



# STARTING GUIDE:

CAMPAIGN ONE - "THE LEGEND OF VOX MACHINA"



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# WHAT IS CRITICAL ROLE?

[Critical Role](#) is a game of [Dungeons & Dragons](#), played live, by a group of “friends from work,” who just happen to be voice actors from video games, cartoons, and anime.

Eventually, they put their game sessions on the internet, playing live, on Thursday nights, on [twitch.tv](#), with episodes archived on [YouTube](#). It is a real game, otherwise known as an “*actual play*” video stream.

As in any other game of D&D, the [Dungeon Master](#) (DM) creates the world and the [Non-Player Characters](#) (NPCs) that occupy it. The DM may have a plan, and a story to tell, but the players have all the control.



The “home game” in 2013.

The players create their own characters. They also decide, in real-time, where their characters go, what they say, and what they do. It is all improvised. And that’s where the magic happens.



Live show, 2019.

# WHY SHOULD I WATCH?

Maybe you *shouldn't*. Starting on this journey seems daunting. Really daunting. There's literally hundreds of hours of content. That's a whole lot of content.

But maybe you *should*. Try it. Take in a few episodes, and make up your own mind. That's what this guide is for. This guide should give you a head start. It should give you an express lane to getting to the good stuff as soon as possible, and trimming some of the stuff you can either just read about or leave behind.

## **“Cool. But *really*...why should I watch?”**

We all love a great story. It's what makes us human. Our ancestors told fantastical stories around a warm fire. That's still who we are. The completely unique, immediate kind of story-telling that is being done here—collaborative and improvisational—touches that ancient craving to hear the telling of a great tale in a way you simply can't find on bookshelves or on film. None of those forms of entertainment let you sit and watch the story being created in real-time, when anything can happen. And no other form of storytelling introduces a random element—the rolling of dice—to determine success or failure.

Despite connecting us to an archaic form of storytelling, this particular unique story wouldn't be possible without the technology of our time. So, it's an ancient storytelling tradition, being created through a game introduced in the 1970s, told by a group of people who weren't yet born when the game came out, and broadcast over the internet live on Twitch, a social media platform developed in 2011 for people to watch other people playing *video games*, not for people to do...*THIS*. It's hacking the latest entertainment tech, bending and twisting it for a purpose for which it was never intended. So it's also uniquely *current*, somehow.

Above all though, try it out for the wonderful talent on display. These talents are remarkable. This group wasn't cast in a Hollywood office in a room full of 8x10s. They were just a group of friends that got together to play a game one time for a friend's birthday. And they liked it so much they kept doing it. They became even better friends, living their adventures together. Eventually, the rest of the world would notice them and realize they were really, *really* good at what they do.

## **“Do I need to know how to play D&D?”**

No! Not at all. You'll eventually figure it out, if you are curious. But all you need to know is the players decide what they want to do, and the rolls of the dice, combined with their characters' skills, help determine if they succeed or fail.

THE BAND OF ADVENTURERS KNOWN AS  
**VOX MACHINA**



# THE MAIN CHARACTERS

[VIEW THIS INTRO IN VIDEO FORM HERE](#)

## GROG STRONGJAW - GOLIATH BARBARIAN (PLAYED BY TRAVIS WILLINGHAM)



*"Right, listen up. If you have ale, then you have a friend in Grog Strongjaw. A goliath of towering height and size, this barbarian has an appetite for the two great loves in his life: combat, women, and ale. Wait...*

*Easily the brains of the group, Grog is often consulted for his vast knowledge of shapes, colors, and shiny things. Also ale.*

*In his early years, armed with his two-handed great axe, Grog often enjoyed proving his might amongst*

*the ranks of his family's [wandering herd](#). But after coming upon an unsuspecting [elderly gnome](#) in the woods, he objected to the killing of such an innocent life. A creature of impulse, Grog felt only pity for this terrified little thing. His disobedience cost him dearly. Beaten bloody and banished by the herd leader, his uncle [Kevdak](#), Grog was abandoned and left to die.*

*Exiled from his herd, it was then that the relative of the very gnome he fought to save, saved him. It was the kindness of a gnome cleric named [Pike](#) that healed Grog, bringing him back from death's edge. And they have remained close friends ever since.*

Most nights, Grog can be found challenging entire taverns to wrestling matches!  
Or accompanying [Scanlan](#) to the nearest house where you pay for, er, lady favors.

Also ale.”



## KEYLETH - HALF-ELVEN DRUID (PLAYED BY MARISHA RAY)



*"A first impression of Keyleth would leave you with little information on the half-elven druid. You might even think that her social awkwardness due to her sheltered upbringing is kind of sweet. Of course, it would be unwise to underestimate her based on first impressions. Under that unimposing petite frame is a vicious beast waiting to be unleashed, whose natural powers have made even the fiercest of champions pee their pants. Literally.*

*Born to the air tribe of the Ashari people, Keyleth was raised with a deep love of nature and the elemental magics. It is her people's inherent duty to protect the delicate areas in Tal'Dorei, where the four elemental planes begin to bleed with this realm. Since she was a*

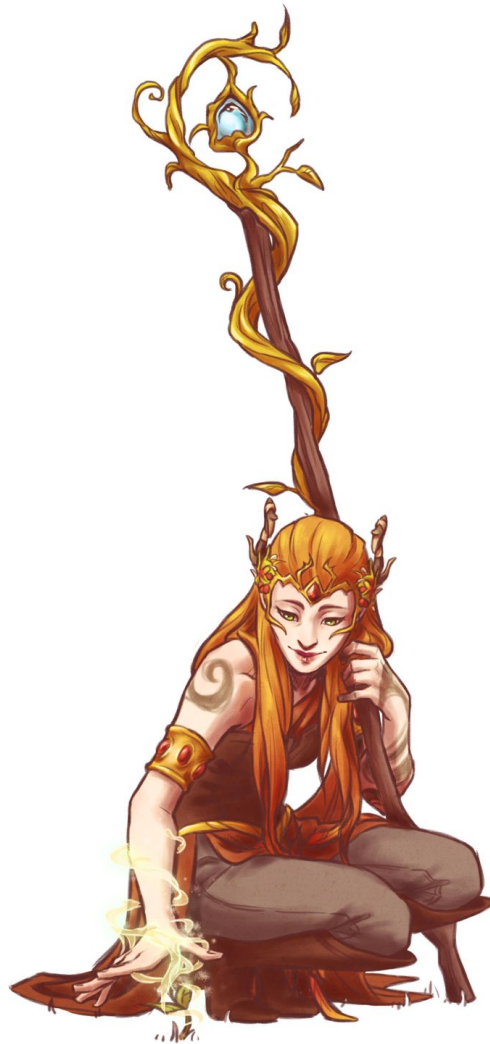
*little girl, she had quite a knack for air manipulation and beast shaping abilities; well, if you consider kittens and flying squirrels to be little beasts, which I do. Anyways, it wasn't long before the headmaster of the tribe, her father, [Korrin](#), realized her true prodigious abilities and she was inveterated to succeed him as the next headmaster. Just like that, her jovial childhood was stripped and replaced with endless spell memorization, teachings from ancient traditions, and exceedingly high expectations.*

*Every druid leader-to-be must embark on a journey to seek out the sister tribes in order to introduce and establish respect amongst the fellow headmasters. They*



call this the [Aramenté](#), or Noble Odyssey. When her father felt she was ready, he set her on the path to truly discovering herself. Not knowing when, or if, she will ever return. As she hikes down the mountain towards [Stilben](#), she meditated on the task ahead. Part of the Aramenté is proving yourself a strong warrior, a valiant protector, and a wise and compassionate leader.

With this knowledge, one thought plays in repeat in her mind: is she even worthy?"



# LORD PERCIVAL FREDRICKSTEIN VON MUSEL KLOSSOWSKI DE ROLO III - HUMAN FIGHTER (PLAYED BY TALIESIN JAFFE)



*"Percy was the third child of seven children, born to a noble family who lived far to the north in the ancient castle of Whitestone. With so many siblings to share the burdens of lordship, Percy turned his attention to the sciences, engineering, and naturalism.*

*One day, a mysterious couple, named Lord and Lady Briarwood, came to court. During a feast held in their honour, the Briarwoods violently took control of the castle, killing or imprisoning everyone who would stand in their way.*

*Percy awoke chained in the dungeon, only to be freed by his [younger sister](#). Together they fled, chased by the Briarwoods' men. As they ran, Percy's sister took several arrows to the chest and fell. Percy kept running,*

*eventually jumping into a freezing river and floating unconscious to freedom.*

*He did not remember waking up on a fishing boat. He barely remembered the next two years as he slowly made his way as far south as possible.*

*Then one night, Percy had a dream. A roaring [cloud of smoke](#) offered him vengeance against those who destroyed his family.*

*When he awoke, Percy began to design his first gun. "*



## PIKE TRICKFOOT - GNOME CLERIC (PLAYED BY ASHLEY JOHNSON)



*"Pike grew up in the outskirts of town, near the [Bramblewood](#). Her ancestors were a family of deep gnomes with quite an unfavorable reputation. Thievery, destruction, and trickery left them with the curse of the last name of Trickfoot.*

*Sarenrae, the goddess of healing and redemption, had other plans for Pike's great-great-grandfather [Wilhand](#), who left his family at a young age after a dream—a dream that changed the course of the Trickfoot family. Wilhand devoted his life to Sarenrae, and pledged from then on that he and his family would live a life of service and devotion.*

*As a child, Pike seemed to have an affinity to heal. Whether it was*

*animals, people, or even flowers, she felt she had a purpose in making things whole that had once been broken. She studied and learned the ways to heal through divine magic. She lived a peaceful life, quiet and simple, until one day, Wilhand was captured and almost killed by a group of goliath barbarians. [One of the goliaths](#) took a stand against the murder of the innocent gnome, and he himself was beaten, bloodied, and left for dead, abandoned by [his herd](#).*

*Wilhand went to Pike for help. She prayed, and healed this barbarian as best she could, bringing him back to life. When he awoke, she discovered his name was [Grog Strongjaw](#). After that, they were the best of friends—a rather unlikely pair.*

*Little did she know that in a few years time, Grog would soon return the favor and bring her back from the clutches of death.*

*After being killed in battle, Pike felt angry. She wanted to be stronger, so that it would never happen again. She spent four months at sea, training with the men and women aboard a ship called The Broken Howl.*



*Gripping her holy symbol in one hand, and her morningstar in the other, this time, Pike is ready."*

## SCANLAN SHORTHALT - GNOME BARD (PLAYED BY SAM RIEGEL)



*"Oh, you haven't heard of Scanlan Shorthalt? Well, gird your loins, ladies, because he has his eye on you. A talented musician, master of disguise, and dashing handsome in his own mind, Scanlan sings songs almost as much as he sings his own praises.*

*Born a poor gnome, Scanlan used his endless charm and soaring tenor voice to croon for coin and support his single mother. One day he was discovered by a half-orc promoter, and joined [Dr. Dranzel's Spectacular Traveling Troupe](#), where he learned the ways of the world, and honed his skills as a bard extraordinaire.*

*A loner much of his life, Scanlan has never quite come to terms with the violent death of his mother at*

*the hands of a goblin invasion. While his years on the road provided many, shall we say, educational experiences with the opposite sex, deep down Scanlan yearns for the one thing he's never known: the true love of a fellow gnome.*

*Still, Scanlan considers himself a lover first, performer second, and fighter distant third. On the battlefield, he'll support his allies, but rarely draws blood unless it's to protect fellow gnome [Pike](#).*

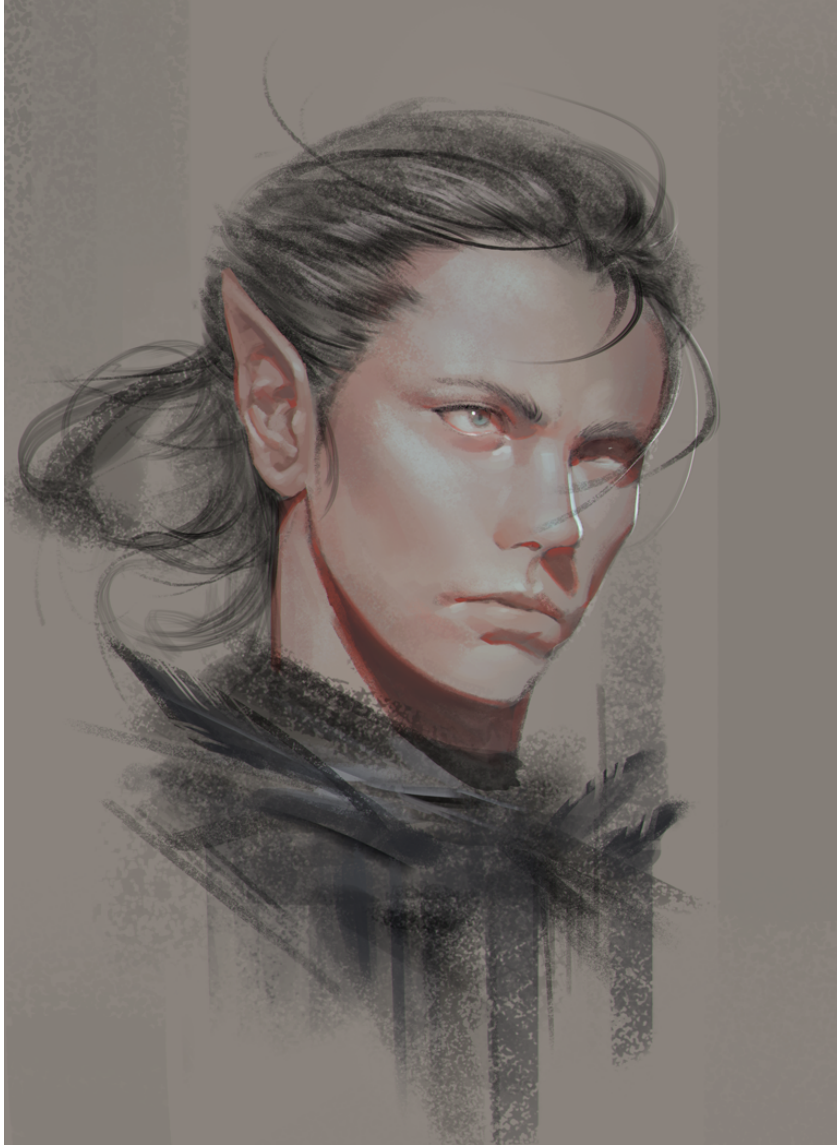
*Count on Scanlan for a hearty laugh, a rollicking song, and a twinkle in his eye that melts hearts and makes the females swoon."*

1

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## VAX'ILDAN - HALF-ELVEN ROGUE (PLAYED BY LIAM O'BRIAN)



*"Never entirely welcome in the company of elves or men, Vax'ildan learned at a young age to skip past formality, preferring instead to invite himself in your door.*

*Along with twin sister [Vex'ahlia](#), Vax was born by a chance encounter between elven royalty and human peasantry. Raised by their mother in their early years, the twins were eventually sent off to their [father](#) in the elven capital of [Syngorn](#). But their cool reception among the elves there never warmed, and their time in the capital didn't last.*

*The siblings stole away one autumn night and set out on the open road.*

*After a few years of wandering, they eventually decided to return to their mother, and journeyed back to the lands of their youth. But instead of finding their childhood home, they returned to a pile of rubble. Their mother was gone, their home burned to ash.*

*Pressing the townspeople for answers, they learned of the day the [dragon](#) came.*

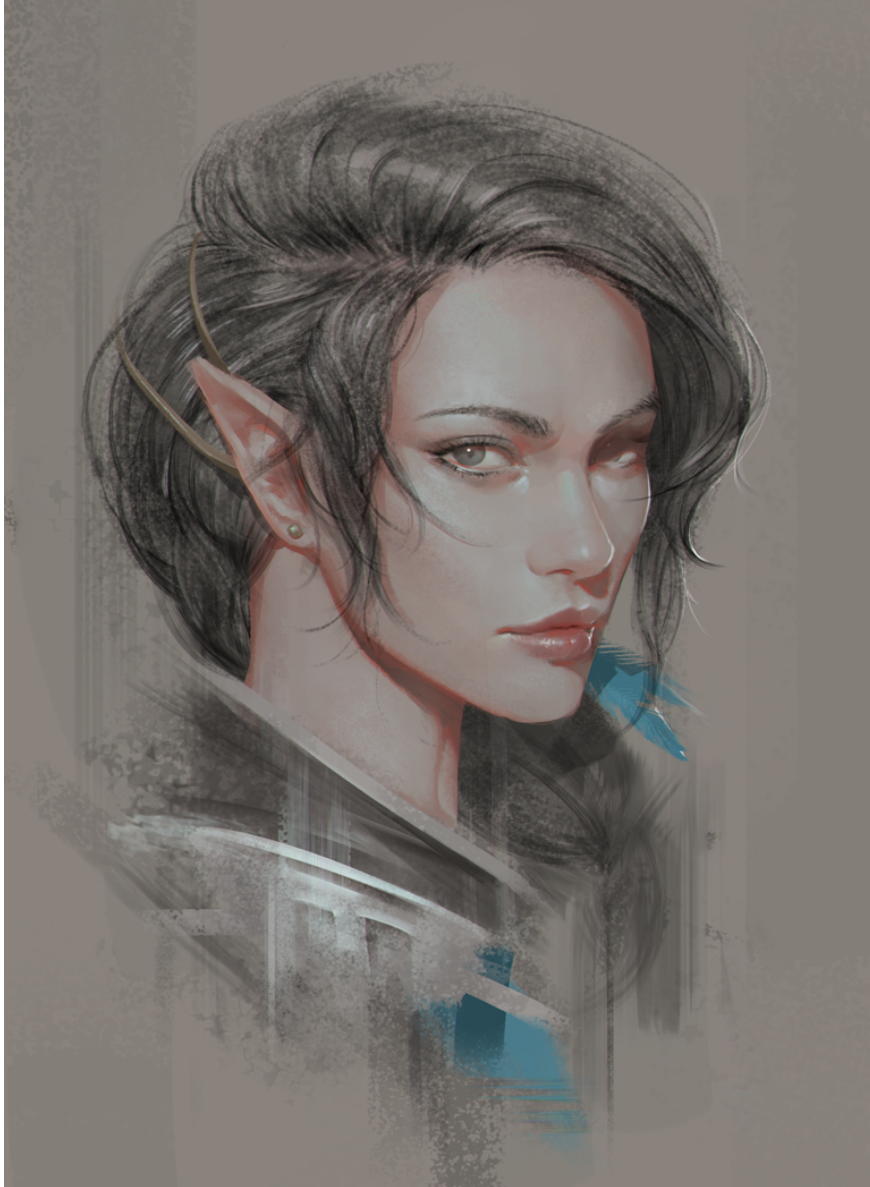


*With their ties all severed, Vax'ildan and his sister set out to find their fortune together in [Tal'Dorei](#).*

*An outsider since birth, Vax quickly learned to solve life's challenges in his own particular way, often by sidestepping them entirely. And when his knack for circumventing adversity isn't enough, the way of blades the elves schooled him in more than makes up the difference."*



## VEX' AHLIA - HALF-ELVEN RANGER (PLAYED BY LAURA BAILEY)



*“Like so many half-elves, Vex'ahlia has spent most of her life suffering the cool reception of a people who don't fully accept her.*

*Born of a [human mother](#) and an [elven father](#)—who only later in life took an interest in their existence— Vex'ahlia and her twin brother Vax'ildan quickly realized the only people they could truly rely on in this world were each other.*

*It was at the age of ten when the two were taken from their mother, and brought to live in [Syngorn](#), the isolated elven city for which their father was an ambassador.*

*He quietly took them in, but always kept an icy distance, and after too many years of disdainful looks, the pair decided to leave his indifference behind, and set out on their own.*

*Vax took to the cities, stealing small trinkets and learning the ways of the thief, while Vex kept to the woods. She preferred the isolation. Always the keen observer, she learned to hunt and to track, to spy, and to shoot.*

*And through a series of fateful events, she earned herself a companion in the form of a bear—her own stolen Trinket—to fight alongside her and protect her fiercely.*

*Also, he is adorable—and gives expert massages."*





# WHERE SHOULD I START?

As of this writing, there are currently two Critical Role campaigns available. This is a starting guide for the first campaign, The Legend of Vox Machina.

**If you want to know the early story of Vox Machina, before the campaign stream started, [watch this video](#).**

You can find all the episodes of Critical Role, Campaign One (C1) on the YouTube channel for Geek & Sundry. They are also available in audio-only podcast form on all the usual podcast services. (More on this in the note below.)

The production gets better and better as the show goes on, but the early episodes are very rough and raw. Therefore, **I recommend new viewers start at [Episode 16, “Enter Vasselheim.”](#)**

NOTE 1: The link above skips the old announcements at the beginning of each episode, which is a good practice for a new viewer to save time. The announcements are all out-of-date anyway. You can also skip the intermissions and the post-show bit at the end. They stop doing the post-show segment after a few more episodes anyway. (See the “Tips and Tricks” page for more info)

The production (especially the audio) still isn’t great by this point, so you’ll see quite a bit of their humble beginnings, but it’s still a good starting point. Skipping more episodes would result in missing some key characters, places, and events that are all pretty big deals later in the story. And you do not want to do that.

A written synopsis (titled “Previously on Critical Role...”) of what happened in the first 15 episodes immediately follows this section in this guide, so you can be completely up-to-speed with a few pages of reading.

Also, on the “Tips and Tricks” page later in this guide, there will be suggestions for skipping around a bit after the first few episodes, so you can avoid some tedious stuff with Tiberius, a character that will permanently leave the party fairly soon after Vasselheim, just before the next major story arc begins.

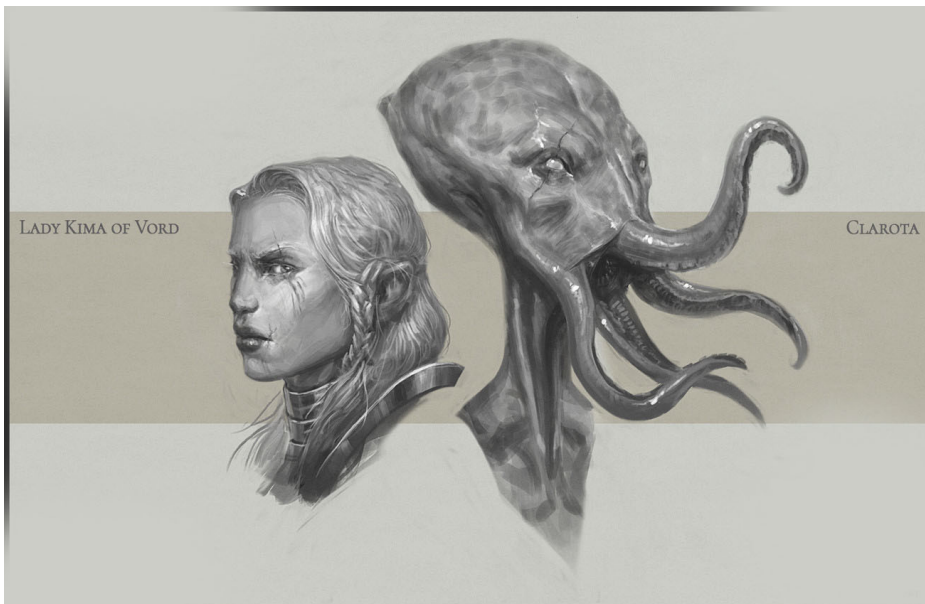
NOTE 2: You may notice on both the podcast channels and on Youtube, there are two channels for episodes. This is because after twenty-something episodes of Campaign Two, (C2) Critical Role decided to leave the Geek & Sundry channel, and go fully independent. Therefore, you’ll find two podcast channels and two YouTube channels featuring Critical Role content. This is no problem when watching or listening to C1, as all the episodes are on the same channel, so once you find the proper one, you don’t need to switch. (See the “Tips and Tricks” page for more info)

# PREVIOUSLY ON CRITICAL ROLE...

Back in Emon, the capital city of the Kingdom of Tal'Dorei, Arcanist [Allura Vysoren](#), a member of the Council of Tal'Dorei, tasked Vox Machina to go to the underground dwarven city of [Kraghammer](#) to find and rescue an old friend of hers, the missing [halfling](#) paladin, [Lady Kima of Vord](#). The party arrives to find Kima had gone down deep into the mines on an investigation of her own. Following this lead, they find the deepest parts of the mine overrun with hideous, necrotic aberrations.



Going even deeper, into the [Underdark](#), the party finds a war camp led by an [ilithid](#), or mind flayer, a dangerous and sadistic form of aberration that controls the minds of others, enslaving them, or eating their brains for sustenance, and is conjoined to others of its kind through a collective consciousness, called the Elder Brain. They attack the war camp, but fail. Later, Keyleth and Vex'ahlia find an exiled mind flayer who has been cut off from the Elder Brain, and make an unlikely alliance. With the help of this new ally, they successfully assassinate the Ilithid and its dwarven general, but barely escape the hordes of foes growing larger around them.



At the [duergar](#) fortress [Emberhold](#), Vox Machina finally locates Lady Kima, held in a torture chamber, and barely alive. They revive her, and the plucky

paladin instantly wants to kill Clarota, their illithid ally. They finally make peace, at least temporarily, and Kima reveals she has discovered the source of control of the aberrations is a pyramid structure in the illithid city [Yug'Voril](#), where a being called [K'varn](#) is welding some sort of powerful tool which lends him enough power to control not only all the duergar but the illithid Elder Brain, and therefore all the illithid attached to it, as well.

Eventually, it is revealed that the tool is one of the [Horns of Orcus](#), two of which were cut off by [Orcus](#), the demon lord himself, perhaps 1,000 years ago, and given to a servant to deliver to the material plane as a way of opening a doorway by which he could enter the mortal realm. K'Varn, a power-hungry [beholder](#), learned of the location of one of the horns, and took possession of it himself to control the underground and prepare an army for an attack on the surface.

Through a clever, but reckless attack, Vox Machina barely manages to overcome K'Varn and take the Horn of Orcus, and



manage to severely injure, but not quite kill, the Elder Brain. The once-friendly mind flayer Clarota becomes conjoined with the Elder Brain again (which was his mind's craving all along,) and instantly turns on Vox Machina. All the other illithid in the city begin converging on the pyramid, to protect and restore the Elder Brain. The party successfully escapes, leaving the Underdark to it's own devices, hoping without the influence of K'Varn, the denizens will stay below and repair what they lost.

Back in Emon, a consultation of the Council of Tal'Dorei and Lady Kima, leads to the conclusion that the horn is too dangerous and Emon is not set up to secure such an artifact. The best place for them to deliver the horn would be Lady Kima's former home temple, the Temple of [Bahamut, the Platinum Dragon](#), in the ancient city of [Vasselheim](#), the capital city of the continent of Issylra.

After a visit to Gilmore's Glorious Goods, (owned by [Shawn Gilmore](#), Vax's lover and Vox Machina's favorite shopkeep/ corporate sponsor,) the party, well-rested and freshly-equipped, is joined by their escorts, a retinue from the Temple of the Platinum Dragon in Emon which has been assigned to accompany them, for the long voyage to Vasselheim.

They place the Horn of Orcus in a special container designed to transport dangerous magical artifacts, and take passage on an airship chartered to deliver them and their dangerous cargo to the storied Dawn City of Vasselheim, the Cradle of Faith.

THE ADVENTURE  
BEGINS HERE.





# ENTER VASSELHEIM



DIRECT LINK TO [EPISODE 16, "ENTER VASSELHEIM."](#)

# CAMPAIGN-WATCHING TIPS AND TRICKS

-Don't be overwhelmed. Just like reading any book, it all starts with the first page. YouTube videos and podcasts shouldn't be going anywhere soon. You can watch or listen anytime you like, and pause or stop anytime you like. You can always come back where you left off with relative ease, on your smart TV, computer, tablet, or phone.

-When watching on YouTube, feel free to skip the announcements at the beginning. The announcements are old. Those T-shirts have all sold out. Sorry! In the earlier episodes, there is also a post-game hangout, where they answer viewer questions and open mail. You can also feel free to skip this.

-In the intermission in the middle, you can skip tons of advertising. A lot of the shows advertised don't even exist anymore. But don't skip too far, because during intermission is also when they begin to show the fan art. The fan art slideshow is usually about five minutes long, and sometimes these can be fun to watch. As evidenced by the art in this guide, Critical Role fans, also known as "Critters," have some very talented artists in their ranks.

-YouTube, and most devices for listening to podcasts, have a "speed up" function, allowing you to view or listen at 1.25x or 1.5x speed, without the audio sounding like chipmunks. (On YouTube, this feature is behind the little "gear" button.) Many viewers find at 1.25x, you still get most of the substance of what's going on, but most agree it kinda kills the dramatic scenes, so you need to pick and choose your spots. For example, in the second half of Episode 27, "The Path to Whitestone," after the intermission, you can certainly speed through the painful parts where Tiberius goes shopping. Many folks like to speed up the combat, or planning sessions a little, and still listen to the "character-building" scenes at normal speed. Feel free to use this feature. It's pretty worthwhile.

[\*\*Here's a handy, well-organized YouTube Playlist link for all the episodes of Campaign One.\*\*](#)

**IMPORTANT PODCAST NOTE:** If you use your podcast app of choice to search for the "Critical Role" feed, you will get two results. You can tell which is which by looking at the logos. The first feed, with all of Campaign One and the first couple dozen episodes of Campaign Two, has a logo with a BLUE background. The second podcast feed has a BLACK background.

**Want to know more about how to play D&D?** [\*\*Download the free Basic Rules here \(.pdf\)\*\*](#)

# THE CAST



(From left to right) Sam Riegel - "Scanlan," Liam O'Brian - "Vax," Marisha Ray - "Keyleth," Laura Bailey - "Vex," Matthew Mercer - "Dungeon Master," Taliesin Jaffe - "Percy," Ashley Johnson - "Pike," Travis Willingham - "Grog"



A SPECIAL THANKS TO ALL THE CRITICAL  
ROLE ARTISTS WHOSE WORK APPEARS IN THIS  
GUIDE. YOU ARE AMAZING.

