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Below is a campaign manual / "season bible" for your world that your buddy can use as the bones of an AI-led DM app. It's written so it can be run at a table or converted into structured data (locations, NPCs, encounters, puzzles, rewards, state flags).

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Muddlebrook: Harlequin Trials

A comedic, chaotic mystery campaign with puzzle rooms, mini-games, and a theatrical "Joker/Saw" mastermind.

Core Pitch

Muddlebrook is a cozy small town with a slightly cursed vibe. People come here for quiet lives, warm taverns, and ordinary problems—until a masked villain turns the town into a game board. The mayor goes missing, and the party becomes unwilling contestants in the Harlequin Machinist's escalating "Trials." Each Trial offers rewards for cleverness and punishes recklessness, but the villain's real goal is to shape the party into the kind of opponents worth performing for... or breaking.

Tone: Scooby-Doo mystery + Monty Python absurdity + dark theatrical traps (never gory, more "cartoon menace" than horror)

Play Style: social scenes → investigation → puzzle/mini-games → short encounter → cliffhanger

Player Experience: beginner-friendly, lots of checks, low rules overhead, always something to do

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## Season Structure

The Loop (what the app can repeat forever)

1. Safe Hub Scene (tavern / shop / town square)

2. Lead (rumor, witness, strange event, villain taunt)

3. Trial Location (puzzle room with 3–6 mini-games)

4. Encounter (clockwork minions, time-ripple hazard, rival contestants, etc.)

5. Reward (magical item/boon, not just a clue)

6. Stinger (Machinist message, mayor hint, new location unlocked)

## Recommended Arc Length

Session 1–2: Mayor missing, Trial #1, first villain contact

Session 3–6: Trial chain around town, meet recluse + shopkeeper, discover the Machinist's "rules"

Session 7–10: Reveal the deeper mechanism (clocktower engine / time fracture), rescue

attempt, betrayal or twist

Session 11+: Expand beyond town (wider region: mines, manor, carnival, underground workshop)

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Setting Bible

The Town: Muddlebrook

Vibe: charming, muddy, lantern-lit streets, friendly people, suspiciously many clocks

Theme: "Normal town that slowly realizes it's in a performance."

Key Districts

Drunken Dragon Inn (hub)

Town Hall (mayor's office becomes Trial #1)

Clocktower Hill (abandoned clocktower; Trial #2+; town's "heart")

Old Market Row (shops; Elara's curios; gossip; side quests)

The Fogline Docks (strange lights; smuggling; optional watery side plots)

The Whisperwood Edge (forest; time oddities; creatures; future arc)

Town Secrets (GM-facing)

Muddlebrook sits on a time-stressed leyline anchored by the Clocktower Engine.

The mayor discovered anomalies and tried to lock the mechanism down.

The Machinist is using the Engine to stage "perfect" set pieces and test subjects.

Recurring Town Problems (drop-in quests)

A bakery's oven bakes bread that screams compliments

A well that echoes future conversations

A flock of crows that only speaks in riddles

A statue that swaps people's shoes at night

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Main Villain Bible

The Harlequin Machinist (H.M.)

Public persona: urban legend, "a performer with gears under his skin"

True role: inventor, illusionist, trapwright exploiting time/clockwork magic

Villain Principles (how to roleplay them)

Never fights fair. Always theatrical. Always staged.

Talks like a showman. Praises clever play, mocks panic.

Rewards are real. He wants contestants to survive and continue.

Punishments are humiliating. Slapstick harm, temporary curses, embarrassment.

He leaves calling cards. Joker-like notes, gears, laughing masks, backwards ticking.

The Machinist's "Rules"

1. Every Trial can be "won" without violence.
2. Every Trial can be "failed" without death (unless party is reckless).
3. The Machinist never lies outright—he misdirects.
4. Using his rewards makes you "part of the show" (he notices you).

Villain Stat Block (5e-compatible, boss for later)

Harlequin Machinist (Medium humanoid, chaotic evil)

AC 16 (reinforced coat, agility)

HP 110 (13d8+52)

Speed 30 ft

STR 10 (+0)

DEX 18 (+4)

CON 18 (+4)

INT 16 (+3)

WIS 12 (+1)

CHA 18 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Con +8, Cha +8

Skills Deception +8, Insight +5, Investigation +7, Perception +5, Sleight of Hand +8, Stealth +8

Damage Resistances psychic; bludgeoning/piercing/slashing from nonmagical attacks (while his "Show Shield" is up)

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Common, plus 2

CR ~7 (tune up/down by party level)

## Traits

Show Shield (Recharge 5–6): As a reaction when hit, reduce damage by 15 and teleport up to 15 ft to an unoccupied space he can see, leaving an illusionary afterimage.

Trapwright: At the start of combat, one creature of his choice must succeed on DC 15 Wis save or be distracted by illusions: disadvantage on its first attack roll that combat.

Time-Skip Step (Bonus Action): Teleport 10 ft, does not provoke opportunity attacks.

## Actions

Multiattack: Two attacks with Razor Cane or Throws.

Razor Cane: +8 to hit, 5 ft, 1d8+4 slashing + 1d6 psychic.

Clockwork Throw: +8 to hit, 30/90 ft, 1d6+4 piercing; target must make DC 15 Dex save or be "Marked" (a little gear sticks to them). Marked targets take +1d6 damage from his next attack.

Curtain Call (1/day): Creates a 20-ft-radius illusion zone for 1 minute. Enemies inside must make DC 15 Wis save at start of their turn or move 10 ft in a random direction (as they "miss their mark"). On success, they act normally.

## Villain Minions

Use these early so he stays distant until later.

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## Monsters & Encounters (Original, Beginner-Friendly)

### 1) Clockwork Critters (CR 1/4)

Small construct, neutral evil

AC 13 | HP 11 (2d6+4) | Speed 30

STR 8 (-1) DEX 14 (+2) CON 14 (+2) INT 3 (-4) WIS 10 (+0) CHA 3 (-4)

Damage Immunities: poison

Condition Immunities: poisoned

Senses: darkvision 60, passive 10

Trait — Wind-Up Scamper: Bonus action: Disengage.

Action — Bite/Clamp: +4 to hit, 1d6+2 piercing.

On hit (1/turn): target must DC 11 Dex save or drop one small item (comedy: "it steals your hat/pen/shoe").

### 2) Confetti Ooze (CR 1/2)

Medium ooze, chaotic neutral

AC 8 | HP 30 (4d8+12) | Speed 20

Trait — Glitter Burst: when hit by melee, attacker must DC 11 Con save or be blinded until end of its next turn (glitter in eyes).

Action — Slam: +3 to hit, 1d8+1 bludgeoning + 1d4 psychic (humiliation damage).

Death: explodes into confetti; everyone within 10 ft rolls a d6: 1–2 sneezing fit (disadvantage on next roll), 3–6 nothing.

### 3) Time Ripple Hazard (non-creature encounter)

Run it like an environmental puzzle in combat. Each round, roll a d6:

1. Slow Zone (one random 10-ft square becomes difficult terrain)

2. Fast Step (one player gets +10 ft movement)

3. Reset (a dropped item reappears in their hand)

4. Echo (a player repeats last sentence involuntarily)

5. Blink (a small object teleports 5 ft)

6. Stutter (one creature rerolls initiative and takes the new result)

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NPC Bible (with roleplay "engines")

Norrin the Bard (tavern)

Role: rumors, vibe-setter, comedic relief, foreshadow

Voice: sing-song, theatrical, friendly

Behavior: turns answers into rhymes, never gives full truth directly

Lines:

"Ah! New faces—new verses!"

"I only write embarrassing songs sometimes."

Use: gives hooks, introduces town gossip, can accidentally reveal "curtain/hidden room"

rumors.

### Mara Ember (bartender)

Role: grounded info, practical advice, keeps pace moving

Voice: confident, no-nonsense, warm but firm

Behavior: short sentences, reads the room, hates drama

Lines:

"If you're not buying, make it quick."

"Rumors are cheap. Facts cost."

Use: points to guard captain, mentions rewards, warns about scams.

### Darius (dark recluse)

Role: mentor, warning, "I've seen this before"

Voice: low, careful, intense

Behavior: speaks like every word has weight, hates the Machinist, respects cleverness

Hook: can direct party to Elara and plant seeds of the back room.

### Elara (Clockwork Curios shopkeeper)

Role: upgrades/rewards economy, back-room temptation, lore gate

Voice: sharp, amused, confident

Behavior: tests customers, bargains hard, has "special stock"

Back room hook: "accidental glow," curtain shift, item whispers.

### Mayor Alderwick (missing)

Role: mystery anchor, emotional stakes

Portrayal: competent, kind, secretly terrified of what he found

Breadcrumb: notes, warnings, or recordings appear between trials.

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Session 1: Playbook (what you already built)

Scene 1: Tavern Meet

Players meet, establish class/race/quirks

Townfolk burst in: mayor missing, reward offered

Norrin sings a short foreshadow line (optional)

Scene 2: Town Hall → Mayor's Office (Trial #1)

Atmospheric intro only (no "here are the things"), then players explore.

Trial #1 Mini-Games (Reward-Focused)

Each mini-game offers a magic item on success and a fun consequence on failure.

1. Backwards Clock

Check: Sleight of Hand / Investigation

Reward: Blinkstep Spark (teleport 10 ft 1/long rest)

Fail: 1 lightning + hair stands up

## 2. Puzzle Box

Check: Int / Arcana

Reward: Jester's Lucky Coin (1/day +1d4, tails = 1 psychic)

Fail: lavender gas, -1 to attack rolls for 10 minutes

## 3. Stacked Bookshelf (Balance Game)

Check: Dex + Wis choice

Reward: Featherfall Bookmark (1/day Feather Fall self)

Fail: shelf collapse, 1 bludgeoning

## 4. Mechanical Frog Chase

Check: Dex / Animal Handling

Reward: Hopper's Jump Band (jump boost 1/long rest)

Fail: frog in shirt, 1 psychic (panic)

## 5. Three Locks

Reward options: stealth vial, flash orb, terrain blessing

Fail: 1 piercing + "goat scream drawer"

## 6. Carpet Tile Puzzle

Reward: Sigil Shard (1/day reduce damage by 2)

Fail: 1 bludgeoning shin smack

Encounter (end of session)

Clockwork Critters OR Confetti Ooze OR Time Ripple hazard

Cliffhanger: distant clocktower rings though "broken"

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Economy & Magical Items (App-Friendly)

Keep rewards simple: "1/day" or "1/long rest." Avoid stacking complexity.

Starter Magic Item Pool (Tier 1)

Blinkstep Spark (teleport 10 ft)

Featherfall Bookmark

Jester's Lucky Coin

Sigil Shard (reduce damage 2)

Whispering Stone (party whisper 1/day)

Flash Powder Orb (deafen 1 round on fail)

Cloak Pin of Minor Disguise (change voice/face subtly for 10 min 1/day)

Gearbreaker's Kit (+2 to checks to disable mechanical traps, 3 charges)

The "Favor Coin" Meta-Reward

Grand prize after completing a Trial set.

Harlequin's Favor (Tier 1): spend to gain advantage on one roll.

Later tiers can do stronger effects (reroll, negate damage, auto-succeed a save) but the villain "marks" you when you use it (narrative consequence).

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App Implementation Notes (what your buddy needs)

This campaign is ideal for an AI DM app because it's modular.

Data model building blocks

Locations (description, NPCs, encounter tables, puzzles list)

NPCs (voice, personality tags, goals, secrets, sample lines)

Mini-games (trigger → required roll → success reward → fail consequence)

Encounters (creatures/hazards, scaling knobs)

State flags (met\_norrin, unlocked\_back\_room, solved\_trial1\_clock, has\_blinkstep\_spark)

Scene scripts (read-aloud intros + villain stingers)

"AI DM Rules" prompt (high level)

Always ask for rolls on uncertain actions

Keep scenes cinematic, not mechanical dumps

Don't reveal hidden structure

Use comedic consequences over lethal outcomes early

Reward curiosity

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Optional: How to Scale Difficulty

Add +2 AC / +15 HP to boss per tier

Add 1–2 extra critters per additional player

Increase DCs gradually (10–12 early, 13–15 mid, 16–18 late)

Make failures add conditions (slowed, blinded 1 round) instead of raw damage

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### Ready-to-Use Roleplay Prompts (for AI)

If your buddy wants quick “voice locks,” these are effective:

Norrin: “theatrical bard, playful, speaks in short rhymes, friendly, dramatic pauses”

Mara: “practical bartender, short direct sentences, dry humor, not easily impressed”

Darius: “quiet intense recluse, speaks carefully, warns, respects competence”

Elara: “clever merchant, amused, tests customers, bargains, hints at hidden stock”

Machinist: “showman villain, taunting, praises cleverness, humiliates panic, never swears, always ‘let’s play’ energy”

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If you want, I can turn this into:

a full PDF campaign manual (with chapters, stat blocks, encounter tables, and handouts), or

a JSON-first “app bible” (locations/NPCs/puzzles already structured for your friend to plug in).