Astarion -- The Drama Queen (Swashbuckler 5 / College of Swords 7)

> **Your Role:** Flashy dual-wielding duelist and the party's face. Dart in, stab with guaranteed Sneak Attack (no hiding needed thanks to Rakish Audacity), disengage for free via Fancy Footwork, and use Bard spells for utility, crowd control, and backup healing. Also the party's lockpicker, trap disarmer, and smooth-talker.

At a Glance

Race: High Elf (Astarion's default -- Darkvision, Fey Ancestry, free cantrip: grab **Booming Blade** for melee thunder damage + movement punishment) **Background:** Charlatan (Deception + Sleight of Hand)

Stats (respec at Withers): STR 8 / **DEX 17** / CON 14 / INT 8 / WIS 10 / CHA 14 DEX for attacks, damage, AC, and Initiative. CHA for Bard spells, Bardic Inspiration, and social checks. INT dump is fine -- use Warped Headband of Intellect if you need INT checks.

Level-by-Level

Level 1 -- Rogue 1

Astarion starts as a Rogue. No respec needed for level 1.

You gain:

- **Sneak Attack (1d6)** -- Extra damage once per turn when you have Advantage or an ally is within 1.5m of the target.
- **Expertise (pick 2):** Stealth + Sleight of Hand. Double your proficiency bonus. Astarion is the party's lockpicker and scout.
- **Bonus proficiencies:** Light armor, simple weapons, hand crossbows, longswords, rapiers, shortswords, Thieves' Tools

Racial Cantrip (High Elf): Booming Blade -- Melee cantrip with bonus thunder damage. If the enemy moves after being hit, they take more thunder damage. Excellent with Swashbuckler's hit-and-run style: hit them, Fancy Footwork prevents their opportunity attack, walk away -- if they chase you, Booming Blade triggers.

Level 2 -- Rogue 2

You gain:

- **Cunning Action** -- Dash, Disengage, or Hide as a bonus action. Extra mobility for positioning.

Level 3 -- Rogue 3 (Swashbuckler)

Astarion stops hiding in shadows and starts fighting with flair.

You gain:

- **Fancy Footwork** -- If you make a melee attack against a target, that target cannot make opportunity attacks against you for the rest of your turn. This is a free Disengage on every attack. Hit and walk away without penalty.
- **Rakish Audacity** -- +2 to Initiative rolls (scales with Rogue level). You no longer need Advantage to trigger Sneak Attack as long as you're within 1.5m of the target and don't have Disadvantage. **Guaranteed Sneak Attack damage every single turn without needing to hide.** This is what makes Swashbuckler special.
- **Sneak Attack scales to 2d6**

Gameplay shift: Run in, stab (Sneak Attack triggers automatically via Rakish Audacity), Fancy Footwork prevents the enemy's opportunity attack, walk away to safety or to the next target. No hiding required. Pure swashbuckling.

Level 4 -- Rogue 4

You gain:

- **Feat:** Pick one:
  - **Actor** -- +1 CHA (14 -> 15), gain Expertise in Deception and Performance. Astarion becomes the ultimate face of the party with double proficiency in Deception, Performance, Stealth, and Sleight of Hand. Thematic and powerful for social encounters.
  - **+2 DEX (17 -> 19)** -- More damage, AC, and Initiative. Stronger in combat, less thematic.
- **Dirty Tricks (Swashbuckler level 4):**
  - **Dirty Trick: Pocket Sand** -- Bonus action, blind a target (CHA save). Blinded enemies have Disadvantage on attacks, and you have Advantage against them. Guarantees Sneak Attack AND sets up possible crits.
  - **Dirty Trick: Flick o' the Wrist** -- Bonus action, attempt to Disarm. Knock the weapon out of an enemy's hand.

Level 5 -- Rogue 5

You gain:

- **Uncanny Dodge** -- When an enemy hits you with an attack, use your Reaction to take **half damage**. This is your primary survivability tool. Astarion is squishy; this keeps him alive. Works once per round.
- **Sneak Attack scales to 3d6**

This is where we pivot to Bard. 5 levels of Rogue gives you Sneak Attack 3d6, Uncanny Dodge, Fancy Footwork, Rakish Audacity, and Dirty Tricks -- everything you need from Rogue. Now Bard adds Extra Attack, spells, Blade Flourishes, and more skills.

Level 6 -- Bard 1

You gain:

- **Bardic Inspiration** -- Grant an ally a d6 bonus to their next attack roll, ability check, or saving throw. CHA modifier uses per long rest (2 at 14 CHA, 3 at 16+).
- **Bard Spellcasting (CHA-based)** -- Access to the Bard spell list. Key picks:
  - **Healing Word** -- Bonus action ranged heal. Your Life Cleric is the primary healer, but a backup Healing Word is always valuable in an 8-person party.
  - **Faerie Fire** -- Concentration. Outline enemies in light; all attacks against them have Advantage. Helps your whole party.
  - **Dissonant Whispers** -- 3d6 psychic damage + forces target to flee.

Level 7 -- Bard 2

You gain:

- **Song of Rest** -- Party heals extra HP on short rest. Nice passive.
- **Jack of All Trades** -- Add half your proficiency bonus to ANY ability check you're not already proficient in. Astarion becomes competent at literally everything. Even skills he hasn't trained in get a bonus.

Level 8 -- Bard 3 (College of Swords)

You gain:

- **Blade Flourish** -- When you take the Attack action, gain +3m movement speed. You can spend a Bardic Inspiration die to perform a Flourish:
  - **Slashing Flourish** -- Hit the target AND all nearby enemies + deal Inspiration die as bonus damage.
  - **Defensive Flourish** -- Add the Inspiration die to BOTH your damage AND your AC until your next turn. Can push your AC to 22+ for a round.
  - **Mobile Flourish** -- Hit the target, deal bonus damage, and push them backward.
- **Fighting Style: Two-Weapon Fighting** -- Add your DEX modifier to offhand attack damage. Essential for dual-wielding.
- **Bonus proficiency:** Medium armor, scimitars

Spell: Hold Person (paralyze a humanoid, melee hits auto-crit)

Level 9 -- Bard 4

You gain:

- **Feat:** +2 DEX to push toward 20 (adjust based on earlier choices and whether you used Hag Hair)
  - Alternative: Dual Wielder (+1 AC while dual-wielding, can use non-light weapons in offhand)
- **Spell:** Invisibility or Silence

Level 10 -- Bard 5

You gain:

- **3rd-Level Bard Spell Slots**
- **Bardic Inspiration now recharges on short rest.** Much more Flourish fuel throughout the day.
- **Spell:** Hypnotic Pattern (AoE WIS save or incapacitated) or Fear (AoE WIS save or frightened + drop weapons)

Level 11 -- Bard 6 (College of Swords)

Big power spike.

You gain:

- **Extra Attack** -- Two weapon attacks per Action. Combined with a bonus action offhand attack, that's **3 attacks per turn**. Sneak Attack (3d6) applies to one of them.
- **Improved Blade Flourish** -- Flourishes now add a minimum of +4 to damage/AC (instead of rolling the Inspiration die, unless the die would be higher).

Combat rotation at this level: Main hand attack + Extra Attack (2 hits, one triggers Sneak Attack 3d6) + bonus action offhand attack + optional Flourish on any hit = 3 attacks per turn with guaranteed Sneak Attack, free Disengage via Fancy Footwork, and Flourish bonuses. Then walk away without provoking opportunity attacks.

Level 12 -- Bard 7

You gain:

- **4th-Level Bard Spell Slots**
- **Key spells:**
  - **Greater Invisibility** -- Concentration. Stay invisible even after attacking. Permanent Advantage on ALL attacks for the duration. Enemies can't target you with single-target spells. Devastating on Astarion.
  - **Dimension Door** -- Teleport yourself + one ally up to 152m. Emergency extraction.
  - **Polymorph** -- Turn an enemy into a sheep or a dying ally into a 157 HP Giant Ape.

Gear to Grab

Act 1

Shortsword of First Blood *Where:* Sold by Roah Moonglow in the Shattered Sanctum (Goblin Camp) *Why:* +1d8 damage against targets at full HP. Astarion's high Initiative (Rakish Audacity bonus) means he often acts first, making this bonus reliable.

Knife of the Undermountain King *Where:* Grymforge *Why:* +1 shortsword. Advantage on attacks against lightly/heavily obscured targets (works in Darkness zones from your Sorcerer). Crits on 19. Excellent weapon.

Gloves of Thievery *Where:* Sold by Brem in Zhentarim Hideout *Why:* +1 to Sleight of Hand, can use Knock as a bonus action. Lockpicking utility.

Act 2

Sword of Life Stealing *Where:* Act 2 vendor or loot *Why:* On crit: +10 necrotic damage and 10 temp HP. Pocket Sand gives Advantage = more crits.

Yuan-Ti Scale Mail *Where:* Sold at Last Light Inn *Why:* 15+DEX (max 2) = 17 AC. Advantage on Initiative rolls. Going first matters for a Swashbuckler.

Act 3

Crimson Mischief (shortsword) *Where:* Orin's corpse (Act 3 main quest) *Why:* Legendary. +7 damage when attacking with Advantage, +1d4 necrotic, extra 1d4 on offhand hits. Best main-hand weapon for dual-wielding rogues in the game.

Bloodthirst (dagger) *Where:* Bhaal Temple reward or Orin's loot *Why:* Legendary. +1d4 piercing, +10 damage on crit, True Strike cantrip. Best offhand weapon.

Bhaalist Armour *Where:* Murder Tribunal (side with Bhaal). Requires a dark story path. *Why:* Aura giving enemies Vulnerability to piercing damage. Every stab does double piercing. Insane with dual-wielding piercing weapons. *Alternative if you don't want the dark path:* Armour of Agility (medium armor, no Stealth Disadvantage, +2 AC)

Helmet of Grit *Where:* Szarr Palace (Cazador's lair, Act 3 -- thematically tied to Astarion's storyline) *Why:* At 50% HP or below, gain a bonus action. Extra offhand attack when wounded.

Helldusk Boots *Where:* Wyrm's Rock Fortress, Gortash's quarters (sneak in or kill Gortash) *Why:* Hellcrawler (teleport on landing) + Infernal Evasion (succeed on a failed save 1/short rest). Perfect for a hit-and-run character.

Cloak of Displacement *Where:* Wyrm's Crossing, Danthelon's Dancing Axe shop *Why:* Attackers have Disadvantage against you until they hit you. Resets each turn. Keeps you alive between Uncanny Dodge and Fancy Footwork.

Quick Tips

> **Rakish Audacity = guaranteed Sneak Attack every turn.** No hiding needed. Just be in melee within 1.5m of the target without Disadvantage. This makes Astarion consistent and reliable unlike traditional Rogues who hide every turn.

> **Hit-and-run is your identity.** Attack -> Fancy Footwork prevents opportunity attacks -> walk to your next target or to safety. You are never stuck in one place.

> **Pocket Sand sets up big damage.** Bonus action Blind -> attack with Advantage -> Sneak Attack + possible crit. If you don't need the offhand attack that turn, Pocket Sand into Advantage attacks is higher expected damage.

> **Defensive Flourish when in danger.** Spend Bardic Inspiration die to add to both damage and AC. A good Defensive Flourish can push Astarion's AC to 22+ for a round.

> **Greater Invisibility for boss fights.** Concentration. Stay invisible even after attacking. Permanent Advantage on all attacks.

> **Astarion is the party's skill monkey.** Expertise in 4+ skills, Jack of All Trades for everything else, high DEX and CHA. He handles lockpicking, trap disarming, Persuasion, Deception, Stealth, and Performance. Let him lead dialogue when you need to charm or deceive.

> **Backup Healing Word.** Your Life Cleric is the primary healer, but Astarion with Healing Word can save a downed ally when the Cleric is busy or out of range.

Party Gear Assignments

This build gets: Crimson Mischief + Bloodthirst, Helldusk Boots, Cloak of Displacement, Helmet of Grit

Passes to others:

- Helldusk Armor -> Paladin/Hexblade. You wear light/medium armor for Stealth.
- Helldusk Gloves -> Karlach. *Backup:* Legacy of the Masters or Gloves of Dexterity.
- Viconia's Walking Fortress -> Paladin/Hexblade. You dual-wield, no shield.
- Gontr Mael -> Gloomstalker. You fight in melee, not at range.
- Nyrulna -> Karlach. You don't throw weapons.
- Birthright -> Paladin/Hexblade. DEX is your primary stat, not CHA.
- All caster robes/staves -> Sorcerer/Gale. You wear armor and use swords.

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