

# FLASHBACKS TO UNSEEN ADVENTURES

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*How To Run a Clip Show*



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# Introduction

The purpose of this document is to help, inspire and guide Dungeon Masters on how to run a clip show session filled with flashbacks of never-before-seen adventures.

There are numerous potential reasons for a DM to consider running a clip show like this. These include but are not limited to: looking for a narrative change of pace, needing to get your party out of an impossible situation they got themselves into, wanting a creative way to introduce a new PC or another element that will drastically change the party dynamic, as an excuse to give (or take away) equipment and money, or to sneak in information about the bigger world and/or the campaign arc.

A clip show could also be framed as PCs selling themselves to a potential new employer with stories about their previous experiences, or used as an opening session to a campaign that begins with the PCs already having a shared history with one another, or as a reflective way for the PCs to end an ongoing campaign.

Unfortunately, this isn't a pick-up and run session and requires some prep and/or improvisation on the DMs part when running. As the players have a great deal of agency in determining the story of each "flashback", it is recommended that the DM and the players have prior experience playing together.

You are free to use any or all of the ideas in this guide for yourself. However, you will find that tailoring the ideas for your table and campaign will be immensely more rewarding.



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# Overall Session Structure

The session structure for a clip show can be roughly divided into three parts: Establishing the Framework, Flashbacks and Wrap Up.

## 1. Establishing the Framework

The purpose of this part is to let the players know what this session would be about and to help them set expectations.

I started my clip show session by describing the start of a combat scene before immediately cutting away to a tavern five months after the combat and asking the PCs to describe what had happened during said combat. After this, I transitioned into the Flashbacks part of the session by having one of the NPCs in the tavern ask the PCs what else they had done in the last five months.

## 2. Flashbacks

This is the "clip show" part of the session. Using the framework established, you play out a number of previously unseen events/encounters experienced by the party.

I started by asking one player to describe an unknown event/encounter experienced by the party in the last five months. I put a word limit of 5 on the descriptions to keep the player from getting too specific. Then taking my cues from what the player had said, I described a flashback scene for the party. We proceeded to play out the flashback for a while before cutting back to the tavern scene and then asking a different player to describe a new event experienced by the party.

I had six players and our sessions lasted around 3-4 hours. So I put a time limit of around 25-35 minutes for the playtime of each flashback scene. If needed I asked the PCs to summarize the ending of a flashback scene in the tavern instead of playing it out. This way even if one or two flashback scenes did go over the 25-35 minutes mark I had set for myself, the session was still likely to fall within the time frame I had for overall gaming session.

While prepping for the flashback scenes I created two lists. The first one contained the ideas and elements I wanted to try and weave specifically into Flashback 1, Flashback 2 etc. This list was created with the intention of further helping the players ease into the framework, with ideas becoming more and more pronounced with each progressive flashback.

The second list contained a general set of ideas I could draw upon to help improvise a flashback scene on the fly. This list was made up of scenes I guessed the players would want to play and a number of other ideas I personally thought were interesting.

## 3. Wrap Up

As the name suggests, this is the part where the DM lets the players know the consequences of the flashback scenes, be it loot, alliances, a new PC who has joined the party etc, and then brings the session to a close.

I had a prepared list of "rewards" for the players. However, the list did include things like a new mount and a baby, so it also had the potential to change the party dynamic moving forward. I then finished the session with one of the NPCs in the tavern teasing the party with the hook for a potential new adventure.

## An Example of my Prep

*My thoughts and reasoning behind certain elements in these prep notes will be written in italic. These are not necessarily a part of the prep but it might help you see my thought processes behind certain decisions or ideas.*

### 1. Establishing the Framework

*Backstory: We ended the previous session with the party trying to get past some Drow soldiers. PCs 1, 2 and 3 have already sneaked past the soldiers, while PCs 4, 5 and 6 were in the middle of trying to rush past before the Drow could react. PC 6 is also riding a direwolf.*

» Things go downhill from the ending of last session.

- The Drow soldiers notice PCs 4, 5, 6 trying to rush past, ready their weapons and yell out a warning to the other soldiers who may not have noticed them.
- The Drow who notice PC 6 and the Direwolf go for their crossbows. Numerous bolts fly out at the two.
- PCs 1, 2 and 3 are suddenly surrounded by massive tentacles that have erupted from the ground all around them.
- A Drow Noble (*who the party had encountered previously and harboured a personal grudge against them*) along with even more soldiers pop out of thin air above the party on “large orange birds of fire” and begin diving towards the party below.

» Before combat can fully start cut away to a Tavern, five months after the encounter

- The Tavern is named **Wilde Wybel's Tavern**
- The bartender/owner, a human by the name of **Wilde Wybel**, has a circular bar in the centre of the Tavern and a floating stool to move about with. She no longer has her legs, having lost them both to Owlbears in two separate incidents.





- The Tavern is lit by ever-burning candles
  - Within the Tavern, there is a pen/cage with an Owlbear in it. Anyone can pay 1gp and attempt to ride the Owlbear for 2 minutes, if they are successful and don't fall off or get injured/eaten they get 20 gp.
  - There is stage with live instrumental music. Currently there is a single female tiefling performer using magic to simultaneously conduct 5 different instruments.
- I planned on using the tiefling performer in some flashbacks as well, provided the opportunity presented itself.*

- » The party are drinking with two siblings, **Betric Fortinwulf** and **Chelry Fortinwulf**, who are members of the mercenary company, **Lingering Venom**.

*PC 4 happens to be associated with the Lingering Venom, so this was an easy way to signal to the players that they could trust the siblings.*

- **Betric Fortinwulf:** Human male. Dark skin. Thin pointy beard and moustache. Friendly but quiet.
- **Chelry Fortinwulf:** Human female. Dark skin. Missing half of her top lip, so you can see her teeth sometimes, which can be unsettling. Much more relaxed and chatty than Betric.

- » "Hang on, hang on, hang on," Chelry tells the party. "Large orange birds of fire? That doesn't make any sense! How do the Drow not burn if they are sitting on fire? They are not exactly known to be fireproof."

She eyes the party with an amused smile. "What really happened?"

*It might seem a little bit unfair for me to describe Drow sitting on birds of fire and then almost immediately have a NPC accuse the PCs of making that up. However, my reasoning was twofold. One, I knew it would make my players laugh. And two, I wanted to let the players know the flashback scenes coming up may not be 100% accurate and wanted to give them permission to let their imaginations run wild.*

- » Give each PC some time in the spotlight to narrate what had happened during the Drow battle from their POV.

*This was a chance to get the players used to having more agency in describing what happened during past events.*

- » Once all the PCs have had a chance to describe what happened, Chelry still doesn't appear to be convinced by their tales, but she is entertained nonetheless. "So that was five months ago?" she asks. "What else have you all been up to since then?"

*The last question is an obvious segue from Establishing the Framework to Flashbacks.*

## 2. Flashbacks

*As mentioned previously in the Overall Session Structure, I had two lists for this part: A Flashback-Specific List containing the ideas and elements I wanted to try and weave specifically into Flashback 1, Flashback 2 etc. And a second General List containing a collection of ideas I could draw upon to help improvise a flashback scene.*

### 2.1. Flashback-Specific List

#### » Flashback 1

- 1) Halfway through the first Flashback, PC 6 remembers that there were a group of halflings with the party during this encounter. We then continue the Flashback with a group of halflings now having "popped" into the scene from nowhere.



*This again serves to tell the players that the memories they are playing through aren't 100% accurate. They are just the stories their PCs are telling the Lingering Venom. Plus having never met many halflings in her life previously,*

*PC 6 had a minor personal quest of wanting to locate a few halflings.*

*I also hoped to bring the halflings back later in Flashback 4, showing that the Flashbacks aren't necessarily happening in chronological order.*

» **Flashback 2**

- 1) During this Flashback, the party meets an exact duplicate of PC 5.

*I now started to introduce weirder concepts into the flashbacks. Plus the duplicate was part of a larger story arc for PC 5. I hoped to sneak this past the players as just an odd thing their characters experienced.*

» **Flashback 3**

- 1) During the Flashback, the party has a cage of parrots.

*The party had previously been looking for parrots to taste test.*

- 2) During the Flashback, the party's direwolf would have flowers dyed into his fur.

*I wanted to pass this off as another odd thing in this Flashback and pay it off in Flashback 5.*

» **Flashback 4**

- 1) During the Flashback, PC 1 is on drugs.

*This is a reference to PC 1's character flaw.*

- 2) The group of halflings from Flashback 1 show up in this Flashback too.

- 3) During the Flashback, PC 2 has a laser pistol.

*While the laser pistol is a fun toy for the PCs to play with during the Flashback, I also planned to give it to the PCs as treasure in the Wrap Up. So I was setting the seeds for that here.*

*I also hoped that the laser pistol would encourage the players to think about where it may have come from and by extension the greater shape of the cosmos.*



## » Flashback 5

- 1) During the Flashback, the direwolf is dyed bright orange.

*Continuing the colour-changing-direwolf theme set up in Flashback 3. The mystery of why this happens will be solved when the pixie shows up later in this flashback.*

- 2) During the Flashback, PC 3 is wearing a three-foot long cap.

*In a previous session PC 3 was given the three-foot long cap by a pixie. Showing PC 3 wearing the three-foot long cap helped foreshadow the pixie showing up later in this Flashback.*

- 3) During the Flashback, PC 4's ear has been replaced with that of a Donkey ear and she occasionally brays while talking.
- 4) Midway through the Flashback scene, a pixie (**Iduna**), pops her head out from under PC 3's cap and excitedly reminds the party that she was there for this Flashback.

- **Iduna** : Female Pixie. Always Excited. Hyper Energetic. Loves sugar, new life experiences and pranking/giving gifts to people. Her reactions to things are always over the top.

*Iduna was already established in the campaign as a member of the Lingering Venom with PCs 1, 3 and 4 having previously encountered her.*

- 5) Immediately after 4) on this list, cut back to the present. Iduna is also in Wilde Wybel's Tavern, listening to the party's tales. She is on the floor beside the party's table dying the direwolf's fur with blue tribal tattoos. Once the PCs get a couple of minutes to talk with Iduna, cut back and continue with the Flashback.

## » Flashback 6

- 1) During the Flashback, PC 1 is carrying a fiddle.
- 2) During the Flashback, PC 2 has a Plate Armor wearing dwarven bodyguard.
- 3) During the Flashback, PC 3 is carrying a stack of stolen books and is having difficulty seeing.

*PC 3 had previously been trying to research magic by stealing and studying books.*

- 4) During the Flashback, PC 4 has a dinosaur (Allosaurus) mount.
- 5) During the Flashback, PCs 5 and 6 are dressed like gladiators.
- 6) During the Flashback, the direwolf is the size of a poodle.



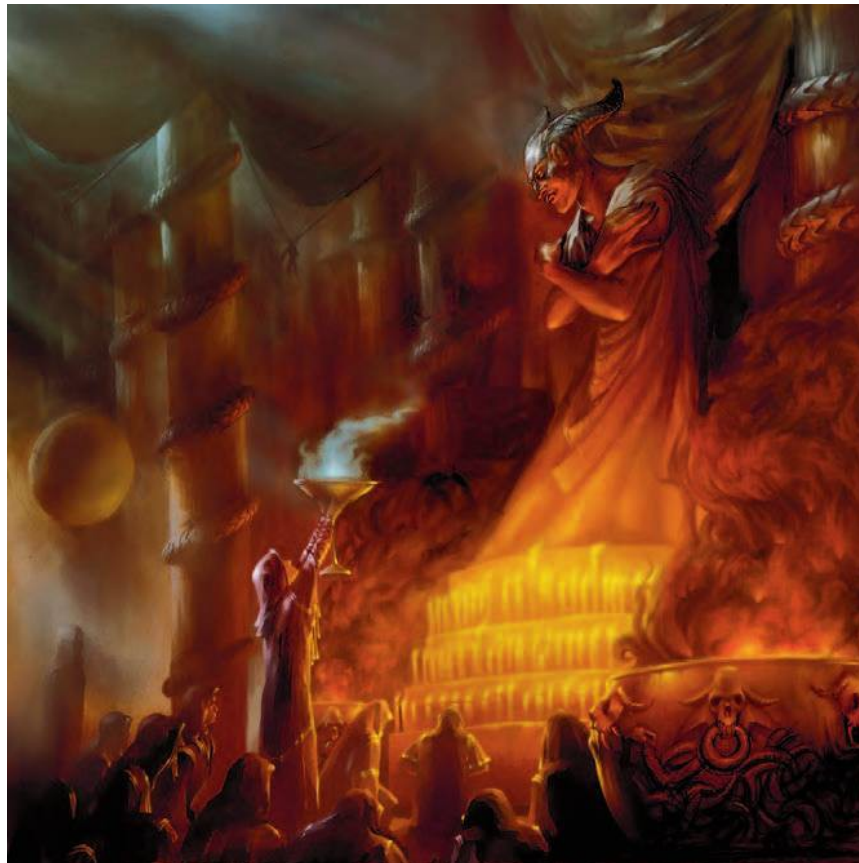
## 2.2. General List

- 1) A consequence for your actions. Either the Drow Noble (*mentioned in Establishing the Framework*) sends an invisible stalker against the party. Or a family member of a gnome PCs 3 and 4 had previously killed, tracks them down for revenge.
- 2) PC 1's uncle is being chased down by a group of angry dinosaurs. PC 1's uncle had managed to teach a group of people how to shapechange into dinosaurs but he had not succeeded in teaching them how to change back.

*The last time the party had seen PC 1's uncle, he had left in search of other druids.*

- 3) PC 3 tries to make a deal with a devil.

*PC 3 had previously wanted to make a deal with a fiend, but he could not figure out how to contact a fiend with the offer of his soul. I guessed that he might try again.*



- 4) What happened to PC 3's sister?

*The party had started on a mission to save PC 3's sister from the Drow but after half the party almost got killed in the rescue attempt, they were forced to abandon it. I had strongly hinted that the sister's story did not end well. There was always the chance that a player might want to know what happened to her for certain.*

- 5) The party runs into a Dragonborn member of the Order of the Chalice.

*PCs 5 and 6 had witnessed members of a religious order (the Order of the Chalice) attack and murder a politician in a city. After the act, one of attackers managed to escape to the annoyance of the PCs. Being Dragonborn themselves, I was curious to see how PCs 5 and 6 would react to a Dragonborn member of the Order of the Chalice, who wasn't part of the assassination.*

- 6) The party is acting in a play or playing in a band.
- 7) Some of the PCs have either aged up or aged down.
- 8) The party is on a mission to capture a number of exotic creatures.
- 9) Iggis Hawthorne shows up.

*Iggis Hawthorne was an simple honest smuggler / procurer of exotic creatures. There were story reasons that the party might want to ask him some questions. If not, I could always combine it with 8 on this list).*

- 10) The party are involved in a hostage negotiation.
- 11) The party are in the middle of digging up a grave.
- 12) The party needs to get out of a trap / solve a puzzle.
- 13) The party are in the middle of exploring a dungeon/ruins.

*This campaign didn't have a lot of dungeon delving, so this would actually be a change of pace.*

- 14) The Party has to infiltrate a Noble's Ball.



*In a one-off game in between sessions of this campaign, I ran a political intrigue game for some of the players. This game was set around the lives and*

*relationships of the Darby noble family. I felt this might be a good opportunity to tie that story to the main campaign.*

- 15) Start the flashback just after someone the party were hired to protect ended up dead...again.

*This was a callback to the party's first mission, which ended badly.*

- 16) The party are fleeing / hiding from a stalking monster. Run this like a horror story.

- 17) An encounter in a smithy.

*The PCs had never been to a smithy in this campaign.*

- 18) The PCs are exhausted and struggling to stay alive against the weather and the terrain.

- 19) The PCs are participating in a cooking competition.

- 20) The PCs are gladiators.

*I felt like if this came to pass, it might tie in nicely with PCs 5 and 6's appearance in Flashback 6.*

- 21) Some Fey beings have stolen all the beer!

- 22) Jousting Tournament.

- 23) The PCs encounter a time traveller.

*PCs 3 and 4 were searching for an extremely powerful wizard. There was a chance that one of them could have asked to meet one.*

- 24) A Dracolich returns.

*The PCs had already interacted with a Dracolich. So this was me just wanting to bring back another NPC.*

- 25) The PCs interact with a rival adventuring party.

- 26) A flashback is set as the party are flying over a city.

- 27) Four of the PCs find the other two naked in suspicious circumstances.

- 28) The party are searching for a special material to forge a weapon with, e.g. a meteorite.

- 29) The party are in the middle of a battle on a Space Ship.

### 3. Wrap Up

» Hand out rewards to the party for the unseen adventures

- 1) 1 x Laser Pistol (17 charges remaining)
- 2) 3 x half eaten apples
- 3) 500 cp, 10000 sp, 2500 gp, 65 pp, Bloodstone (40 gp)
- 4) 3 x Jasper (60 gp each), Zircon (150 gp), 2 x Citrine (75 gp each), Quartz (50 gp), Star Rose Quartz (50 gp)
- 5) 4 x Studded Leather Armor
- 6) 1 x Flail, 1 x Spear, 4 x Daggers, 1 x Warpick
- 7) Rod of Rulership
- 8) Gloves of Thievery
- 9) Instrument of the Bards (Fochlucan Bandore)
- 10) A Baby
- 11) Adamantine Armor for the direwolf (+1 to AC)
- 12) Deck of Illusions (18 cards remaining)
- 13) A Giant Bat mount
- 14) 1 x Potion of Hill Giant Strength
- 15) 1 x Spell Scroll of Magic Weapon



» Wilde Wybel's Tavern is practically empty by the time the party has finished with Flashback 6.

» "Well this has been fun, but we should probably talk business," says Chelry. "How much do you know about the Planes?"



# An Example of How the Flashback Scenes Played Out

## 1. Flashback 1

Player's five word description: "The incident with the Spiders"

*This was easy, I used 2) on the General List but swapped out the dinosaurs for giant spiders instead. Midway through, PC 6 remembered the Halflings and out they appeared from thin air to help the PCs.*

*We didn't have the time to finish the combat that erupted between the party and the Spider-Druids but the tide had turned in the PCs favour by the time we cut back to the Tavern. I seem to remember that the Flashback ended with PC 1 stuck in a web, helplessly watching a giant spider making its way towards him.*

## 2. Flashback 2

Player's five word description: "Entered into a Succubus' Lair"

*Knowing my players, I should have prepared for something like this!*

*The party met with a Succubus who had an exact duplicate of PC 5 (1 on the Flashback-specific List) under her charms. "Oh, there are two of you!" she said on seeing PC 5. She then tried to convince PC 5 to spend a few days in her company. PC 5 eventually decided to turn down the offer and we cut back to the Tavern.*

*Three other notable things happened in this Flashback that would come back in future Flashbacks. One, the Succubus claimed she 'knew' PC 2's Father, a Fiend. Two, PC 2 offered to spend time with the Succubus in place of PC 5. And three, I noticed that the player for PC 3, who gave the description for this Flashback, was disappointed that the Succubus was interested in PC 5 and not PC 3.*

## 3. Flashback 3

Player's five word description: "Bar Fight! [PC 6] wields [PC 3]"

*Technically not on the General List but bar fights are a pretty standard D&D trope.*

*PC 6 was a Dragonborn with the Tavern Brawler Feat. I had previously ruled that she could wield PC 3, a halfling, as in improvised weapon in combat.*

*I described an organised fight in a tavern between PC 6 wielding PC 3 and a Minotaur wielding PC 1's uncle, a dwarf druid, from Flashback 1. The other PCs quickly found things they wanted to do, like taking bets and/or trying to secretly influence the fight.*

*Before long the organised fight devolved into a full-on free-for-all Tavern brawl and we cut back to Wilde Wybel's Tavern.*

#### 4. Flashback 4

Player's five word description: "Found Dragon. Got Good Information"

*Oh boy! This one was probably the trickiest.*

*"What happened to the Dragons?" was supposed to be an important question in the campaign. I simply could not think of a way for the PCs to meet a 'real' Dragon that would make any narrative sense. And I had a feeling that the player who described this scene would be disappointed if I brought out the Dracolich for this (24 on the General List), especially as the Dracolich had already given the party all the information he had.*

*I decided to start by combining 1) on the Flashback-specific List and 1) on the General List. PC 1, alone in his room and high on drugs, encounters an Invisible Stalker sent by the Drow Noble.*

*I can't remember if I did this to buy myself some more time to think about the Dragon situation or if I had already decided to use a Faerie Dragon as the 'Dragon' the party had come across. If it was the later, I probably just wanted something to distract the players with in case they were disappointed not to encounter an Ancient Dragon. The truth probably lay somewhere between the two.*



*In any case, PC 1 decided against seeking out the rest of the party and chose to combat the Invisible Stalker alone. Couple of rounds into the fight it looked like PC 1 would die alone in his room and no one else would know about it. So I had PC 4 burst into PC 1's room while being chased by a gnome (again 1) on the General List).*

*The fight then spilled out into the corridor of the inn the party was staying at and I began introducing the remaining PCs into the scene. PC 6 showed up with the halflings (2 on the Flashback-specific List). PC 5, whose player had described the scene, then showed up with a Faerie Dragon on his shoulder.*

*At this point, I realized that if PC 2 emerged from his room with a laser pistol (3 on the*

*Flashback-specific List), PC 3 would be the only one without an interesting entrance to this Flashback. So I quickly scanned the General List for ideas. My eyes landed on 27). And I remembered Flashback 2.*

*I decided not to use the laser pistol in this Flashback. Instead, PCs 2 and 3 emerged from the same room. Alongside the pair, holding a whip, was the Succubus from Flashback 2.*

*Chaos followed. PC 6 threw a halfling through a window. PC 5 picked up and threw the gnome chasing PC 4 over the railing onto the floor below. The rest of the party fought the Invisible Stalker. The Flashback eventually cut back to Wilde Wybel's Tavern when PC 5 decided this wasn't worth his time and walked away while the fight continued on behind him.*

*I then told the party any new information they may have gathered from the Faerie Dragon.*

## **5. Flashback 5**

Player's five word description: "Time I summoned my father"

*This scene was described by PC 2's player. As previously mentioned, PC 2's father is a Fiend.*

*I had 3) on the General List, so I wasn't completely unprepared for this. I had PC 2 (with a laser pistol) meet with his father and converse. PC 2's father asked him to facilitate a deal between an agent of his and another member of the party.*

*Next day the agent arrives: the Succubus from Flashbacks 2 and 4. During prep I had planned on using the tiefling performer in Wilde Wybel's Tavern as the agent. However, since the Succubus had by now become an established NPC and she had hinted at a relationship with PC 2's father, it seemed like a better fit.*

*What followed was a tense negotiation for part of PC 3's soul. I don't think the players noticed or cared for most the things I introduced from the Flashback-specific List.*

*PC 3 eventually rejected the deal offered. However, PC 5 then chose to restart the negotiations with the Succubus from Flashback 2. This time he agreed to the offer in return for the Succubus' help with rescuing a Drow Prisoner.*

*It was an unexpected conclusion to the Flashback but when the baby (10 on the reward list) showed up later, the players without exception turned to look at PC 5.*

## **6. Flashback 6**

Player's five word description: "Went to the Halfling Circus"

*A lot of things from the Flashback-specific List worked well for this. The scene found most the PCs performing for the Halfling Circus.*

*The performance went poorly and the audience tried to burn down the place. But eventually PC 2 managed to calm everything down with a wonderful bardic performance. The scene ended with the audience waving their lit torches in the air in time with the music.*