the debt promptly draws pressure from the exceedingly aggressive noble.

*Lady Lost* - A successful bawd, mistress of her own bordello has many noble patrons and business has been well. However recently her most desired girl has disappeared after a rendezvous. Suspicions are that a jealous and possessive nobleman has made off with her. The truth is much different: the escort had learned some information regarding many of her noble clients, and her kidnapper has abducted her to learn her secrets. The madam does not know why she is taken, but many nobleman become involved: some want her back, some are angry and jealous that someone has made off with her, and some are fearful that their secrets will be divulged.

*Word Gets Around* - Whatever sensitive piece of information the players have, whether it is regarding their current investigations or an embarrassing secret from their past, their rivals or opponents. Their edge? The information provided to them by a bawd who has learned their secrets: maybe one of them talked in their sleep and a lady of comfort overheard them. Maybe street urchins saw or overheard them, possibly servants of some sort privy to their secret have passed the information on. Nonetheless the bawd has learned that there is good money in their secrets and soon he or she is mining them for all they are worth. The players must put a stop to this by hunting down, bribing, discouraging, or silencing the bawd. Cunning players can wage a war of disinformation, or turn the cunning bawd around in such a way that the bawd begins to reveal information on the player's enemies instead.