

Rosso's Guide to organized play in **WATERDEEP**



By Andrea Lucca



Introduction

First of all: who the hell is IL ROSSO?

My name is Andrea Lucca and I am one of the first Adventurers League organizers in Italy.

I started my experience as organizer 4 years ago managing a little group of players in a little game shop near Milano during the Rage of Demons Season, then I became the organizer of Milano's main League, played in the European University of Mind Sports UESM, an important game association in the city where tons of player come every Friday to play D&D.

Right now, UESM Adventurers League is one of the biggest in Italy with a minimum of 50 player each Friday night with peaks of over 100 players.

This huge number of players forced us to improve the organization and led us to find new ways to entertain our fellows with D&D.

Last year we also developed our Shared Campaign called [Codex Venator](#), now being played side by side with the official AL in many groups around Italy.

Of course, none of this it would have been possible without a great team of people that chose to engage with me this crazy quest.

In particular I would like to thank:

- **Nicola DeGobbis**, the guy that brought AL to Italy when it seemed impossible
- **Alex Melluso**, my irreplaceable sensei and first member of our guild
- **Enrico Romeo**, the one who can
- **Luca Bianco**, who helped me in writing this (while he was driving the car).
- **Davide Milano**, the only amazing, wonderful, awesome and spectacular rule-expert I like (and the one who reviewed this text and totally didn't change a thing of his own description. True story.)
- **Christian "Zoltar" Bellomo AKA The Sage Advice**, who always pushes us forward
- ...and all the **Spiders from Mars** of Uesm Milano for being the best DM group an organizer can hope to have.

And why did you write this guide?

In Italy, the Adventurers League became very popular in 2016, after the first *Epic* event hosted at *Lucca Comics & Games*.

Most of the Italian players joined AL groups to meet new people, to have fun, to feel part of a great community, and to experience the emotion to play the same adventures and fight together with other groups for the same objective, like in the *Epic* event.

But, as you know, AL adventures aren't multi-table and must be played as written to remain legal.

Anyway, as you probably know when you organize a big AL group, being well-scheduled and with a proper amount of DM is not everything: your players will expect something great from you and you must do your best to keep the group close-knit and let everyone have fun.

For this reason, during the Storm King Thunder Season, when we played together the hardcover module too, we developed some tricks to give the players an immersive mood & feel. Factions were very useful for this.

Before the actual session each faction had briefings, where the players could meet and discuss with their comrades, sharing suggestion of their character development or preparing themselves for the next adventure.

Moreover, we have created private groups on social networks where the players of each faction could talk between session, engaging in roleplaying or plotting.

After this faction briefings we started the event all together with a general introduction to make the people feel the sensation of being summoned by their faction to engage the same quest.



During the game, if some table reached some important intel (or put in motion some crazy plan) we updated all the other table to let the players feel they were doing the adventure in the same moment, together, as a team.

These are only some little examples of what we have done in the past, but now, with Season 8 everything has changed, and those old tricks probably will not work anymore. Probably.

We think that Waterdeep: Dragon Heist is a great module and we want to run it with our fellow AL players but, due to its peculiar features, this can be very hard to be manage in an AL group, harder and harder with more players.

For this reason, I developed new tricks and I decided to put them in this guide: I hope that some of you will find this useful.

Why is Dragon Heist different?

If you already read Dragon Heist and you have experience with playing an Hardcover Module in an AL group context, you will immediately understand why Dragon Heist can easily become trickier to organize.

In all the previous seasons the heroes were summoned by the factions because a major threat was putting the Forgotten Realms at risk. Well, except that time when an evil fog brought us in another plane of existence ruled by a cruel vampire lord, but that's another story.

This time apparently there isn't any major world threatening danger and it is very likely that most of your players won't be part of a faction.

Moreover, the first chapters of the adventure are an urban sandbox, heavily bound to what the players want to do and which aspect of Waterdeep every-day life they want to explore.

Because of this, it can be very difficult to imagine how to play this adventure with random groups and DMs.

At this point you are maybe asking yourself why you should get crazy trying to prepare this hardcover for your AL group instead of playing only the easy Adventurers League modules.

My answer is that Dragon Heist is a shockingly beautiful adventure, probably one of the best published till now and I'm sure it will create a lot of hype in the AL community: many of your players will want to play it.

From the next chapter of this guide I will show you some of the tricks that I developed for our gaming group. None of those are perfect and maybe they won't work in your group, but I hope, at least, to inspire you in finding new way to manage *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist* in the organized play context. If that happens I would be honored if you will share you experience with me: you can find my contacts at the end of the module.

I wish you the best fun possible in the streets of the City of Splendors.

Il Rosso

Gangs of Waterdeep

or “how to give motivation to your players’ characters”

Spoiler alert!

From now on I will start spoiling most of the contents of the adventure to explain how to prepare it, so, **please**, don't read anymore if you want a spoiler-free experience.

Let's start!

As previously described, most of Dragon Heist experience evolves around the choices of the players and what they want to achieve in Waterdeep.

The adventure begins with the characters already in the most famous inn of the Sword Coast, the **Yawning Portal**, and, after some troubles, they will be immediately get in touch with Volo that will hire them for a rescue mission.

I'll explain later how to deconstruct the different parts of the hardcover within the Adventurers League's logic but, for now, we can say that the first chapter of the HC is about this first quest.

The important and fundamental point of Dragon Heist happens at the end of the first chapter: when the group solve this first quest they receive a **property** in Waterdeep as a reward from Volo.

This isn't a flavor reward but a central part of the hardcover: the property won't become just base of operation floating in the background but a **real in-game activity** that the group will need to manage, especially during the second chapter, based on what the group wants to do with that property. The adventure suggests to the DM different things that can happen around that place: will the group restructure the building and

pacify the ghosts that haunts the manor, or will they let the property in a state of neglect? Will the group start a new brewery activity, or will they transform the manor in a “heroes for hire” agency? There are really no restrictions in what the group can do with the manor and this choice will affect how the city and their inhabitants will react and change.

In a public AL group, hosted in a shop or gaming center, is very unusual to have exactly the same group with the same DM each week, of course, and this can be a big problem for an adventure module of this type.

The list below points out which are for me the main objectives that you should keep in mind if you want to organize this hardcover:

1. the players need a reason to stay together
2. choices made during each session must affect the following ones
3. the DMs group **MUST** know what happened at the other tables

During the next chapter of this guide I'll explain my solution to achieve all these objectives in the group-fluid reality of the Adventurers League.

Gangs!

The first and most important is to create several gangs which players **and DMs** must join.

The table below show how many gangs you should have depending of the average number of players in your AL group:

# of players	Suggested # of gangs	# of players in each gang	# of DMs in each gang
0-15	1+	10	2
15-30	2+	11	2
30-45	3+	12	3
45-60	4+	13	3
60-75	5+	14	3
75-90	6+	15	4
90+	7+	15	4

As you can see each gang is composed by several players and DMs: the general idea is that the players of a gang should always play together (split in groups of 3-7 players) with one of the DMs of that gang and their fellow comrades.

For the number of players in your AL you should always consider developments: if your number of players is close to the upper value it's better to consider the next row, to be prepared if new players show up without warning.

Creating your gangs

You should organize an introductive session with your players for create the gangs: it can also be a good moment to introduce new players and help newbies with character creation and introduce them to the rules of the Adventurers League.

Then, following the table above, you should make groups of players and DMs and give them time to decide some important points like

1. The name of the gang (Appendix A lists some example)
2. A brief history of this gang (are they a group of urchins grown up in streets of Waterdeep? An enterprise company of

artisan and merchants? Or a band of mercenaries from distant lands?)

3. The objective of the gang (they want to become rich and famous or maybe open the best brewery in the city?)
4. Organize the roles (with this system you know approximately which role your gangs have and need, help the players to create well balanced gang that cover most of the roles)
5. Suggest to each gang to create a social or instant messaging group to communicate and organize themselves between sessions – this is also very useful to close-knit the gang.

All the characters inside a gang should stick to the gang's objectives and should feel a part of it: if your players don't like this solution or don't understand it remember them that life in Waterdeep is difficult without anyone watching your back or without some good connections.

At the end of the first chapter of the hardcover, when the groups take their manor from Volo, you should award one manor to each Gang: in this way each gang can try to pursue their objectives using the manor and making the most of it.

Warriors! Come out to play!

or “How to give proper coordination and momentum to your gangs”



Now that you know how to compose the gangs, I'll show you how to make the gangs work from the organizer's viewpoint.

Usually the organizer should prepare the game event, being sure that there will be enough DMs for the number of signed players. Each AL group has its own way to set up tables: you should consider meeting with players and DMs at least 30 minutes before game time.

Briefing

It is important to give time and space for each gang to brief and spend some time together to

- Recollect what happened to the gang in the **last adventures** (especially for players who missed some previous episode)
- Create AL-legal groups with players and DMs of each gang. Each group should be made by players from a **single gang**, we'll manage problematic issues below
- Assign gang **objectives** to each group
- Allow meetings between gangs to find **alliances** or declare **rivalry**

This model is designed to have several fixed DMs for each gang so that they can update each other about the actions of the characters on each group. It's a tricky part, especially for the most open-world sections of the adventure and,

because of this, we developed a DM-logsheets that wraps up data that DMs should share with which other. After every session the DMs should fill the logsheet and share it with the others (Google Drive is your best friend here). You will find this logsheet in Appendix B.

The actions of each gangs during the event are happening in game at the same time: for this reason, the organizer should inform all the groups if one group does some public noticeable action. Also, at the end of the event or in the following days the organizer should inform everyone if something the groups did caused some changes in the city or his inhabitants. For example, since all the mansions are in the same avenue, it would be a true annoyance for everyone if the gang of the Crazy Brewers did something really, really stupid attracting the attention of the City Watch on the whole street – and your players will love the feeling of a shared stage. Below, I will focus on interactions between the groups and their effects on the story.

Zen and the art of manor maintenance without money

If you read the new rules for the AL, you noticed that is literally impossible for a group to put together the gold required to fix and repair the

mason (if they want to) using the AL gold gaining system.

To overcome this problem, let the different gangs plan what to do with their manor, ask them what action they want to put their effort in, then manage changes and upgrades of the manor as a local story award, and give them the resources depending on the completion of side-quests. Then, give to all players news about the status of various manors: let the competition kick in and your players will battle to get the fancier manor.

I assure you that your players will enjoy a lot the idea of doing something together with the other tables in-game during the event (like in Epics):

what I've learned during my experience as organizer is that sometimes giving them this feeling is far enough to radically change the flavor even if everybody is playing the same adventure.

Villain and villains

Note: in Dragon Heist events and the villain are determined by which season of the year the adventure is set in. Choose one season (and consequently one main villain) for all your groups **but** remember that all the other evil guys of the setting aren't motionless puppets: **use them** and their thugs to rock the boat and shake up the life of your different gangs and groups.



For a few dragons more

or “What do we play each night?”

In this chapter I deconstructed the adventure parts into typical AL events timing: following this planning you will give an AL-legal path for your players to enjoy all the hardcover adventure.

This plan is made considering the slow advancement rules (where players get half of the advancement points) otherwise your player risks to get out of tier before finishing the story. More about this on Appendix 3.

I'll also point out which AL module can be used in parallel with the hardcover chapter: this can be useful if you have more than one playing table for a gang during an event, if you want to add variety of what the gangs can achieve in the City of Splendors, and if you need a quick ready-to-use adventure for emergencies (see the next chapter about this).

Each session is intended to last 3-4 hours of play.

Session #	Expected PC level	Hardcover chapter	Dragon heist event	Complementary module
1	1	1	Introduction at the Yawning Portal and assignment from Volo	DDAL08-00 Once in Waterdeep
2	1	1	Xanathar Guild's Hideout	DDAL08-01 The map with no names
3	2	2	Manor management + one level 2 faction quest	DDAL08-02 Beneath the city of the dead
4	2	2	Manor management + another level 2 faction quest	DDAL08-03 Dock ward double cross
5	3	3	Fireball event, temple of Gond + one level 3 faction quest	DDAL08-04 A wrinkle in the Weave
6	3	3	Searching the city, Grandhul Villa + another level 3 faction quest	DDAL08-05 Hero of the Troll Wars
7	4	4	Seasonal chain, part 1 + one level 4 faction quest	DDAL08-06 Purging the blood
8	4	4	Seasonal chain, part 2 + another level 4 faction quest	
9	5	4	Finding the key to the vault	DDAL08-07 Into the dark
10	5	4	The Vault	DDAL08-08 Crypt of the dark kiss
11	5	5	Villain's lair, part 1	DDAL08-09 Fangs and frogs
12	5	5	Villain's lair, part 2	DDAL08-10 The skull square murders

Major events

The major events in the table should be easily adapted to be played in a single night, giving a proper amount of time for roleplay, relations development and the sudden appearance of enjoyable competition between similar gangs. DMs should give their players proper time and DMs from various gangs can and should communicate if their gangs are going to face similar challenges to let them interact, help each other or start feuds.

Faction quests

Chapter 2 presents **six factions** (classics like Emerald Enclave, Harpers, Lords' Alliance, Order of the Gauntlet, Zhentarim and the new

acquisition Force Gray) and for each faction there are four little quests, one for each level from 2 to 5, described in one or few lines, that could easily fill half a night and support the group in finding some special resources to be used to upgrade and develop their manor.

We'll publish modules, available for free on the DMSGuild, for each of these little quests, to show how to expand them and to let them better fit this purpose.

You can use these quests as supplemental objectives to be played during the main campaign or as secondary adventures for characters who missed some episode and fell a little behind.



When a fireball explodes

or “Unexpected players and how to address them”

If you are a seasoned Adventurers League Organizer you know that a plan doesn't always come together.

New players will pop up from nothing 10 minutes before the session when you have prepared the tables already and DMs will go missing for unexpected personal events. It will happen. Those problems are normal and unavoidable in the organized plays reality and you shouldn't get crazy in trying to prevent them. You need to live with them.

Here I collected some suggestions to turn the unexpected in expected. These tricks will work fine with the Gangs system.

Alliance

When a gang during an event doesn't have enough player to create an AL-legal table it should form a temporary alliance with another gang and form mixed table.

Remember that **PVP combat is not allowed** in Adventurers League: the different players gangs should coexist in peace, or at least with a gentlemen rivalry.

The host gang will decide mission and objective for the session, and all the players and all the gangs involved will receive the same benefit and rewards.

Men at arms

When a new unexpected player comes at the event he'll not be assigned at any gang: don't push him to choose a side immediately.

Let him play as a mercenary instead: he will help a gang in exchange of the normal rewards provided by the adventure and, within a couple of sessions, he can try to get into a gang.

Web of masters

As previously explained each gang have its own pool of DMs and this means that there is a worst case scenario: all DMs of a gang are missing!

How can you manage this? Well, the truth is that you can't, or at least you can't without previous organization.

With the gang system a DM must know at least the basic events happened to his players in previous adventures. As organizer you must speak a lot with your DMs all together before and after every gaming session: this moment can be helpful to prepare and share the most important actions of the gangs.

The more your DMs speak with each other, the better: they will share useful information useful in case anybody needs to take care of another gang. If you decide to use the report in Appendix B remember to share them with all your DMs.

Adventure modules

Official AL modules can be easily prepared and can offer a quick escape if you know a little in advance that you will have a critical situation with your DMs pool.

The table in chapter 4 lists which adventure module you can use during each session – anyway, every module can be easily adapted, according to the situation.

Final Notes and References

I truly hope you have found this guide helpful or at least interesting. Maybe most of my tricks won't work in your group but I hope at least I inspired you in finding new ways to entertain your players.

I'll update this guide with notes, updates and corrections so please feel free to contact me if you have comments, feedback or you want to share your experience with me.

Here are my contacts and some reference links of what I have done in the D&D world till now:

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My Adventurers League group in Milano at UESM

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/412198182448459/>



Codex Venator - our D&D 5th Edition Shared Campaign set in an dark version of Italy

<http://www.codexvenator.it/>

I'm also one of the Adventures Designer of the successful kickstarter founded 5th edition module

Journey to Ragnarok

<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/micheleparoli/journey-to-ragnarok-a-norse-mythology-adventure-fo>

Appendix A — Sample gangs

You can choose an option or roll 1d20 to select a feature

1d20	Name	Backstory	Objective	Manor
1	The Crazy Brewers	Artisans united by the passion for beer brewing.	Build a brewery and find the perfect beer.	Brewery pub
2	Dock Ward Irregulars	A band of urchins from the poor districts.	Find new unexpected ways to solve mysteries.	Private eye agency
3	Punishers	A group of lethal protectors willing to clean the streets from criminal scum.	Fight against any criminal band in Waterdeep, at any cost.	Base of operations
4	The Sages	A group of scholars in search of lost knowledge.	Gain knowledge of arcane secrets hidden in Waterdeep.	Library
5	The Usual Unknown	A band of robbers and thieves, masters of cons and deceptions.	Money. Power. With more money.	Gambling house
6	Heroes for Hire	Sellswords in search of a job.	Help everybody in need, for the right price.	Gym
7	Sewer rats	Outcasts of disparate races and origin.	Try to find their place in Waterdeep. Out of the usual terrible mess.	Fight club
8	The league of extraordinary gentlemen	Noble philanthropists associated with strange creatures.	Become famous with spectacular discoveries.	Private club for extraordinary gentlemen
9	The Shou Lung Dragons	A group of martial artists (with turtles!).	Looking for new powerful villains to defeat.	Dojo
10	The Jokers	A group of acrobats and jesters.	Become the most famous artist gang in the city.	Circus
11	The Rolling Statues	A band of musicians with a new cutting-edge kind of music.	Become the greatest musicians of the town and make the biggest concert.	Theatre
12	DCM investigations	Finding their friend, an investigator gone missing.	Make DCM's dream of a private eye agency real.	Private eye for arcane and supernatural
13	The Black Paw	A group of ninjas all from small races (halflings, gnomes, kobolds...).	Recover their lost relic, their Sensei's scroll.	Restaurant, with a hidden dojo
14	Sons of the Dragon	Ex cult of the dragon, now devoted to Bahamut and metallic dragons.	Establish the faith on Bahamut in Waterdeep.	Temple of the platinum dragon
15	Gorgon's Demo	Former underdark citizen escaped from the madness of Rage of Demons.	Create a safe haven for underdark refugees.	Inn without windows

16	Madame Eve's Spooky Store	People escaped from the realm of Barovia, willing to establish a new home.	Looking for strange artifacts to recreate the ancient tarots.	Bizarre and weird arcanities shop
17	The Faces	A group of anarchists who wants a Waterdeep free from the Masked Lords.	Find and remove the masked lords from their place.	Laundry
18	The Merrie Fellows	Former nobles and scholars who steal from the rich giving to the poor.	Steal from the rich and give to the poor, laughing at corrupted officers.	Soup kitchen
19	Ubtao's elite	Envoys of a merchant prince, looking for new trades	Find new precious items to bring to Port Nyanzaru.	Tradeport
20	The Firehair	Artists and warriors faithful to Sune	Finding and defending the beauty of the world.	Sunite temple of beauty



Appendix B — DM logsheet

DM	Date	Session/Chapter

Gang name	Average party level	Objective

Report the gang's actions with factions

Report the gang's actions with other gangs

Notable NPCs

Crimes committed and events with the guards

Notable actions that will go on your newspaper

Appendix C — How to AL-legal

This season presents a new ruleset to be used. These rules are good because they make this season playable without the previously required monster-slaying, but they can present some issues to be remembered.

Time

As now, every hour spent playing the hardcover gives your players one advancement checkpoint (ACP from now on). This means that after **24 hours** of play a character will be level 6 and unable to join your groups.

24 hours can be very few to play a complex and heavy-roleplay oriented adventure like Waterdeep: Dragon Heist so it will be useful to ask your players to **use the slow progression**. In this way you'll have a good amount of time to play. You **can't force** anyone to use the slow progression but warn your players that not using the slow progression will cause their character to miss the finale. Get an agreement on that and let the normal progression to lower level character, so that they can catch up the others.

Money

The main issue about money is to get the ~1000gp required to get the manor "up and running". The Adventurers' League Content Catalog gives you the opportunity to get an **agreement with Volo** for that. Let each gang embellish its own manor and report them like in a fictional newspaper – remember that all of this should not give any numerical advantages, **just social** ones.

Remember also that some items will have lowered costs for AL play, like the components for the key to the Vault of Dragons. Check the **AL content catalog** for a complete list.

Treasure

The AL content catalog includes also the **Story Items** that you should manage as a single item for your organized play.

If someone, I have no idea *how*, manages to get the Blackstaff or the complete suit of a Masked Lord, you will have the opportunity for some crazy and enjoyable scene – just remember that story items will not be carried out of the adventure.

Keep in mind that players can keep and use any consumable magic item in the adventure (and buy it).

Remember also that your players will be able to get only items for tier 1 characters: even at level 5 they won't have enough tier2 treasure points to buy a *Portable hole* (the most problematic item available) so you should not worry too much about it.

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