



SPOILERS FOR THE ALEXANDRIAN REMIX

Recently I [reviewed *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*](#), the most recent campaign supplement for *Dungeons & Dragons* from Wizards of the Coast. That review highlighted a number of places where, unfortunately, I felt that *Dragon Heist* came up a little short in terms of its design. Since writing that review, I've had several people ask – based in part, perhaps, on my previous experience [remixing the *Keep on the Shadowfell*](#) and [Eternal Lies](#) – if I would “fix” *Dragon Heist* for them.

Short answer: Yes.

Unlike [Hoard of the Dragon Queen](#), for which I received [similar requests](#), *Dragon Heist* has a lot of really great material in it. Material that's worth bringing to your gaming table. The primary goal of this remix is, in fact, to make sure that you can bring even MORE of this material to your gaming table than the published campaign allows, and to re-structure the material in a way that will make it easy and rewarding for you to run the campaign.

With that being said: If you're expecting something as expansive as my remix of *Eternal Lies* or as mechanically-oriented as my remix of *Keep on the Shadowfell*, I'm afraid you'll be disappointed. My goal with *Dragon Heist* is more narrowly focused, although it will perhaps serve as an exemplar of how I often rework published material in order to create a richer, more dynamic, and (importantly) more robust scenario.

EDIT: In the course of writing and developing the Alexandrian Remix, the scope of the project expanded. This is discussed in more detail in [Part 7: How the Remix Works](#), but the originally design-oriented discussion ambitiously grew into a much more prodigious project than I'd originally intended. These essays were not designed for use at the table, and became even less useful as such as time went by. If this is your first time visiting the remix, I recommend reading through this series to understand how and why it works. If you're looking to actually *run* the remix, you'll want to have run-time notes: A description of those can be found in Part 7, and Patrons of the Alexandrian can find a copy of my own run-time notes at Patreon.

This advice also holds if you're ever feeling overwhelmed by the minutia of the Remix: Skip to Part 7 and read “How the Remix Works” followed by “A Simple Checklist.” It's easier than you think!

[Review: Dragon Heist](#)

[Part 1: The Villains](#)

[Part 1B: Other Factions](#)

[Part 1C: Player Character Factions](#)

[Part 2: Gralhund Villa](#)

[Part 3: Faction Outposts](#)

[Part 3B: More Faction Outposts](#)

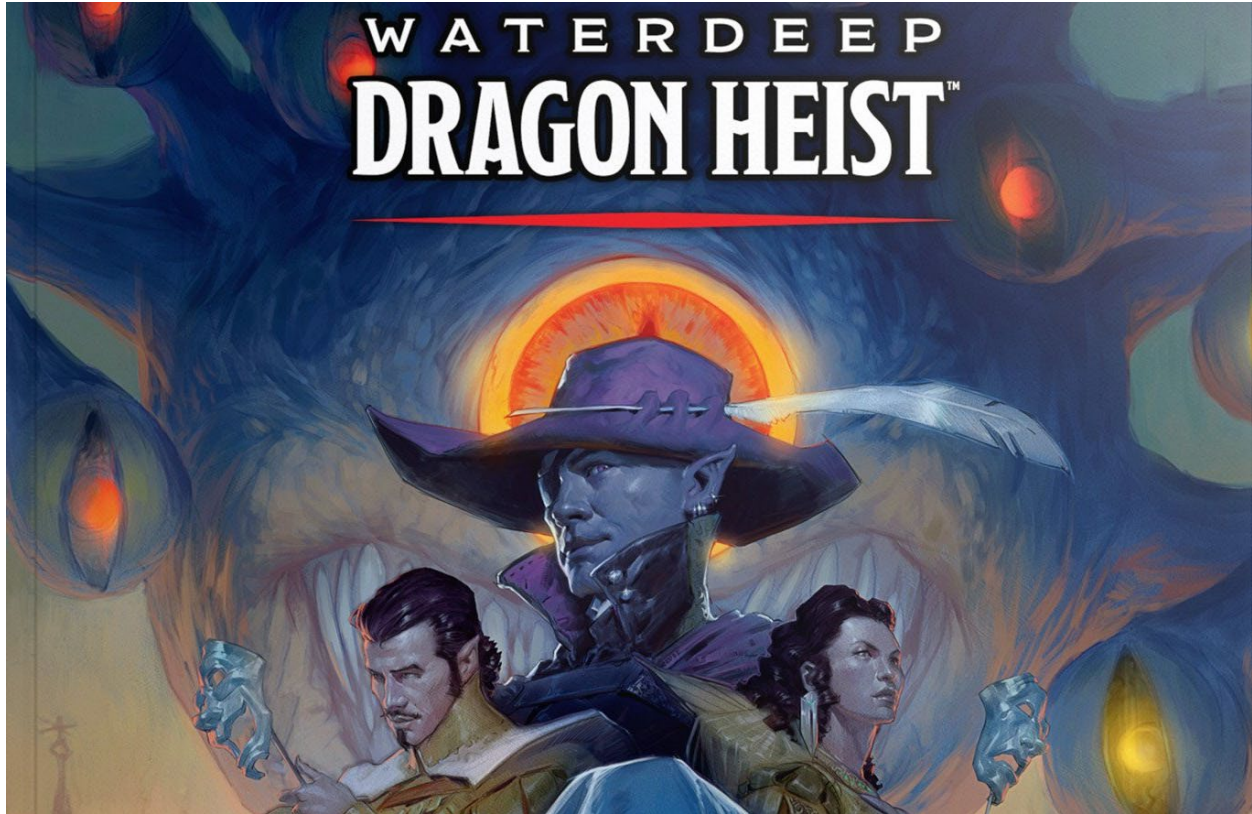
[Part 3C: Response Teams](#)
[Part 3D: Other Response Teams](#)
[Part 4: The Eyes of the Stone](#)
[Part 4B: Bregan D'Aerthe – Sea Maidens Faire](#)
[Part 4C: Cassalanter Villa](#)
[Part 4D: Xanathar's Lair](#)
[Part 4E: Zhentarim – Kolat Towers](#)
[Part 5: Clues and Timelines](#)
[Part 5B: Finding Floon](#)
[Part 5C: The Nimblewright Investigation](#)
[Part 5D: Backtracking Dalakhar & Kalain](#)
[Part 5E: Outpost and Lair Revelation List](#)
[Part 6: Golorr Artifacts](#)
[Part 6B: The Brandath Crypts](#)
[Part 6C: The Vault](#)
[Part 6D: Faction Reports \(Gralhund/Jarlaxle\)](#)
[Part 6E: Faction Reports \(Cassalanter\)](#)
[Part 6F: Faction Reports \(Xanathar/Zhentarim\)](#)
[Part 7: How the Remix Works](#)

[Addendum: First Impressions](#)
[Addendum: The Twin Parades](#)
[Addendum: Fancy Props](#)
[Addendum: Other Collaborators](#)
[Addendum: A Night in Trollskull Manor](#)
[Addendum: The Dragon of Dragon Heist](#)
[Addendum: Timelines & Starting the Campaign](#)
[Addendum: The Blinded Stone](#)

[Running the Campaign: A Party at Shipwrights' House](#)
[Running the Campaign: The Manshoon Heists](#)
[Running the Campaign: Creating the Characters](#)
[Dragon Heist: The Final Session](#)

REVIEW: DRAGON HEIST

[by Justin Alexander - November 7th, 2018](#)



SPOILERS FOR DRAGON HEIST

*If you're a local player in my campaigns, you might want to steer clear here. I may be running *Dragon Heist* in the future, but not for people who've read the plot.*

I've been periodically checking out the published campaigns for D&D 5th Edition whenever one catches my eyes, hoping that it'll be something super awesome that I can use to kick off a 5th Edition campaign. *Hoard of the Dragon Queen* was one of these, and that went... [poorly](#).

Earlier this year, I started getting really, really excited about [Waterdeep: Dragon Heist](#). It promised something distinctive: A heist-structured mini-campaign for D&D with the PCs competing against a complex web of factions in order to win a huge prize that would lead directly into a megadungeon campaign in the [Dungeon of the Mad Mage](#)! That would be amazing!

... that is not what *Dragon Heist* is.

First, there is no heist. And I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, "But Justin, the name of the book is *Dragon Heist*. Why wouldn't there be a heist?" And I'm right there with you, because an overwhelming refrain as I read through this book was simply:

Why?

But... why?

And also: Why?

Okay, let's take a step back and talk about what the story of *Dragon Heist* actually is. It basically breaks down into four parts:

- The PCs are hired to rescue someone who has been kidnapped. The person they rescue is virtually unimportant, but the *other* kidnap victim turns out to be the estranged son of a former Open Lord of Waterdeep who embezzled a bunch of money and hid it in a magical vault.
- The PCs are rewarded with the deed to an abandoned tavern. A little while later, a huge fireball goes off and kills a bunch of people just outside the tavern. Investigating the explosion will lead the PCs to discover that some bad guys have stolen a magic item (the *Stone of Golorr*) that will lead them to the magical vault.
- A Benny Hill chase sequence ensues, at the end of which the PCs have the *Stone of Golorr*.
- They go to the vault and loot it.

THINGS THAT MAKE NO SENSE

So one of the major problems with *Dragon Heist* is how much of it doesn't really make any sense.

For example, the second part of the scenario works like this:

- Dalakhar is a spy who works for Lord Neverember. He has stolen the *Stone of Golorr* that leads to the vault, but is unable to leave Waterdeep and take the magic artifact to Lord Neverember because Zhent assassins are stalking him.
- He goes to members of Lord Neverember's estranged son's household and asks them to tell him where he can find the heroes who rescued the estranged son because he believes that anyone who would rescue Lord Neverember's son can also be trusted to help him.

That doesn't actually make sense. Why wouldn't Dalakhar just ask Neverember's son to help him? And if Dalakhar believes that the son is so estranged from his father that he would never help him, why would he believe that the son's friends would be the only possible source of assistance? Why doesn't he just ask his friends for help directly?

So then Dalakhar gets killed in the fireball that explodes outside of the PCs' tavern. Where did the fireball come from? Well, Zhent assassins working with House Gralhund had successfully tracked him down. House Gralhund didn't fully trust the Zhent assassins, however, and so sent their own agent to follow them and make sure the job got done right. "When it seemed as though Dalakhar might give [the Zhent assassins] the slip, this agent hurled one of the beads from the necklace [of fireballs] to stop the gnome in his tracks."



Okay, fine. Except then it turns out that the Zhent assassins were *also* killed and/or badly injured in the fireball because they were literally mere feet away from Dalakhar when it went off. So... the Gralhund agent was so concerned that Dalakhar had escaped the Zhent assassins – even though they were mere feet away from snatching him – that it decided to blow up an entire city block?

That doesn't make any sense.

To be fair, I think the intention here may have been for the Gralhunds to be intentionally double-crossing the Zhent assassins by blowing them up along with Dalakhar. (There's another passage later in the book that sort of suggests that might be true.) But it still doesn't make sense because the Gralhunds' agent immediately runs away, leaving the surviving Zhent assassin to collect the *Stone of Golorr!* It's also obviously directly contradicted by the first passage.

Which is another problem: *Dragon Heist* is teeming with continuity errors. For example, in a later scene there's a gazer who is invisibly following the PCs and watching their movements. When the PCs reach a particular location, the gazer waits outside and summons reinforcements from its gang. But when the PCs go inside, they discover that the gang members are... already there? How? Why?

FRAGILE STRUCTURE



Okay, Dalakhar and a bunch of other people have been blown up. So the PCs start investigating the explosion.

But... why?

There's literally no reason given. The PCs are given no motivation to do so, and, in fact, the scenario goes out of its way to specifically discourage them from getting involved.

But, okay, the PCs start investigating the explosion. This investigation can follow one of two paths.

First option: Break into the morgue and use *speak with dead* spells. (This option is fine, if a little thin.)

Second option:

- Question witnesses and have one of them tell the PCs that she saw an automaton that “bears a striking similarity to the automatons that sometimes march in the Day of Wonders parade”, which is sponsored by the local temple of Gond.
- Go the Temple of Gond and discover that this is not, in fact, true and there are no such automatons that march in the Day of Wonders parade. (Because the adventure is teeming with continuity errors, remember?)
- The Temple of Gond *does* have a single automaton that matches this description, however. It’s known as a nimblewright. As the PCs approach the temple, the nimblewright will be on the roof flying a mechanical bird that will crash land on or near the PCs.
- If – and only if! – the PCs mention the incident with the mechanical bird to the priest of Gond they speak with, the priest will take them upstairs to the nimblewright’s room, chastise the nimblewright, and force the nimblewright to watch while acolytes pack up all of its mechanical inventions.
- If the PCs happen to have cast a *detect magic* spell while they watch the acolytes clear out the nimblewright’s stuff, they will notice that one of the items is magical.
- If they ask the nimblewright what this item is, it will turn out that the nimblewright has built a nimblewright detector! (What a lucky coincidence!)
- If they use the nimblewright detector, they will discover that there are only four nimblewrights in the entire city of Waterdeep. (Lucky!)
- Three of them belong to someone who may or may not be the bad guy in this scenario. (More on that later.) Regardless, this is pure coincidence and irrelevant to the current investigation.
- The fourth is, in fact, the one they were looking for at Gralhund House!

This investigatory structure is so bizarre, arbitrary, and paper-thin in its rationale that I honestly find it difficult to understand why it was included in the book at all.

Fortunately, when this structure inevitably fails, the book does suggest that the GM just have an NPC randomly come by and tell the PCs where to go.

When I find stuff like this in a published scenario, I always kind of second guess myself: Am I the crazy one? Does this actually work for other groups? Well, the interesting thing about the rise of online actual plays is that you can very quickly do a survey of how scenarios actually play out, and notably every single DM running *Dragon Heist* online that I was able to find has been forced to improvise a fix for this broken structure.

And this is a pattern which repeats several times in *Dragon Heist*. The Benny Hill chase, for example, is largely built along a similar chain of implausible connections, leaving the GM with little choice but to force implausible-yet-predetermined outcomes.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, the book is pockmarked with exhortations for the GM to railroad their players, accented with a smattering of pixelbitching propped up with several “thou shalt not find this unless you jump through my very specific hoop” bits. (One of the silliest involves making it impossible for the PCs to succeed on an Investigation test because there’s a thin layer of dust on the floor.)

TIMELINE

Something else to mention here is that the adventure's handling of time makes no sense. This is really a more specific iteration of Things That Make No Sense, but it's pervasive enough to become a serious issue in its own right which any DM running the adventure will need to deal with.

First major example:

- Dalakhar steals the *Stone of Golorr* from Xanathar.
- This triggers a gang war between the Zhentarim and Xanathar which has been going on for awhile when the PCs undertake their first mission.
- At the end of that mission, the PCs are rewarded with an abandoned tavern.
- A period of at least a tenday and probably *several weeks* now passes during which the PCs are assumed to be fixing up the tavern, joining various factions, doing missions for those factions, and advancing 1-2 more levels.
- Dalakhar, unable to get out of Waterdeep with the *Stone*, attempts to bring it to the PCs.



... what the heck has Dalakhar been doing for the past several weeks? The way the adventure is written, it actually seems as if he *just* stole the stone before coming to the PCs, but that can't be true. And to make things even more confusing, there's another timeline in which Dalakhar was keeping an eye on Neverember's estranged son, and then abruptly stopped doing that to infiltrate Xanathar's operation, but the dates in that timeline aren't really consistent with the other events described, either.

Another example: After the PCs trace the nimblewright to Gralhund House, Lady Gralhund orders the nimblewright to deliver the *Stone of Golorr* to a courier who will carry it to her master. (Why not just deliver it directly to her master? I can't help you.) In the adventure as written, it's supposed to take the PCs *several days* to find the nimblewright and discover where it took the *Stone of Golorr*.

You might be thinking, "Well, that's too bad. They'll be way too late to stop those couriers from delivering the *Stone of Golorr*!" Thankfully, however, the bad guys all politely wait for the PCs to show up before suddenly remembering they have a package to deliver and rushing off to do so in the Benny Hill chase sequence.

I think my favorite sequence here is:

- The bad guy tells five cultists about the *Stone of Golorr* and sends them to pick it up from the nimblewright. But he simultaneously orders two of the cultists to murder the other three because now they know too much about the *Stone of Golorr* and must be silenced! (But... why?)
- They botch the job and leave one of the other cultists still alive. This cultist then lies unconscious in a mausoleum for *several days* until the PCs find her and wake her up. She tells them where the other two cultists went.
- Thankfully, instead of just having the cultists bring the *Stone of Golorr* directly to him (despite that being the most logical course of action), the bad guy has ordered them to wait at a converted

windmill for – and I emphasize this once again – *several days* twiddling their thumbs for no reason.

- The bad guy eventually sends three spined devils to pick up the *Stone of Golorr*. With absolutely *incredible* timing, these spined devils arrive just *after* the PCs enter the converted windmill, but just *before* the PCs can climb the stairs and retrieve the *Stone* for themselves.

Cue the Benny Hill soundtrack.

And there are four different variations of this nonsense, because...

PICK A VILLAIN

Dragon Heist has a gimmick: It has four different villains.

Before the campaign begins, the GM picks one of these villains:

- Xanathar, a beholder crime boss
- Jarlaxle Baenre, a drow swashbuckler who is the secret lord of a city and also runs a traveling circus
- the Cassalanter, a demon-worshipping noble family
- the Zhentarim, a network of assassins and mercenaries

This decision also determines what season the campaign takes place (spring, summer, autumn, or winter). With one exception there is no actual connection between the villain and the time of year, but it does provide an interesting vehicle for emphasizing to the GM how the setting of Waterdeep changes over the course of a year.

The villain the DM chooses essentially affects three moments in the adventure:

1. It's their minions the PCs are chasing during the Benny Hill chase
2. It's their minions who track the PCs to the vault (even though they generally have *no way of doing that*) and fight them as they attempt to leave.
3. Each of them has a unique and elaborately detailed lair.

So, roughly speaking, at least three-quarters of the adventure is totally unaffected by the choice of villain. And where it gets weird is that most (but not all) of the villains are included in the scenario *even if they're not the villain you selected*. So, for example, Xanathar is intensely interested in the vault at the beginning of the scenario regardless of whether or not the DM selected him to be the main bad guy, but then he just... stops caring? Jarlaxle will kind of randomly show up and you're supposed to stage a random, lengthy scene with him which will, if he's not actually involved with the vault storyline, result in... nothing?



Oddly, the most compelling and interesting villains – the Cassalanter – are the ones who only show up if you select them as the main villains. (Although, as written, it’s very likely that the PCs will never even realize that the Cassalanter *are* their antagonist, and it’s virtually certain they’ll never find out the really interesting reason the Cassalanter are interested in the vault without the GM rewriting a bunch of stuff.)

This is all baffling. And it becomes more so as we look at how these villainous components were actually implemented.

THE BENNY HILL CHASE: As I mentioned, this section of the adventure starts with the PCs discovering who the Gralhunds’ nimblewright delivered the *Stone of Golorr* to. There are four different variations of this sequence (one for each villain), but they’re all pretty similar and consist of the PCs chasing one set of bad guys and then, just as they’re about to grab the *Stone of Golorr*, a completely random new bad guy will leap out of the shadows, grab the *Stone*, and run off!



In most of these sequences the GM is instructed to not once, but TWICE use the chase rules from the DMG and then, as soon as the PCs succeed at the chase, pull the, “Ha ha!” moment.

Whatever.

There’s a bunch of other painful railroading in this sequence, too. (Including old chestnuts like “the city watch magically finds them no matter where they are and no matter what precautions they take and arrest them”.)

But it gets weirder, because the way they’ve decided to design this sequence is to take ten generic locations, add a little text customizing them to each villain’s minions, and then shuffle up the order in which you encounter them based on which villain’s minions you’re chasing.

But... why?

It’s difficult to really describe how pointlessly convoluted this whole approach is. I spent an enormous amount of time trying to figure out what the benefit of this was supposed to be. They’d spent so much time constructing this Rube Goldbergian structure that I thought there *surely* must have been some purpose behind doing so.

But there just... isn’t.

In fact, it's all negative value: If you want to run the adventure strictly as written, the presentation is just unnecessarily confusing. If you were thinking that you might try to remix *Dragon Heist* in order to bring all the villainous factions into play simultaneously, the design of this section only serves to block you from doing so (because your players will notice if a bunch of different factions are all independently holed up in identical windmills).

THE LAIRS: *Dragon Heist* spends a little over 60 pages describing each of the villains' lairs in lavish detail. Here, at long last, a strong and unique spotlight is shone on each of the villains.

But if you glance back up to the beginning of this review where I summarized the plot of *Dragon Heist*, you may notice that "go to the villain's lair" does not appear in the list of events.

That's because in the adventure as designed, the PCs don't go to any of these lairs.

"That makes no sense! Why would you spend 60 pages describing these lairs and then write up a scenario structure in which they're never used? You must be pulling my leg, Justin!"

No. I'm not. The DM is, in fact, repeatedly told that the PCs don't need to go there, probably won't go there, and if they do go there and actually confront any of the villains, they'll almost certainly be killed.

But... why?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS



This book made me feel dumb.

Great care was clearly put into its construction. Enormous effort was exerted in order to erect, for example, the Rube Goldbergian Benny Hill chase sequence. The "pick a villain" gimmick required a ton of extra work. It all suggested that there must be some *meaning* in the madness that I was seeing.

And so I spent inordinate amounts of time flipping back and forth through the book, trying to figure out what I was missing.

Ultimately, though, I don't think I'm missing anything. *Dragon Heist* is just a mess.

Take the "pick a villain" thing, for example. I've seen it hyped up for giving the scenario "replayability", but that's not really true: As I mentioned before, fully three-quarters of the scenario isn't affected by the villain swap-out. *Dragon Heist* is no more replayable than any other scenario.

My most charitable conclusion is that the goal might have been to create distinctly different versions of the plot in order to support *rewatchability* (not *playability*) for the audience of actual play streamers. (In other words, the second time you watch a streaming group playing *Dragon Heist* you're surprised to discover the plot suddenly going in a different direction!) But just designing a scenario featuring dynamic faction play would have had the same result without turning your scenario's spine into generic mush and having the GM ignore half the book's content.

There are also places where you can squint and kind of imagine what the useful intention might have been. The Benny Hill Chase of Generic Locations, for example, might have been an exemplar of how to build an adventure out of customized generic urban locations. But the book doesn't actually provide a stockpile of such generic locations, so even if that was the intention, it doesn't really go anywhere.

Similarly, there are a number of scenes (like the Jarlaxle one) where it feels as if the scenario is *almost* trying to allow the ultimate bad guy to evolve organically out of the events of the campaign. But none of that goes anywhere, either, because the "DM picks the villain before the campaign starts" structure is pretty heavily embedded.

In many ways, *Dragon Heist* feels like the shattered remnants of a broken development cycle. It feels as if they were aiming for something ambitious, didn't achieve it (or maybe it fell apart in playtests), and they ended up kind of cobbling together something that was at least mostly functional out of the wreckage.

So here's the big question: Do I recommend *Dragon Heist*?

...

... how much work are you willing to put into fixing it?

I came to *Dragon Heist* because I wanted something that I could basically run out of the box. That's not really what I found: I could probably technically run it as written, but I wouldn't feel good about myself as a DM. So, for me, *Dragon Heist* is a failure.

If I was in a slightly different place in my life right now - one where I had the time necessary to heavily modify the scenario - I might feel differently: *Dragon Heist* is filled with interesting NPCs, studded with a number of good set pieces, and has an intriguing (if unfortunately squandered) premise. It's drenched with absolutely stunning art, including excellent portraits for most of the NPCs you'll encounter. It's also an excellent introduction to the rich setting of Waterdeep, with the decision in the second part of the adventure to gift the PCs with an abandoned tavern (although it is largely unconnected to the rest of the scenario) being an inspired one to tie the PCs into the community.

In short, there's a solid foundation here and a lot of good raw material to work with. But you *will* need to put in a fair amount of labor to realize its potential.

Here's another way to think of it: Without the "villain swap" gimmick and a couple other instances of bloat, this could have easily been a 64 page module plus about 32 pages of gazetteer information. If you

think of this as a 96 page book with a bunch of other pages that have been specifically designed so that you can't use them, it's really difficult to justify this as a \$50 product.

If you're willing to put in the substantial work necessary to actually get 100% utility out of the book, then your personal calculus may change.

Style: 4

Substance: 2

Author: Christopher Perkins (with James J. Haeck, James Introcaso, Adam Lee, Matt Sernett, Jeremy Crawford, Ben Petrisor, Kate Welch, Matthew Mercer, Charles Sanders)

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PART 1: THE VILLAINS

by [Justin Alexander](#) – November 28th, 2018

DESIGN GOALS

In remixing *Dragon Heist*, I have three primary goals.

First, I want to make it a **HEIST**. Or, more accurately, multiple heists.

Second, I want to eliminate the original “pick a villain” gimmick and instead restructure the campaign to feature **ALL OF THE VILLAINS**. The goal is to get all of the factions interested in the Vault competing with each other, and then thrust the PCs into the middle of that situation, bouncing around and causing all kinds of chaos.

Third, we’ll be doing a general **FIX-UP JOB**. This will include an attempt to clean up the broken continuity in the published campaign and also an effort to make the campaign’s scenario structure more robust (by applying the [Three Clue Rule](#), for example).

Because I don’t want to get too consumed with minutia, however, this final point will not take the form of attempting to track down every single continuity error in the scenario. Instead, I’ll be looking to perform a broader reorganization of *Dragon Heist*’s back story that will hopefully rearrange its diverse parts into a coherent whole, and then trust the DM to resolve the local continuity appropriately using these broad reference documents as their touchstone.

Even if you don’t own *Waterdeep: Dragon Heist*, I hope you’ll find some points of interest in my design notes and other discussion. But it probably goes without saying that in order to actually *use* this remix, you’ll need to [own a copy of the book](#).

We’ll begin with the villains.

THE GRAND GAMES



Periodically throughout *Waterdeep*’s history the byzantine factions of the city – or some significant subset thereof – will become collectively fixated upon some objective. Thus will begin a Grand Game.

Sometimes the goal of a Grand Game will be arcane. Often it is clandestine, although quite public struggles are not unknown. (On no less than three occasions the Grand Game has revolved around the appointment of the Open Lord.) Whatever the case, the intense rivalries of the Grand Game give birth to all forms of subterfuge, covert activities, deception, and intrigue.

This is very much the case with the current quest for Dagult Neverember's vault. Obliquely referred to by many players of the Grand Game as Neverember's Enigma, the truth of the vault was sought even before the players realized it *was* a vault. At first, it was merely known that the disgraced and ousted Neverember was keeping some momentous secret, and those involved in the Game yearned to discover what the former Open Lord of Waterdeep was hiding.

When the vast scope of his embezzlement — a half million gold dragons! — came to light, however, many intuited the truth behind Neverember's Enigma and its pursuit became even more frenzied.

In terms of the *Dragon Heist* campaign, we will focus on five factions participating in the Grand Game:

- Xanathar, a beholder crime boss
- the Zhentarim, a network of assassins and mercenaries
- the Cassalanters, a demon-worshipping noble family
- Jarlaxle Baenre, a drow swashbuckler who is the secret lord of a city, leader of the dark elf mercenary group Bregan D'Aerthe, and has surreptitiously come to Waterdeep as the captain of a traveling circus
- the Gralhunds, a minor noble family who is way out of their league

For each of these factions, we will want to know:

- What they're planning to do with the gold (which is largely, with the exception of our revised version of the Gralhunds, dealt with in the original book)
- How they became involved with Neverember's Enigma and what their current strategy for pursuing the Grand Game is
- How the PCs first interact with them and become aware of their involvement in the Grand Game

DESIGN NOTES

The concept of the "Grand Game" was created to give a convenient label to the proceedings. As the PCs are exposed to this label, it will help them conceptualize what they have become a part of. It also elevates the hunt for the vault, tying it into the long history of the city and the rivalry of its factions. As the PCs make the choice to join the Grand Game, it will be clear to them that they have crossed a threshold and become part of something larger than anything they have taken part in before. (And thus they themselves have become more important.)

The terminology of "Neverember's Enigma" is deliberately cryptic. It allows the participants of the Grand Game to speak in code while wrapping their words in elliptical euphemisms, creating a sense of mystery which will invite the PCs to drive forward and discover the truth of what's happening.

XANATHAR



When Xanathar had the *Stone of Golorr* stolen from the Palace of Waterdeep, he only knew that he was stealing an object of great importance to Lord Neverember (i.e., Neverember's Enigma). When he later learned about the missing dragons, he believed that he was now in possession of the whole key to Neverember's Vault. And he was perfectly happy with that. You don't need to actually *hold* the gold if you're the one who controls its location.

What he didn't know was that the *Stone of Golorr* had been blinded by Lord Neverember, who removed its three Eyes. (More on this in Part 4 of the remix.)

Then the Zhentarim came to him with one of the Eyes and said, "We have two different parts of this puzzle. We'd like to make a deal." Xanathar was enraged at both their presumption and his own folly, slew the Zhentarim envoys, and took the Eye they had brought to him.

Thus began the gang war between the Zhentarim and Xanathar. Xanathar was convinced that the Zhentarim had the other Eyes. (They didn't. Although that changes shortly after *Dragon Heist* begins; see below.) The Zhentarim, for their part, wanted both vengeance AND their Eye back (and the *Stone of Golorr* itself for good measure).

The gang war, in turn, became the point at which everyone who knows what's *really* going on in Waterdeep (or likes to think they do) became aware that a Grand Game was in progress. In the process, Dagult Neverember became aware that it was Xanathar who had stolen the *Stone of Golorr* and he reassigns Dalakhar to infiltrate Xanathar's organization and steal the *Stone* back.

ZHENTARIM

The Zhentarim were originally founded as a mercenary force by the wizard Manshoon, but they've been a fractured organization ever since the Manshoon Wars, when multiple clones of Manshoon warred for supremacy.



Most of Manshoon's clones were destroyed during the Manshoon Wars, but yet another has recently returned to Waterdeep (claiming, as they all do, to be the one true Manshoon). When he peeled off a large hunk of the local Zhentarim network that had been established by the Doom Raiders (see p. 198 of *Dragon Heist*), he became aware that Lord Neverember had used the local Zhentarim's resources to embezzle hundreds of thousands of gold dragons from the government.

Manshoon wanted to know where that money has gone. He knew that Neverember didn't actually have it in his possession, so he sent agents to infiltrate Neverember's household in Neverwinter to find out. Those agents weren't able to fully ascertain where the gold was, but they did identify the Eye as the key to getting it. They stole the Eye from the Protector's Enclave and brought it to Manshoon, who through a combination of divinations and other espionage efforts eventually connected it to the *Stone of Golorr* which Xanathar had stolen.

CHAPTER 1 - A FRIEND IN NEED: After he lost his Eye to Xanathar, Manshoon needed to get back in the game. His agents eventually concluded that Neverember's son, Renaer, might have another of the Eyes. They were right, although Renaer didn't know it: His father had given him an elaborate, ivory mourning locket in honor of his mother. The Eye was hidden inside it.

The full dynamic in the first chapter, therefore, is this:

- Zhentarim agents snatch Renaer Neverember and his friend Floon Blagmaar.
- While questioning Renaer in Area Z5, they realize that the Eye is in the mourning locket and take the locket from Renaer.
- Renaer is hauled back down to Area Z2 and tied up next to Floon. Upstairs, the Zhentarim break open the locket (it can still be found in Area Z5), remove the Eye, and give it to a courier to carry to Manshoon.
- Floon is then hauled upstairs for questioning (the Zhentarim want to see if he might be worth a ransom).
- Xanathar's agents storm the warehouse. They immediately find "the prisoner" (i.e., Floon), assume he's Renaer, and several of their agents hustle him out to their sewer hideout. Meanwhile, Renaer takes advantage of the confusion downstairs to slip his bonds and hide in Area Z2.

- Xanathar’s agents do a perfunctory sweep of the warehouse and then take off, leaving the kenku behind to kill any Zhents who show up.

Renaer will be able to tell the PCs that he was questioned by the Zhents about the half million dragons his father stole from the city; then they ripped off a locket that was very precious to him. If they find the locket and see the (now empty) secret compartment inside it, Renaer can also tell them that he had no idea that the compartment existed or what was stored inside it.

DESIGN NOTES

The opening scenario thus introduces the PCs to both the Zhentarim and Xanathar. It should also become clear that they’re both interested in the money Dagult Neverember stole, but the exact nature of what’s being fought over (i.e., the Stone of Golorr) should remain a mystery at this juncture.

The other thing we’re doing here is cleaning up one of the scenario’s major continuity errors: Why was Renaer kidnapped? At this point in the timeline, the Zhentarim already know that Xanathar has the Stone of Golorr and that the Stone is the only way of finding the vault. Questioning him “about the whereabouts of the Stone of Golorr”, as the adventure suggests, makes no sense.

JARLAXLE BAENRE

As *Dragon Heist* begins, Jarlaxle is unaware of the *Stone of Golorr* or the Grand Game which is being played. His current agenda, as described in the campaign, is to convince the leaders of Waterdeep to support Luskan’s bid to join the Lords’ Alliance. Freshly arrived in his cover identity as Captain Zord of the Sea Maiden’s Faire, Jarlaxle is coordinating and ramping up his local intelligence operations.

NIMBLEWRIGHTS: One of Jarlaxle’s main objectives right now is the sale of nimblewrights. Built by the technomancers of Luskan, he’s brought several dozen of these constructs with him and is selling them at surprisingly compelling prices.

Why? Because he’s actually harvesting data from them. In Jarlaxle’s stateroom onboard the *Scarlet Marpenoth* (Area U4, see p. 143) there is a specialized *crystal ball* that allows him to look out through the eyes of any nimblewright and even review what they’ve seen. (We might think of this as a “recording”, but Jarlaxle refers to it as a record of witness.)

After the PCs identify that a nimblewright is responsible for the *fireball* in Trollskull Alley, they’ll be able to trace the local nimblewrights back to “Captain Zord”. If they speak with Jarlaxle about the nimblewright they’re seeking, he’ll first want to know why they’re looking for it. Following up on whatever the PCs tell him, his agents will discover the hunt for the *Stone of Golorr* (or he’ll simply review the record of witness for the appropriate nimblewright and discover the Gralhunds’ schemes).

Alternatively, the PCs might decide not to talk to him and instead sneak in and steal his records of sale (or access the records of witness in the *crystal ball* for themselves). Which is great because, bang, you’ve got a heist pointed at Jarlaxle’s ship.



DESIGN NOTES

If the PCs perform a heist on the nimblewright proprietor instead of speaking with Jarlaxle, it's very possible that Jarlaxle won't become aware of the Grand Game and his agents will not become involved in later stages of the scenario. That's fine, though, because we've already gotten maximum bang for our buck from the player-initiated heist, right?

Full details on how the nimblewright-focused investigation is structured will be found in Part 5 of the remix.

CASSALANTERS



The Cassalanters were actually interested in Neverember's Enigma even before they knew that 500,000 dragons were on the line: Lord Neverember was not the first person to hide secrets within the *Stone of Golorr*, and through their demonic researches the Cassalanters have identified a number of other lucrative and powerful lines of inquiry they would like to pursue (see Part 6 of the remix).

They discovered that Neverember had hidden one of the Eyes in the crypt of Lady Alethea Brandath, Renaer's mother. They went to the crypt and extracted the Eye from the magical wards Dagult Neverember had placed around it. (Ironically, they were literally standing on top of the Vault itself and didn't know it.)

When the Cassalanters learned about the embezzled gold, however, their priorities quickly shifted: They saw an opportunity to save their children from the pact they had made with Asmodeus.

A PLEA FOR HELP: After the explosion, during the time that they're investigating the nimblewrights, the PCs are contacted by the Cassalanters, who request an audience. The Cassalanters' own agents were

in Trollskull Alley that day because they, too, were tracking the *Stone*, so they know that Dalakhar was trying to bring the *Stone* to the PCs.

When the PCs arrive at the Cassalanter estate:

- They are given an opportunity to “accidentally” meet the Cassalanter’s children, who come running into the Entrance Hall (C1) while the PCs are waiting.
- Lady Cassalanter comes out personally to gather the PCs from the Entrance Hall and shoos the children away. She leads the PCs to the Reading Room (Area C4), where they can look out over the Butterfly Garden (Area C25). The children have scampered through the mudroom and are playing out there now. (Make sure to mention the black dragon head mounted on the wall of the room.)
- Lady Cassalanter introduces her husband and they tell the PCs a modified version of their plight: The twins were cursed at their birth by Asmodean cultists to lose their souls on their ninth birthday. The Cassalanter’s have discovered a ritual which can save them, but it requires them to sacrifice “one shy of a million gold coins”. They are quite rich, but even in leveraging everything they own they still can’t raise that monstrous sum. If they could get their hands on Neverember’s ill-gotten gains, though... Will the PCs please help them?
- And then, of course, Lady Cassalanter turns to gaze wistfully at her children frolicking with the butterflies.

Obviously they don’t tell the PCs that the ritual also involves killing 99 people. (Unless they have some reason to think that the PCs would think that to be a great idea.) They don’t technically need *all* the money, and are willing to cut the PCs in on 10% of it or agree to return the surplus funds to the city.

THE FEAST: If the PCs agree to help and succeed in delivering the gold to the Cassalanter’s, they receive invitations to the feast where Ammalia poisons 99 guests in the garden pavilion and the final ritual is performed.

You may be tempted to have the Cassalanter’s betray the PCs by having them be among the 99, but I actually recommend the opposite: If the PCs have delivered as promised, the Cassalanter’s are more than pleased with their work and are looking forward to a long and prosperous friendship with them. They’re invited to feast in the Banquet Hall (Area C15) where all the non-sacrificial guests are celebrating.

If the PCs haven’t discovered the Cassalanter’s true motives, it will be far more effective for them to be horrified by their implication in the mass murder.

DESIGN NOTES

As far as I can tell, Renaer’s mother has never been given a first name, so I’ve provided one. If I’m in error on this (I haven’t, for example, read the novels the Neverembers appear in) please let me know.

Note that everything the Cassalanter’s tell the PCs is true... from a certain point of view.

PART 1B: OTHER FACTIONS

by [Justin Alexander](#) - November 29th, 2018



Moving beyond the major villains, the Grand Game also features the participation of any number of other factions (including the PCs).

GRALHUNDS

The Gralhunds are a minor faction (at least compared to the four main villains) involved in the Grand Game. They simply hope to obtain the Vault for themselves, and use its riches to elevate their position in Waterdeep's high society. (As described on p. 213, the Gralhunds believe that Lady Yalah should have been elevated to the Masked Lords years ago following the events in the novel [Death Masks](#).)

Many dismiss the Gralhunds as petty schemers, but the truth is that they have had to be clever and conniving in order to punch above their weight-class in Waterdeep's labyrinthine politics. Even now, as they play the Grand Game, they are struggling to compete with organizations that are far larger and have far more resources.

Thinking outside of the box, they embedded agents in Renaer Neverember's household months ago. Because Renaer was estranged from his father, they knew it was a long-shot, but it paid off: The agents spotted Dalakhar's surveillance of Renaer and identified him as an agent of Lord Neverember. When Dalakhar was abruptly pulled off of that assignment, the agents followed a hunch, followed up, and discovered he had ended up in Xanathar's organization (presumably still on orders from Lord Neverember). The Gralhunds didn't know that Xanathar held the *Stone of Golorr*, but when it was stolen they were among the first to suspect (and then know) that Dalakhar was responsible.



THE NIMBLEWRIGHT: Two days after Dalakhar stole the *Stone*, the Gralhunds located him and dispatched their newly acquired nimblewright to find him. In Trollskull Alley, the nimblewright uses a *fireball* spell to kill Dalakhar and the Zhentarim agents trailing him. The nimblewright then grabs the *Stone of Golorr* from Dalakhar’s corpse and flees the scene, returning to the Gralhund Villa with his prize (see Part 2).

DESIGN NOTE

The key decision here was to simplify the Gralhund back story. This quickly eliminates a whole slew of continuity errors from the campaign and simplifies a rather convoluted intrigue that the players are unlikely to ever fully fathom. But we’ve also simultaneously increased the scope of the Grand Game (by establishing that there are numerous minor factions all wrapped up in the intrigue) and given ourselves the opportunity to dynamically increase the number of factions involved in the Gralhund Villa sequence (see Part 2).

OTHER MINOR FACTIONS

OPEN LORD: The Open Lord of Waterdeep isn’t exactly a “minor” faction, but Laeral Silverhand is considerably behind the curve in the current Grand Game. She knows that Lord Neverember embezzled 500,000 dragons from the city, but as *Dragon Heist* begins she is under the belief that he already has the money in Neverwinter. She has agents working to recover it there, but little hope of succeeding (as she believes it has likely already been laundered into Neverember’s expansive plans for rebuilding and expanding Neverwinter). She has heard rumors of Neverember’s Enigma, but has yet to connect that with the missing dragons, and is also unaware of the *Stone of Golorr* (although she knows that a powerful artifact was stolen from the palace during the confused time period when Neverember was being ousted from power).

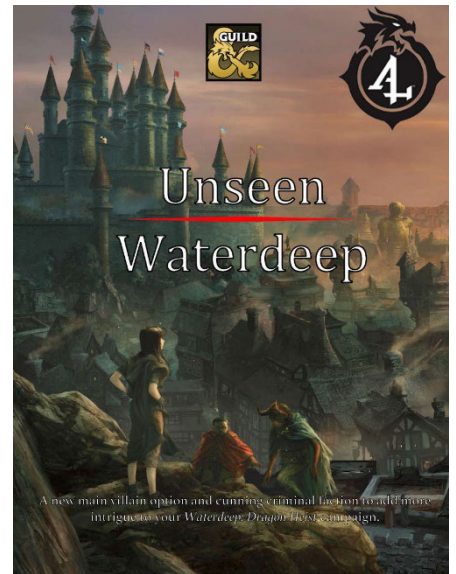
The most likely avenue for that to change — and potentially change rapidly — is through information blabbed to the City Watch. This could happen as early as Scenario 1 (depending on exactly what Renaer and/or the PCs report to the watch), but it’s quite possible for the Open Lord to *never* fully twig to what’s happening.

THE UNSEEN: James Introcaso, one of the original designers for *Dragon Heist*, wrote a supplement for the campaign called [Unseen Waterdeep](#). It includes a new villain for the campaign — a half-doppelganger, half-illithid hybrid running a small gang of shapechangers who wants the gold in order to fund bribes to

discover the identities of the Masked Lords (who he intends to assassinate and replace with his shapechangers).

If you want to crank up the byzantine complexities of the Grand Game by adding in more villainous factions, the Unseen are a great plug-and-play option for that. I'm not going to discuss them at great length, but:

- Consider introducing the Unseen by having them send a doppelganger disguised as a friend or ally of the PCs to politely pump them for information. (They may also be targeting other factions with the same tactic. Their goal is to quickly play catch-up in the Grand Game.)
- I would avoid adding the Unseen to the Gralhund Villa sequence (see Part 2). Partly to keep that complexity of the sequence under control, but mostly because adding them a little later will create the feeling that the Grand Game is attracting more attention and the stakes are ratcheting up.
- However, if the PCs have staged a successful heist on Jarlaxle's ship without tipping him off about Neverremember's Enigma, then the Unseen can very easily slip in and fill that vacuum in any sequence where I discuss Bregan D'Aerthe's involvement.



DESIGN NOTES

The Unseen also make a convenient exemplar for how other factions of your own design can be added to the campaign. Note that their method of introduction to the campaign is via a unique vector: The Zhentarim have kidnapped people. Cassalanter asks the PCs for help (perhaps in exchange for a percentage). The PCs have to ask Jarlaxle for help. The Gralhunds launched a violent assault. The Unseen's introduction comes via social subterfuge and deceit. Similarly, the Unseen are also capable of deploying tactics that the other factions can't. If you're adding a new faction, try to make sure they're bringing something new to the table, and not just rehashing what the current factions already provide.

BONNIE'S DOPPELGANGERS / THE BLACK VIPER: These aren't really factions. They're small, independent operators who almost certainly lack the resources to go up against the big players. (Of course, the same thing could be said of the PCs.)

Whatever the case may be, Bonnie's Doppelgangers and the Black Viper are good examples of small-time players who can get swept up in the Grand Game.

- They might interfere with heists. (Either pursuing the same objective or just coincidentally breaking into the same establishment in pursuit of some other item of value.)
- They might be hired by NPCs to accomplish any number of ends. But, in particular, they might seek to steal the *Stone* and/or the *Eyes* from the PCs.
- They might also offer their services to the PCs (or be found by the PCs if they go looking for such services).

(Bonnie's doppelgangers are described on p. 20 and are part of faction missions on p. 35 and 37. The Black Viper is described on p. 196 and is part of faction missions on p. 39 and 40. She also appears at the Cassalanter Estate, as described on p. 118.)

PART 1C: PLAYER CHARACTER FACTIONS

by [Justin Alexander](#) – December 5th, 2018



Let's briefly discuss *Chapter 2: Trollskull Alley*. This remix is largely not going to be discussing this chapter of [Waterdeep: Dragon Heist](#) because it is mostly unimpeachable and almost certainly the best part of the published campaign. To briefly review:

- The PCs are awarded with Trollskull Manor, which they can “refurnish, rebuild, rename, and otherwise personalize.”
- The expectation is that they will reopen the tavern on the first floor, and a number of encounters and mechanics are given for doing so.
- During this time, their recent notoriety also results in them being approached by one or more factions who would be interested in having them join up.
- The factions ask the PCs to perform a series of missions for them, spanning from the time the PCs are 2nd level until they are 5th level.

The faction missions, it should be noted, are clearly intended to be interwoven with the ongoing events of what we're referring to as the Grand Game, but this is one place where the campaign kind of glitches because the heavily compressed timeframe of the primary plot doesn't really leave a lot of breathing room for integrating these missions (or running their new tavern for that matter).

This remix should help address this problem simply by virtue of decompressing the events of the Grand Game: Investigating the Faction Outposts (Part 3) and performing the Eye Heists (Part 4) will expand the timeline and give a little more room for integrating the faction missions.

Beyond that, there are only two tweaks I would suggest for *Chapter 2: Trollskull Alley*:

- Add 1-3 additional urban adventures that overlap with setting up the tavern and running the early faction missions.
- Review the [Running the Game: Tavern Time](#) essay here at the Alexandrian and use it to bring Trollskull Tavern to life. (UPDATE: I ended up doing a customized version of this for *Dragon Heist*. You can find it [here](#).)

You might also consider fleshing out the faction missions and putting a little more meat on their bones, but I think you'll largely find that unnecessary: As designed the faction missions will take up perhaps one-quarter or one-third of a session. As such, they'll integrate with everything else that's going on to create a dynamic, multi-faceted session that draws the players ever deeper into the rich life of Waterdeep. If the faction missions expand to take up a full session on their own, some of that effect will be lost.

On the other hand, giving each faction one meaty mission as a diversion or counterpoint to the Grand Game might make for a good change of pace. (That's going to be beyond the scope of this remix, however.)

ALLIES IN THE GRAND GAME

Once the PCs have joined a faction, however, the PCs themselves become a vector by which those factions can become involved with the Grand Game.

The PCs can ask for help. Factions can provide assistance, particularly when it comes to intelligence gathering. If the PCs need help locating a faction outpost or lair, for example, their faction can probably help them with that. Of course, they might ask the PCs to do them a favor (in the form of a faction mission) first.

Have the factions push them for information. "How have you been spending your time?" "We heard you were involved in that fracas at the Gralhund Villa. What was up with that?" "We've noticed you haven't been around a lot lately. We've got a vested interest in you now, and we need to know how to find you."

Intermingle the factions. You can also have a PC's faction become engaged with a faction of the Grand Game from a completely different direction. For example, maybe the Harpers are interested in exotic poisons which were shipped into Waterdeep (and are destined for the Cassalanter's ritual). Or the Order of the Gauntlet might be interested in targeting Xanatharian slavers.

If these factions discover the Grand Game and/or the PCs' role in it, they are likely to bring their own agenda to bear.

Bregan D'Aerthe is, of course, Jarlaxle's faction and their agenda should be obvious. Look at areas of the campaign where Jarlaxle's agents are present and consider simply making the PCs those agents (perhaps even giving them a small force of drow to command).

The **Emerald Enclave** actually has no interest in the Grand Game or Neverember's ill-gotten dragons. They'll assist PCs who have proven loyal to the faction, but, perhaps refreshingly, will make no demands upon them for the Vault or its contents.

Force Grey is allied to the Open Lord. If members of the Grey Hands or Force Grey bring the Grand Game to their attention, the Open Lord will quickly figure out what actually happened to the missing 500,000 gold dragons and she's going to want the money back.

The **Harpers** know that the Cassalanter are actually demon-worshippers and, if they realize the PCs have gotten tangled up with them, will quickly warn them of the fact. The Harpers are more than happy to let the PCs keep the gold (although they will encourage them to "do the right thing" and return the money to the citizens of Waterdeep), but they want the *Stone of Golorr*, which they believe contains vital intelligence that can help them in their struggle with the Abolethic Sovereignty. It should be noted that the Harpers of Waterdeep are riddled with Zhentarim double-agents, and anything the Harpers learn about the PCs and their activities can very easily fall into Manshoon's hands.

The **Lords' Alliance** actually works directly for the Open Lord. If Jalester Silvermane becomes aware of what the PCs have gotten themselves tangled up in, he'll arrange a discreet meeting with Laeral Silverhand as quickly as possible.

The **Order of the Gauntlet** will expect the PCs to tithe at least 25% of the horde.

The non-Manshoonian **Zhentarim** will see an enormous opportunity in the gold: Efforts are under way to reclaim and repair Zhentil Keep, and that money could be used to buy them a seat on the Zhentarim Council that's forming to do so. This could really raise the profile of the local Zhentarim network, and the PCs would basically be buying their way into the local leadership of the Black Network. (Or they could pursue this thread all the way to the ruins of Zhentil Keep if that's their predilection.)

DESIGN NOTE

These interactions serve to tie the material in Chapter 2 more tightly to the wider events of the campaign spine. Using the PCs' factions to demonstrate the wider scope of how the factions involved with the Grand Game are integrated into the life of the city will deepen the scenario, while also providing the opportunity for creative players to find unique vectors for targeting their enemies. Finally, forcing the PCs to make some tough choices between the advantages and obligations of their faction allegiance will make those relationships more meaningful.

PART 2: GRALHUND VILLA

[by Justin Alexander – January 21st, 2019](#)



The investigation which brings the PCs from the *fireball* in Trollskull Alley to the Gralhund Villa will be fully described in Part 5. For the moment, however, we do need to establish a few key pieces of revised continuity:

- As mentioned in Part 1, the Gralhund's nimblewright and the Zhentarim agents tracking Dalakhar are NOT working together.
- The nimblewright uses a *necklace of fireballs* to launch a *fireball* which kills Dalakhar and most of the Zhentarim agents, with the exception of Urstul Floxin (who barely survives, but is incapacitated).
- The Gralhund nimblewright dashes forward, rifles through Dalakhar's pockets, and takes the *Stone of Golorr*. It then runs off, returning to Gralhund Villa.
- Urstul Floxin is able to identify the nimblewright. The Zhentarim track it back to the Gralhunds and are out for both revenge and the *Stone*.
- Meanwhile, the PCs will have likely tipped off Jarlaxle and pulled Bregan D'Aerthe into the Grand Game. Jarlaxle and his agents will also know who the nimblewright belonged to.
- Xanathar doesn't know that the Gralhunds have the *Stone*, but he has learned that Urstul Floxin, a Zhentarim agent, was present when Dalakhar was killed. The beholder is still not entirely clear who stole the *Stone*, but he has his agents observing Urstul Floxin and those agents have tracked him to Gralhund Villa.

This sets up the quadpartite confrontation (really quinpartite once you add in the PCs) at the Gralhund Villa.

DESIGN NOTES

The simple goal here is to viscerally evoke the cross-faction conflict of the Grand Game: The first scenario of the campaign features two of the factions (although the PCs only encounter one of them). The climax of the second scenario features three of the main factions plus the Gralhunds (and also the Cassalanterers if the PCs are working for them at this point) all coming together in immediate conflict. That's the essential story of Dragon Heist being told through action, and it sets the stakes for the rest of the campaign.

OBSERVING THE VILLA

The Villa, for our purposes, exists in one of two states when the PCs arrive: *Before the Zhentarim Raid* and *During the Zhentarim Raid*. The DM can select which scenario is true based on any number of criteria, but I'm going to use a simple metric: If the PCs arrive during the day, then the Zhentarim raid happens that night. If they arrive at night, then the Zhentarim raid is in progress. (And if, for whatever reason, they specifically decide *not* to go to the Gralhund Villa after tracking the nimblewright back to it, I'll trigger the raid a couple days later and have the PCs hear reports of it – either through broadsheets or contacts or simply gossip in their tavern's common room.)

Before the raid happens (i.e., if the PCs arrive during the day), the Villa is under observation by up to three different factions. If the PCs scout around the Villa, they may be able to spot these teams. The DC for Wisdom (Perception) tests is noted with each faction.

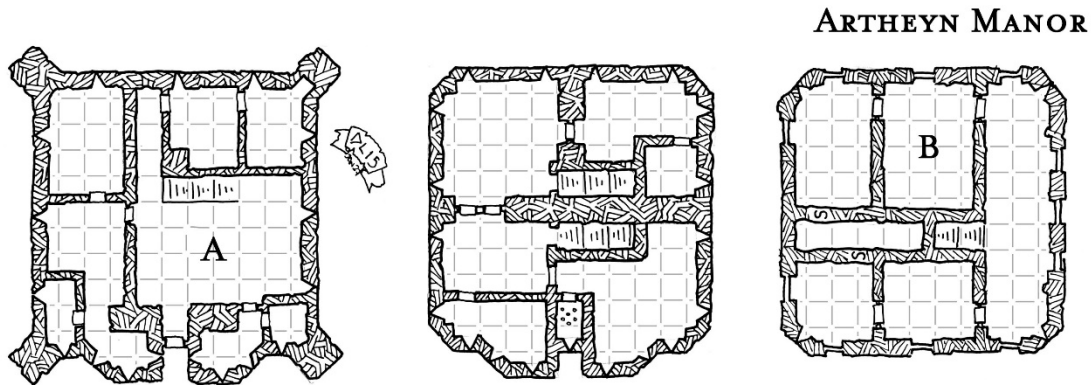
ZHENTARIM WATCHERS (DC 12): Two Zhentarim **thugs** are located on the roofs of the buildings near the estate, stealthily changing their position from time to time. They have been placed here by Urstul Floxin to make sure that neither the nimblewright, the Gralhunds, nor the *Stone of Golorr* leave the villa before the raid begins. They have a black **flying snake** with them to send a message if necessary.

The Zhentarim watchers spotted one of Xanathar's gazers, but didn't realize it was watching them (or that it has remained in the area). They are unaware of the presence of Jarlaxle's team.

XANATHAR'S GAZERS (DC 16): There are four of Xanathar's **gazers** in the area. At DC 16, the PCs spot one gazer. They spot an additional gazer for each PC who succeeds on the test or for every 2 points of margin of success.

Xanathar's agents tracked Urstul Floxin and the Zhentarim watchers to the villa when he gave them their instructions. Xanathar isn't sure exactly what Floxin wants with the Gralhunds, but he's installed the gazers to find out.

JARLAXLE'S TEAM (DC 14): If Jarlaxle has been tipped off by the PCs, he has a team holed up in Artheyn Manor across the street from the villa.



The Artheyns are a mercantile family. Radford Artheyn, the patriarch, has packed up the household and temporarily relocated to the Moonshae Isles in pursuit of a rumored vein of black gold in Alaron. (See *MOON1-3: Black Gold* from the 4th Edition Living Forgotten Realms for more on black gold, although the details aren't actually important for this scenario.) Drop cloths cover most of the furniture in the three-story house. A watch team has been stationed by the front door (Area A), which is on the opposite side of the house from Gralhund Villa, and the primary observation team is on the top floor (Area B).

Area A: Fel'Rekt Lafeen (**drow gunslinger**; *Dragon Heist*, p. 201) and 2 **drow**.

- *A Directive from Jarlaxle* lays on a side table. (If the PCs search Artheyn Manor after the raid, Fel'Rekt has carelessly left this behind.) The directive, signed by "Jarlaxle Baenre", indicates that Fel'Rekt is to keep a watch on the Gralhund Villa and "seize any opportunity to take possession of the *Stone of Golorr*". Updates are to be sent twice daily via Fenerus Stormcastle, and someone named Krebbyg has been instructed to pick up messages from Fenerus twice daily for the duration of the Gralhund operation.
- *GM Note:* Fenerus Stormcastle's House is a Bregan D'Aerthe outpost, see Part 3.

Area B: Two **drow gunslingers** and 6 **drow**.

Jarlaxle's team are aware of both the Zhentarim watchers and Xanathar's gazers.

THE VILLA – ADVERSARY ROSTERS

Adversary rosters make it easy for a DM to run dynamic locations in which the action spills over from one room to the next. If you're not already familiar with their use, I recommend reviewing [this article](#) which discusses them in detail.

To use these rosters, simply ignore any references to NPCs in the published key for the Gralhund Villa. If the PCs enter the villa before the Zhentarim raid has begun, you should also obviously ignore any references to corpses or other signs of violence.

GRALHUND VILLA - PCs ARRIVE DURING THE DAY

2 Gralhund Guards	Area G1 - Main Gate	
1 Servant (Gardener)	Area G2 - Yard	
Stableboy (Ike) +2 Mastiffs	Area G3 - Coach House	(mastiffs don't obey Ike)
Groundskeeper (Hurv)	Area G3 - Bedroom	(sleeping)
12 Gralhund Guards	Area G4 - Barracks	(8 unarmored, 1d4+1 sleeping)
2 Servants (Head Butler + Cook)	Area G6 - Pantry	
Servant (Head Maid)	Area G7 - Laundry Room	(keys to all locked doors)
4 Gralhund Guards	Area G8 - Great Hall	
1 Servant (Maid)	Area G9 - Parlor	
1 Servant (Maid)	Area G10 - Trophy Room	
Nimblewright	Area G11 - Orond's Study	
Orond Gralhund	Area G12 - Family Library	
2 Gralhund Guards	Area G13 - Upstairs Foyer	
Yalah Gralhund + Hrabbaz	Area G16 - Master Bedroom	
2 Servants (Nursemaids)	Area G18 - Children's Room	
Gralhund Children (Zartan + Greth)	Area G18 - Children's Room	
4 Servants	Area G19 - Servant's Wing	(playing Three-Dragon Ante)

GRALHUND VILLA – PCs ARRIVE AT NIGHT

Groundskeeper (Hurv) + 2 Mastiffs	Area G2 - Garden	(in shadow form)
Stableboy (Ike)	Area G3 - Bedroom	(sleeping)
2 Zhent Thugs	Area G8 - Great Hall	
4 Zhent Thugs + 4 Gralhund Guards	Area G13 - Upstairs Foyer	(fighting)
Urstul Floxin	Area G15a - Guest Suite	(wounded)
Orond Gralhund	Area G15b - Guest Suite	
Yalah Gralhund + Nimblewright + Hrabbaz	Area G16 - Master Bedroom	
Gralhund Children (Zartan + Greth)	Area G18 - Children's Room	
9 Servants	Area G19 - Servant's Wing	

Note: Yalah Gralhund has the Stone of Golorr.

STAT REFERENCE

Groundskeeper (Hurv) – cult fanatic, MM p. 345 or shadow, MM p. 269

Mastiffs – MM p. 332 or shadow, MM p. 269

Servants – commoner, MM p. 345

Gralhund Guards – veteran, MM p. 350

Yalah Gralhund – DH p. 220; noble, MM p. 348

Orond Gralhund – DH p. 213-4; noble, MM p. 348

Urstul Floxin – DH p. 216; assassin, MM p. 343

Zhentarim Thugs – thug, MM p. 350

Flying Snake – MM p. 322

Drow Gunslingers – DH p. 201

Drow – MM p. 126

Gazer – DH p. 203



THE VILLA – MODIFIED KEY

Area G11 – Orond’s Study: The mahogany desk is covered with papers, which consist of the *Gralhund Study of the Grand Game* (see Part 6D).

Area G12 – Library: Orond was studding *A Missive from Castle Ward*. He leaves it laying on the arm of one of the library’s chairs if disturbed (by, for example, a Zhentarim strike team breaking into this house).

- *A Missive from Castle Ward:* “We are now certain that the Second Eye was carried from the warehouse in the Dock Ward to Yellowspire in the Castle Ward. I no longer believe that it remains within Yellowspire, however. After observing the Zhentarim traffic here, I am convinced that they must be using a teleportal within the tower. If we wish to track the Second Eye further, we will need to access that teleportal or otherwise determine where it leads. – Chirada”

Area 15b – Guest Suite: Does not contain a *teleportation circle* or flying snakes.

THE PCs RAID THE MANSION

If the PCs arrive during the day and raid the mansion before Floxin shows up, what happens?

OBSERVATION TEAMS: Check to see if they spot the PCs’ infiltration. If they don’t, then nothing happens until they do. Then, broadly speaking:

The **Zhentarim** will send their flying snake to Urstul, who will hastily assemble his team and rush over. He still won’t arrive for 10+2d6 minutes, though, so it’s quite possible the PCs will complete their raid and leave. If that happens and the Zhentarim think they have the *Stone*, they’ll leave a message drop for Urstul and attempt to follow the PCs to see where they take it. If they don’t think the PCs have the *Stone*, one of the Zhentarim will follow them (to identify who the new players in the Grand Game are) and the other will maintain observation of the villa.

Xanathar's Gazers will continue monitoring the situation, with one or more of the gazers following the PCs when they leave.

Jarlaxle's Team will wait for an opportunity to present itself and then strike at the *Stone*. That might mean attempting to send a team into the compound (probably heading over the roof and entering through Area 17 - The Balcony), or it might mean waiting until the PCs have the *Stone* and then attacking them as they leave.

GRALHUND GUARDS: If the alarm is raised, then

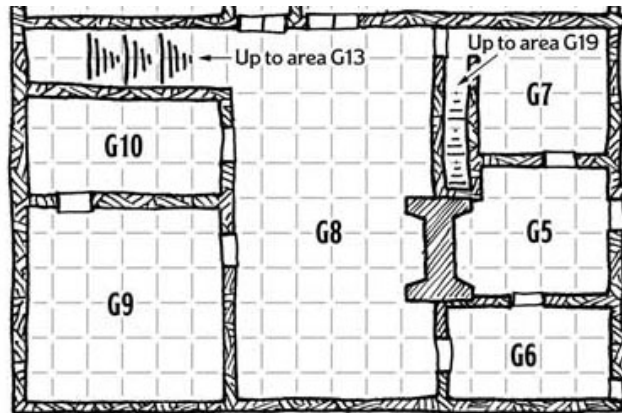
- 2 of the guards from Area G8 - Great Hall will move towards the alarm.
- 1d4 rounds later, 4 armored guards from G4 - The Barracks will mobilize. 2 will head towards the alarm; two will move towards Lord Gralhund.
- 1d4 rounds later, the unarmored guards from G4 - Barracks who were NOT asleep will mobilize with weapons but no armor.
- 1d4 rounds later, the unarmored guards from G4 - Barracks who WERE sleeping will mobilize with weapons but no armor.

(It would take unarmored guards 5 minutes to don their chain shirts. They're not going to wait on it if the villa is under attack.)

Beyond that general response procedure, though, simply use the adversary roster and play the characters appropriately based on the information they have.

OTHER APPROACHES: What about other approaches? For example, what if the PCs knock on the front door? Or bring the City Watch? Broadly speaking, if the compound seems threatened by armed force, similar responses will be taken. If a peaceful approach is being taken, successful Charisma checks may allow PCs to meet with Lord Orond. (Lady Yalah will not put in an appearance; she stays with the *Stone* upstairs.)

ZHENTARIM RAID TIMELINE



The night-time adversary roster assumes that the PCs *arrive* on the scene during the night, with the Zhentarim raid taking place *in media res*. If the PCs instead arrive during the day and settle down as their own observation team, then they'll be able to watch the raid play out in real time.

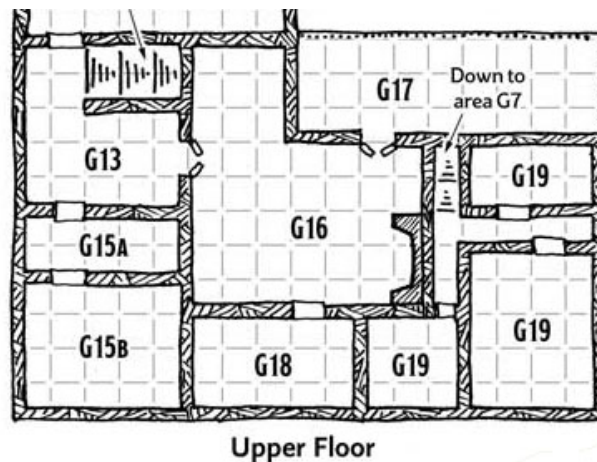
FLOXIN'S PLAN: Urstul wants to enter the house quietly through G6 - Pantry, make a rush through G8 - The Great Hall, go up the stairs, and capture Lord Orond, Lady Yalay, and/or the children before the guards can fully mobilize. With hostages in hand, he believes they can negotiate for the *Stone of Golorr* and then leave.

This is what their raid looks like, broadly speaking (assuming the PCs don't intervene):

- Urstul Floxin and 8 Zhents in black leather armor rendezvous with the 2 watchers and then all of them approach along the villa's rear wall and pick the lock to the Pantry (G6).
- Inside they are surprised to discover two servants (the head butler and the cook) using the pantry for an illicit, late night romantic liaison.
- The halfling cook makes a run for the Kitchen (G5), screaming bloody murder. Which is, in fact, what the Zhents do: They murder both servants.
- The cook's screams, however, alert the head maid who was working in the Laundry (G7). She comes to see what the fuss is all about, entering the kitchen to see the Zhents cut down the cook in the opposite doorway. She turns and runs back through the laundry screaming.
- Floxin curses and tells half of his men to chase her down. They catch up with her on the backstairs to the Servant's Quarters (G19) and kill her. A couple of other servants who were coming down the stairs run back up, raising the alarm, and the servants eventually barricade themselves.
- Meanwhile, the head maid's screams have alerted the guards in the Great Hall (G8). One of them runs out the front doors and circles around to the Barracks (G4) to raise the rest of the guard. The other three move into G7 and begin fighting the Zhents there.
- This actually works to Floxin's advantage slightly, leaving the Great Hall (G8) empty. He and his force rush from the Kitchen (G6) into the south end of the Great Hall (G8), but before they can

head for the stairs, two guards on patrol in the Parlor (G9) walk out the door. Urstul and his men attack, driving the guards back into G9 and killing them.

- Lord Orond emerges from the Library (G12), where he's been studying late. Urstul, still in the hall just outside G9 sees him, gives a cry. Lord Orond flees up the stairs while Urstul and his men give chase.
- The guards fighting the Zhents in the Laundry (G7) are mortally wounded and fall back almost simultaneously into G8. The Zhents they were fighting give pursuit and kill them.
- Upstairs the guards in the Upstairs Foyer (G13) have already barricaded the doors to the Master Bedroom (G16) where Lady Yalah and the children are. So when Lord Orond comes rushing upstairs, one of the guards ushers him into the Guest Suite (G15). The guard is killed by Urstul Floxin as he shuts the door on his lord.
- Meanwhile, guards are pouring out of the Barracks (G4) and entering the house through both the Great Hall (G8) and the Kitchen (G5). They engage the second Zhent force in G8.
- Upstairs things are looking bad for the Gralhunds, with Urstul's Zhents dispatching the other guard in G13. The Zhents downstairs hold the line and manage to kill a total of eight guards there, but after two Zhents are killed they're forced into a fighting retreat up the stairs.
- A furious melee breaks out at the top of the stairs while Urstul desperately tries to break down the door in the Guest Suite (G15b) to reach Lord Orond and take him hostage. Some of the Zhents manage to break down the door to the Master Bedroom (G16), but are then forced to turn and fight as the guards come pouring up the stairs.



This is the point in time represented by the PCs Arrive At Night roster. At this point, as described in the original adventure key, there are the following corpses:

- G6 - head butler and cook
- G7 - head maid on the stairs up to G19
- G8 - 8 guards, 2 Zhent
- G9 - 2 guards
- G13 - 6 guards, 2 Zhents

(Note: There's nothing special about this point in time. If it seems more dramatically appropriate, you can have the PCs arrive at any point during this timeline, although running things from the key will be

slightly more complex as you'll want to adjust the corpses, etc. accordingly in real time. Tracking the PCs attempting a stealthy infiltration from the north at the exact same time that Floxin and his team are infiltrating from the south can be a lot of fun!)

If the PCs haven't interfered (and don't interfere going forward) here's what the rest of the raid looks like:

- Jarlaxle's team goes into motion: Fel'Rekt Lafeen and 6 drow cross the roof of Gralhund Villa, taking up a position immediately above the Balcony (G17). The two drow gunslingers and 2 more drow move across the roofs and take up a position opposite the large windows of the Upstairs Foyer (G13).
- The Gralhund Guards manage to kill the rest of the Zhents. At this point, however, there are only four guards left.
- The drow gunslingers sniper the Gralhund guards through the window. Simultaneously, Fel'Rekt and his team drop onto the Balcony (G17) and break open the doors.
- Lady Yalah flees into the Children's Room (G18). While his drow go to G15 and collect Lord Orond, Fel'Rekt spends 6 rounds dueling Hrabbaz, eventually killing him.
- Lord Orond is dragged into G16 and Fel'Rekt negotiates with Lady Yalah through the door. Lady Yalah eventually breaks and, sobbing, gives Fel'Rekt the *Stone of Golorr*. He and his team flee back the way they came as the City Watch comes bursting into the house on the lower level.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE PCs?

With all that being said, it's considerably more likely that the PCs will intervene at some point. Once that happens, of course, everything is probably going to change. It's impossible to speculate on that new outcome because the situation is so volatile and there are so many different ways the PCs might go in the confusion and chaos of the situation they find themselves in: Do they help the Zhents? The Gralhunds? Do they end up fighting Fel'rekt's people on the roof and giving the Gralhunds a chance to escape or for the City Watch to arrive? Ultimately, you just have to play and find out!

There are a few points to make, however:

The failure of the **Zhentarim** is not foreordained. If the PCs draw off some of the reinforcements from the barracks, for example, it's quite possible that the Zhents are able to kill the guards and take control of the Gralhund family.

If circumstances change, **Lady Gralhund** may be presented with an opportunity to give the *Stone of Golorr* to the nimblewright and have the construct escape with it.

Jarlaxle's Team will look for an opportunity to intervene in Bregan D'Aerthe's favor. In the default raid that comes quite late, but once the PCs get involved Fel'rekt may decide to have his drow crash the party much earlier. Or they might wait and attack the PCs after they leave.

Xanathar's Gazers will not intervene. But they will attempt to follow anyone and everyone leaving the scene afterwards.

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE STONE?

With all that being said, the **EXPECTED OUTCOME** of the Gralhund Villa sequence in this remix is for the **PLAYER CHARACTERS TO HAVE THE STONE OF GOLORR**.

(This is a really significant change to the campaign as published, so I'm putting it in bold here.)

ROOFTOP CHASE: If the PC's DON'T have the *Stone of Golorr*, then it is likely that they've spotted someone fleeing the scene with it. This will probably trigger a rooftop chase, for which you can use the *Rooftop Chase Complications* from p. 72 of *Dragon Heist*.

AND NOW THE GAZERS: If you end up in a rooftop chase – here or anywhere else in the adventure – it will be a really cool visual for the PCs to suddenly see multiple gazers come swooping out of the darkness.

This is the scenario – the *Stone of Golorr* known and in the open – that Xanathar *will* have his gazers get involved. You might use this to cripple those carrying it, allowing the PCs to catch up. If circumstances allow, Xanathar might also be able to send a Response Team (see Part 3C) to intercept the chase, turning it into a three-way brawl for control of the *Stone*.

THE STONE IS LOST: If that fails (or the PCs don't see the *Stone* leave or choose not to pursue it), figure out where it goes. Transport to a Faction Outpost (see Part 3) and then to a Lair (see Part 4) is the most likely outcome for any of the factions.

PART 3/PART 3B: FACTION OUTPOSTS

[by Justin Alexander - January 24th, 2019](#)



As you may have already ascertained, this remix is simply tossing out most of *Chapter 4: Dragon Season* from the original campaign. The original sequences no longer work with the more dynamic, multi-faction approach we're using for the remix, and I'm simply not that interested in these sorts of pre-scripted, linear, and often railroaded sequences.

We're still going to take advantage of some of the raw material in *Chapter 4*, however, to create a number of Outposts for each faction. (In some ways you can think of this as sort of taking the best version of each location from the campaign.)

BREGAN D' AERTHE OUTPOSTS

FENERUS STORMCASTLE'S HOUSE (*Trade Ward, Quill Alley - Dragon Heist*, p. 63): Fenerus Stormcastle was the founder of the Blood Hawk Posse, a gang of horse-riding brigands that, to this day, harries travelers on the road to Amphail. When he was drummed out of the gang after a botched raid, Fenerus "retired" to Waterdeep and joined the Guild of Chandlers and Lamplighters. He supplements his income by spying for the city of Luskan and providing his contacts with information on the political climate in Waterdeep, as well as juicy bits of news overheard on his nightly rounds through the Trades Ward.

Since the Sea Maidens Faire arrived in Waterdeep, Fenerus has also been acting as a message drop for Bregan D'Aerthe. Fenerus collects messages from various covert drops and brings them back to his house, where they are collected by Krebbyg Masq'il'yr and taken back to Jarlaxle's ship.

Questioning Fenerus: Although he's supposed to be a cut-out, Fenerus once followed Krebbyg after Jarlaxle's lieutenant picked up the messages and knows that they're being taken to the Sea Maidens Faire.

Following Krebbyg: Krebbyg comes to collect messages from Fenerus once every 1d3 days. If the PCs stake out the house long enough, they may also be able to follow him to the Sea Maidens Faire.

Messages: The PCs may be able to capture several messages. These are written in code, requiring an Intelligence test (DC 16) to decipher. (The check is made with advantage if they speak Drow.) The contents of these messages will vary depending on when, exactly, the PCs come to Fenerus' house. Possibilities include:

- Information unrelated to the Grand Game, most likely revolving around attempting to identify Masked Lords, gain blackmail material over them, and/or diplomatic assessments of their support for Luskan joining the Lords' Alliance.
- A report from the Gralhund Villa observation team: "Watchpost established in the manor south of the Gralhund Villa. We have identified members of the Black Network onsite. We have also observed gazers in the area, although we have not yet determined which beholders' dark dreams they've sprung out of. – Fel'Rekt Lafeen"
- "Westra Moltimmur is demanding three additional dresses for Sapphiria's Booty. Considerable expense. Rongquan Mystere may need to put in an appearance." (A little research can quickly identify these names as referring to the Seven Masks Theater, see below.)
- "The Council of Musicians, Instrument-Makers, & Choristers refuses to withdraw their objection to the Sea Maidens Faire as a public entertainment. But I've resolved the matter by getting license from the Jesters' Guild. We only need to make payment to them with claim that we are employing a guild entertainer, even though we're not. The guilds in this city are even more rotten than those in Luskan."
- "Nimblewright delivery completed to Bowgentra Summerteaen. We have eyes up in the Watchful Order." (Summerteaen is the leader of the Watchful Order of Magists and Protectors, a guild for wizards and sorcerers in Waterdeep.)

SEVEN MASKS THEATER (*Dragon Heist*, p. 75): Use the description of the Autumn version of the theater from the original campaign. Jarlaxle owns this theater under the false identity of Rongquan Mystere. One of the dressing rooms is kept empty as a safe house for D'Aerthe agents in trouble. Jarlaxle will also use the theater as a "neutral" meeting place with other factions (including the PCs).

Malcolm Brizzenbright: We'll also transplant Brizzenbright's Ghost from the Winter version of the Theater (see *Dragon Heist*, p. 76). He's the founder of the Seven Masks Theater, but has been dead for over thirty years.

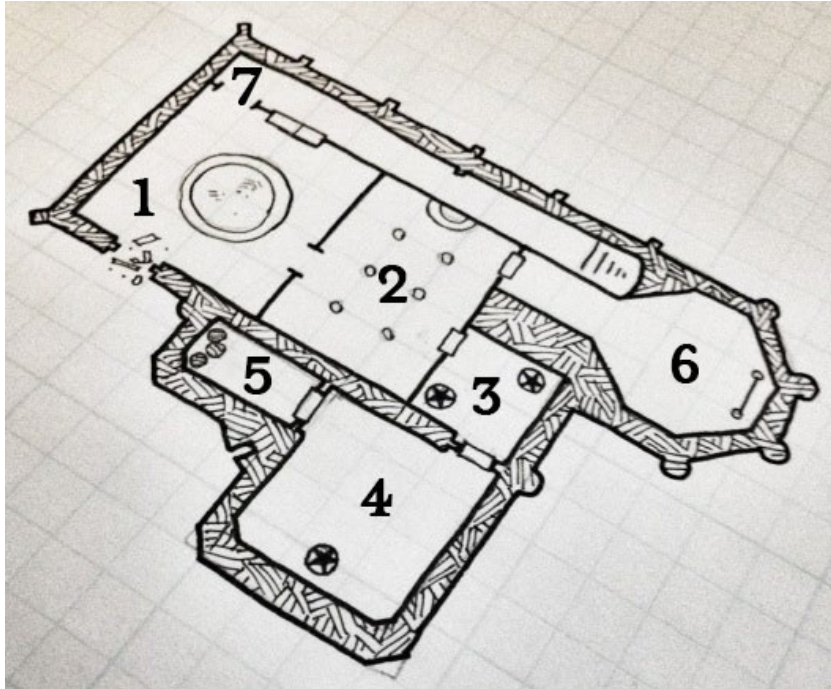
- He knows that "Rongquan Mystere" is a fake identity, and he's anxious that his theater not be used for nefarious purposes.
- He can identify the dressing room being used as a safe house.
- He once saw "Rongquan" speaking with drow in the lobby during a performance of *The Mad Mage's Seven Riddles*. They mentioned something called the "Sea Maidens Faire".

Area P6 – Stage Manager's Office: Amongst the other papers dealing with theater work is a *Letter Regarding Fenerus Stormcastle's House*. Directed simply to "J", it warns him that, "There have been strange eyes fixed upon the house of Fenerus Stormcastle and flights of black snakes have been seen flocking the skies of the Trades Ward. Greater care should be taken when messengers approach the house, and we may want to find an alternative asset. I leave it to your judgment whether or not Fenerus himself should be warned. - K"

- *GM Note:* "J" is Jarlaxle Baenre and "K" is Krebbyg.

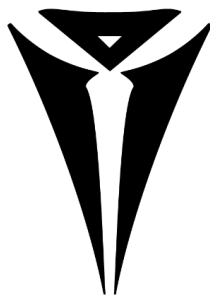
CASSALANTER OUTPOSTS

ASMODEAN SHRINE (North Ward, Aveen Street): From the outside, this appears to be a nondescript residence. The entire interior of the house, however, has been converted into a shrine dedicated to Asmodeus. The Cassalanters discovered the ancient Hell cyst (see Area 8) below the house, bought the property, and installed members of the cult.



Area 1 – Summoning Circle: Demonic sigils have been painted onto the floor to form a summoning circle. Tapping into the power of the Hell cyst, the circle can be used to summon 2 **imps** once every nine days.

Area 2 – Styxian Shrine: Intertwined figures of demons and devils twist about the columns in this room, a visceral depiction of the savage brutality of the Blood War. At one end of the room there is a small font of reddish-gray stone that extrudes from the wall. The cistern is half-filled with grayish water, enchanted to act as the water of the River Styx. Those drinking from it must succeed at a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw or lose all of their memories for 8 hours. (The cultists consider this a test of their faith and a sacrament.) On the wall above the font, the symbol of Asmodeus has been painted on the wall in blood.



Area 3 – Demonic Statues: Two large demonic statues – one depicting a kyton (chain devil) and the other a bezekira (hellcat) – face off against each other.

Area 4 – Chapter House: Huge, writhing tentacles seem to erupt from an arcane circle on the far side of this room, but it's just a disturbingly lifelike statue given the semblance of life by an *animate object* spell (50 hp, AC 10, +6 to hit, 2d20+2 damage, Str 14, Dex 10). The tentacles are fastened to the floor and only attack a target within 10 feet if given a command by one of the cultists; otherwise they just writhe artistically.

Two cots are lined up against the wall. A long trestle table runs down the middle of the room with benches to either side.

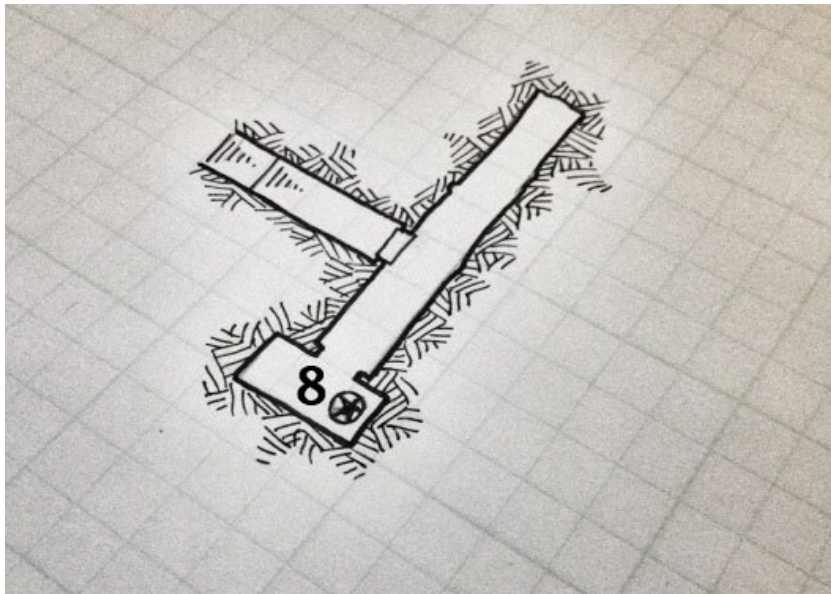
Under the cot is *Arn's Book of Worship*: This text with a stylized goat's head drawn in blood upon its plain brown cover, contains a number of "high prayers" to Asmodeus and the description of a number of banal demonic rites of worship. On the inside back cover, in simple handwriting, one can read, "This book belongs to Arn Xalrondar, of the Windmill upon Coachlamp Lane.")

Area 5 – Demonic Jelly: Three large wooden kegs. A mysterious amber jelly within them acts like a *potion of hill giant strength* if rubbed over the body (6 doses per keg).

Area 6 – Mirror of the Fiend: A large mirror with an obsidian frame carved with demonic sigils stands at the far end of this chamber. Anyone seeing themselves reflected in the mirror is bathed in purplish flames which deal 1d6 damage per round to most creatures, but heal 1d6 damage per round for fiends.

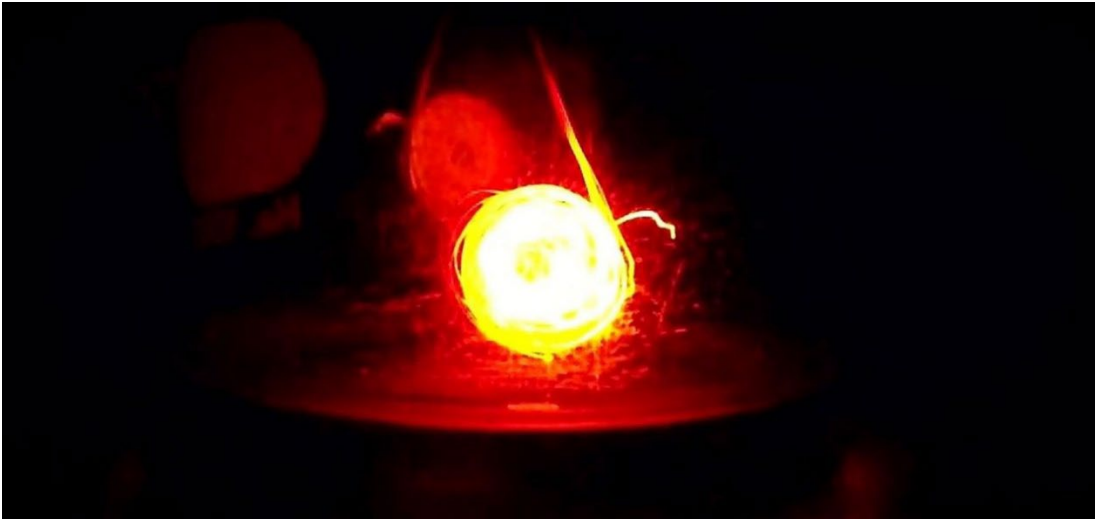
- **Noble Sigil:** On the back of the mirror is carved a small rune. A DC 13 Intelligence (History) check reveals that this is a Waterdhavian noble sigil; a practice that was once common in Waterdeep, but which died out over a century ago. A DC 16 check identifies this specific rune as indicating that the mirror belonged to the Cassalanter family.

Area 7 – Passage of the Nine Hells: The plaster walls of this long hallway are completely covered in a mural seamlessly depicting the Nine Hells – the desolate wasteland of Avernus; the malefic green skies of Dis; the endless rotting bogs of Minauros; the magma-ridden valleys of Phlegethos; the frozen sea of Stygia; the cyclopean basalt of Malbolge; the endless, maze-like ruins of Maladomini; the serrated glaciers of Cania. At the far end, above the arch leading to the descending stairs, is depicted the Malsheem, the Citadel of Hell, in Nessus, the Ninth Circle of Hell.



Area 8 – The Hell Cyst: The entire lower level of the shrine is clearly much, much older than the house above it. The walls were once covered in bas relief, but the stone has worn away and the carvings have become unrecognizable.

In a niche one end of the cramped corridor, the extrusions of stone seem to reach out from the wall and almost cradle a glowing ball of hellish red light which floats in midair.



Those who dare to lean close to the ball will discover that – at a distance of a few inches or so – they can actually peer into it (or perhaps, more accurately, *through* it). Doing so is like peering through a heavily distorted lens into a volcanic hell. (The Hell cyst is actually a pin-prick of Hell co-located onto the Material Plane. There is no way to traverse or communicate through the event horizon of the cyst, but the cyst is nevertheless a literal manifestation of Hell on Earth and can be used as the focus for a number of demonic rites.)

ASMODEAN SHRINE - ROSTER

1 cult fanatic + 2 imps	Area 1	MM p. 345, MM p. 76
1 apprentice wizard + 2 imps	Area 2	DH p. 194, MM p. 76
2 cult fanatics	Area 4	MM p. 345

Questioning Cultists: Successfully questioning the cultists will reveal that rituals are held at a site beneath the Cassalanter Villa. The fanatics will report that their contact there is Willifort Crowell (which might lead the PCs to believe that the Cassalanters are unaware of what’s happening in their own home); the wizard knows better and may be made to reveal as much.

Instructions from Lord Cassalanter: The apprentice wizard carries a note from Lord Cassalanter instructing that the next pair of imps to emerge from the summoning circle should be dispatched to perform surveillance on the Sea Maidens Faire, which he believes to have become of particular importance as a result of recent intelligence which has come into his possession. (The note might mention the PCs by name here if they were the source of this intelligence; otherwise he names Willifort Crowelle.) “The imps should report back to me directly at the villa.”

CONVERTED WINDMILL (Southern Ward, Coachlamp Lane): Use the description of the Summer version of the Converted Windmill (see *Dragon Heist*, p. 88). It's used as an apartment by Arn Xalrondar (LE male Tethyrian human) and Seffia Naelryke (LE female Tethyrian human), both **cult fanatics**.

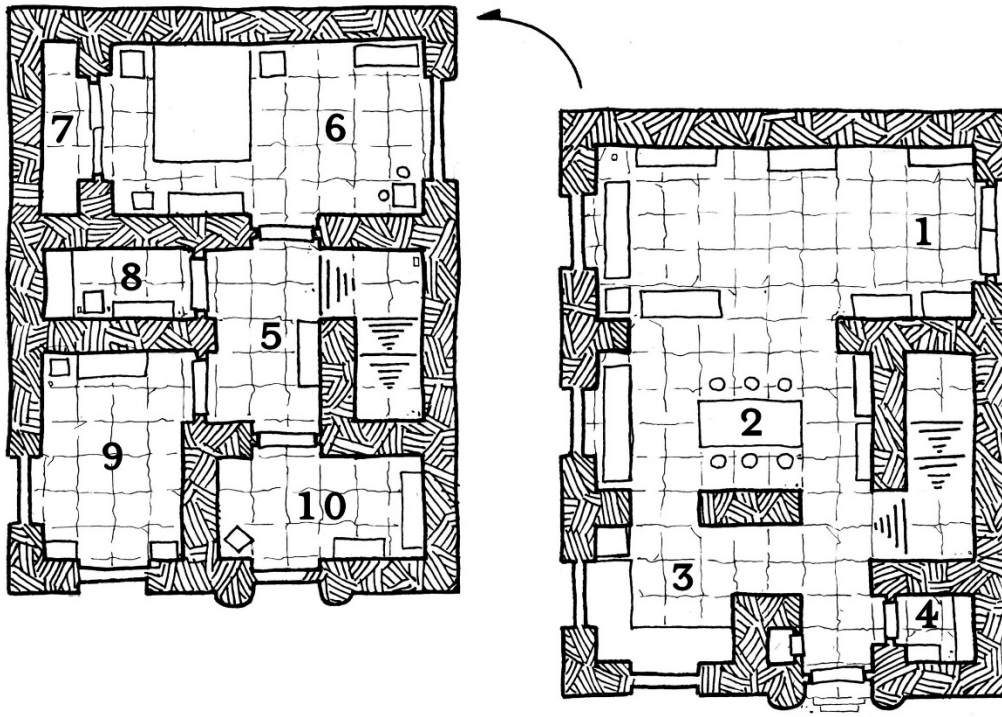
Area W7 – Secure Apartment:

- A note can be found under the bed. It reads: "Meeting Ches 17th, the shrine on Aveen Street".

Area W8 – The Room of Rituals: A pentagram has been painted on the floor in blood. At the points of the pentagram are five black globs of wax – the remains of burned candles – and there's a variety of writing in charcoal surrounding the pentagram. There is a desk along one wall, covered in a mass of papers.

- **The Ritual – DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana):** The ritual performed here was a form of weak demonic divination, similar to a *legend lore* or *contact other plane* spell, but more like a weakly amped up Ouija board or similar parlor trick. The runes indicate that this ritual was performed in an effort to find something associated with "Neverember", "the wealth of Waterdeep", "Golorr", and "that which has been lost to the waters of Lethe" (although the latter appears to be more of a symbolic representation rather than a literal one).
- **Desk:** At the center of the drift of miscellaneous papers is a map of Waterdeep. Strange lines of blood criss-cross the map in bizarre patterns, but one location within the City of the Dead has been picked out from the pattern and circled in black charcoal. Accompanying writing identifies this as the "Brandath Crypt".
- *GM Note:* This ritual, performed by Seffia, identified the Brandath Crypt as the hiding place of one of the Eyes. It actually only worked, however, because the Vault is actually hidden below the Crypt (making it a much more powerful locus for the conceptual anchors of the ritual), although Seffia didn't realize that.

XANATHARIAN OUTPOSTS



TERASSE ESTATE (Castle Ward, Elsambul's Lane): The Terasse Estate is a modest rowhouse residence in the Castle Ward which is secretly owned by Xanathar. It is occupied by a Xanatharian operative named Keln Trigos, a tiefling **priest** (MM p. 348). Keln sometimes provides healing services to injured Xanatharians, but the house is more notable because it's a designated gladiatorial gathering point: Those who wish to attend the gladiatorial combats in Xanathar's Lair must go to one of these gathering points (there are several throughout the city, some heading through the sewers to X1, others following the route described below) in order to be escorted, as a group, to the games (and back).

Area 1 - Front Door: Those coming to the Terasse Estate must give a specific knock and an accompanying pass-phrase to be given entrance. There are two different combinations, one for healing services ("I heard the red hand was hot") and another for the gladiatorial gatherings ("the bawdy star shines bright tonight").

Area 2 – Dining Room: Those here for gladiatorial gatherings are brought together in this room for light socializing and the enjoyment of various delicacies placed upon the table. (Roasted bulette with rare Shou Louan spices. [Rothé](#) carpaccio with vargouille head cheese.)

Area 3 – Kitchen: A large rug of reddish scales covers the floor here. This can be thrown back to reveal a trap door with a narrow staircase leading down to an underground dock. Those heading to the gladiatorial gatherings will be blindfolded before being led down the stairs, and the blindfolds will remain in place until the boat arrive at another secret dock in the caverns near Skullport. This dock connects to a passage which intersects the one leading from Area X4 of Xanathar’s Lair to the Guts & Garter in Skullport.



Area 4 – Storeroom: Trigos’ larder and healing supplies.

Area 5 – Upper Landing: An ancient tapestry on the wall depicts a heavily stylized beholder with several humanoid figures of various races bowing in obeisance before it.

- **Injury Reports:** A logbook hanging on the wall here records those who have been treated here. The names listed are clear pseudonyms designed to keep the patrons of this house of healing anonymous. One recent entry, however, notes, that a particular wound from an arrow was the result of “incautious observation of the windmill on Coachlamp Lane”. (*GM Note:* This refers to the Converted Windmill, a Cassalanter outpost.)

Area 6-7 – Master Suite: This is Trigos’ bedchamber, with walk-in closet.

- **Desk:** Trigos has a variety of expensive stationaries and writing utensils for performing his correspondence, but he also has a burn-pot that he obviously uses to destroy that correspondence on a regular basis. One recent bit of correspondence he hasn’t had a chance to reply to yet, however, is *Instructions for Gladiatorial Weaponry*: “The shipment of special weapons that X requested will be sent by Grinda Garloth in Mistshore. See that they’re bundled up and sent along with the next audience procession. -Ahmaergo” (*GM Note:* If it becomes notable, this is simple a bunch of vicious-looking oddities – many of them foreign weapons from distant lands – destined for the gladiatorial combats.)

Areas 8-10 – Sick Rooms: These bedrooms are used by Xanatharian agents who come to Trigos for his healing arts.

- **An Ill Man’s Note:** On the bedside table of a Xanatharian agent there’s a note which reads: “Orb Confectioners. / Eight small eyes. / How would you like those arranged? / Around an ocular cake.”

GRINDA GARLOTH: Just use the base description of Mistshore (see *Dragon Heist*, p. 65), ignoring all of the seasonal variants. Grinda is allied with Xanathar, working primarily as a black market armorer: Xanatharian agents can come to Grinda and get outfitted with high quality equipment. Grinda also freelances, renting her equipment (and Xanathar’s equipment) to third parties.

Area D2: Grinda's chest contains:

- 500 gp
- *A Note Regarding Gladiatorial Weaponry:* "Xanathar wants the full bundle of weaponry delivered to Terasse's house of healing on Elsambul's Lane no later than two days from now so that it can be sent down to headquarters with the next gladiatorial audience. Don't be late! He's looking forward to seeing some exotic gutting. -Ahmaergo" (GM Note: If it becomes notable, this is simple a bunch of vicious-looking oddities – many of them foreign weapons from distant lands – destined for the gladiatorial combats.)

Area D3: Grinda has a wide assortment of mundane arms and armor (including several single-shot pistols). At any given time, she also has 1d4 pieces of magic arms and armor (roll on Table F, DMG p. 146), and 1d4 miscellaneous magic items (roll on Table A or B, DMG p. 145)

XANATHAR SEWER HIDEOUT, TAKE 2: The Xanathar Guild maintains a number of sewer hideouts throughout Waterdeep. This one is a duergar operation run by Korgstrod Uxgulm. Use the Autumn version of the Cellar Complex (see *Dragon Heist*, p. 86).

Orb Confectioners (Southern Ward, : The sewer hideout can be accessed from the cellar (Area B1) of the *Orb Confectioners*, a shop specializing in sweets fashion like eyes (smallcakes, sweatmeats, sugar plates, candied nuts).

- **Passphrase:** Those asking for "eight small eyes" are asked, "How would you like those arranged?" They are to answer, "Around an ocular cake." If they do so, they are escorted to the basement stairs.



Area B7 – *Mechanical Beholder*: Mixed in with the other material in this room is a letter.

- *On the Delivery of a Mechanical Beholder:* "X is outraged that you bungling incompetents couldn't get his *piece de triumphe* working for the Shipwrights' Ball! If it isn't seen swooping over the Feasts of Leirun, he'll have your guts for garters! See that it's delivered to Terasse's house of healing on Elsambul's Lane by the ninth of Tarsakh or be prepared to pay for it with your heads! - Ahmaergo"

Area B8: Remove the stairs up.

Area B9b – Korgstrud’s Room: The chest at the foot of his bed is a **mimic**. The coffer in a secret compartment under the bed (DC 13 to find) contains 500 gp and *Correspondence with N’arl Xibrindas*.

- *Correspondence with N’arl Xibrindas:* “Korgstroed – It is very important that this be kept in strictest confidence. Only you, me, and X know of the smokepowder. It must be brought to the Staircase of Eyes on the night of the 1st at precisely the stroke of eleven. Use disposable muscle. I will mark the sewer tunnels west of your hideout with a red eye to guide your men. – N’arl Xibrindas.”
- *GM Note:* N’arl’s guildsign leads to Area X1 of Xanathar’s Lair (the secret entrance). See *Part 5B: Finding Floon* for guidelines on following guildsign. Due to its age, this guildsign requires DC 15 checks to follow and the final check is DC 17 because N’arl deliberately tried to destroy the symbols nearest Xanathar’s lair. If the PCs fail three times before succeeding, it indicates that time and/or N’arl have done too much damage and they’ve lost the trail.

ZHENTARIM OUTPOSTS

ZHENTARIM INTERROGATION HOUSE (Trade Ward, Brindul Alley): Avareen Windrivver (LE female Illuskan human **spy**) and Zorbog Jyarkoth (NE male Turami human **thug**) maintain this combination safe house / covert interrogation center.

- Use the Map for house L1 on p. 62 of *Dragon Heist*.

Front Room: Avareen and Zorbog live here. A nest of three black **flying snakes** (used by the Zhents for sending messages) nest in a corner near the ceiling.

- Avareen carries a pass-amulet for Kolat Tower (see Part 4).
- As the PCs are exploring the house, a **flying snake** arrives with *A Directive to Zorbog*. Signed by “Manshoon”, it exhorts Zorbog to “gather the usual gang” and kidnap “Fenerus Stormcastle, who lives on Quill Alley”, a “known associate of these new meddlers in the Grand Game”. Zorbog is to squeeze Fenerus until he reveals everything he knows about these new participants.

Backroom: The backroom has a rack and several other instruments of torture, along with an arcane circle painted on the floor in the corner. Currently strapped into the rack is Ott Steeltoes, a shield dwarf wearing a leather skullcap stitched with fake beholder eyestalks. Ott is a Xanatharian agent captured by the Zhentarim.

Rescuing Ott:

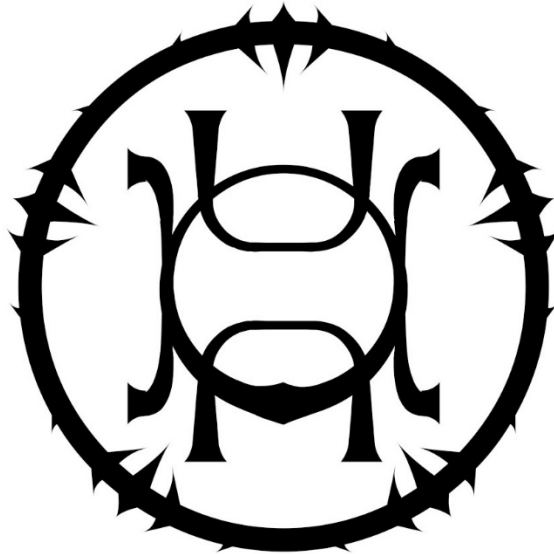
- Ott: “They kept asking me about where Xanathar kept the Eye! I don’t even know what that is!”
- Ott: “I knew Xanathar would send someone to rescue me! ... You’re not with Xanathar? Well, thank you for saving me! We could use a few more good people like you right now with what those filthy Zhent bastards are doing! I could take you back to HQ and make some introductions if you’d like to sign up!”
- Or maybe the PCs can convince him they *are* Xanatharian agents and have him lead them back to Xanathar’s lair. Ott managed to resist torture for a long time, but in his immense gratitude he makes some errors in judgment.

YELLOWSPIRE (Castle Ward): Use the Winter version of the Old Tower (see *Dragon Heist*, p. 79). It is occupied by Amath Seccent (LE female Mulan **priest**), a Banite priestess allied with Manshoon, and her four **acolytes**.

- Seccent is friends with Agorn Fuoco (see *Part 3C: Response Teams*), and he may also be found visiting here.
- *GM Note:* The permanent teleportation circle in Yellowspire is one method of accessing Manshoon's lair.
- *GM Note:* If the Gralhunds are still active in the Grand Game, one of their agents, Chirada, may be keeping Yellowspire under observation from a small apartment across the street. (See "A Missive from Castle Ward" in Area G12 of the Gralhund Villa.) Alternatively, following Chirada's advice, the Gralhunds may be mounting an expedition to raid Yellowspire, access the teleportal, and try to find the Second Eye.

Area O2 – Ground Level: A crumpled note has been carelessly tossed to one side.

- **Crumpled Note:** "Seccent—I have nothing but contempt for what you have done. I don't know what foul rites you hope to perform, but the more traditional rites of Brindul Alley would have surely wrung any information this broadsheet publisher might have had. Nonetheless, Manshoon's word is my command, and so I present to you Shan Chien. May you choke on him. – Avareen"



USING THE OUTPOSTS

These Outposts are fairly flexible in their utility. The DM should be actively playing each faction, and these outposts are some of the tools they can use while doing so. (No different than playing a PC and using their equipment list.) Structurally speaking, however, they're primarily designed to be pit stops or side quests for the PCs as they head for each faction's Lair (see Part 4), allowing them to gather intelligence (including, for example, the actual location of hidden lairs and/or the means of accessing them).

Here are some ways to use the Outposts:

- If the PCs want to find a faction by doing general research, point them at the Outposts first. (The Outposts contain clues that point to the Lairs.)
- In some cases, the Outposts will also include vectors accessing Lairs that are difficult to access. (For example, the teleportation circle in Yellowspire or the gladiatorial audience caravans leaving from the Terasse Estate.)
- The PCs are invited to meet with a faction. (This is particularly true for Jarlaxle's theater, for example.)
- The villains have kidnapped a friend or ally of the PCs. They're being held in one of the Outposts and the PCs need to either rescue them or go to the Outpost and pay their ransom.
- Villainous operations targeting the PCs or other factions will be based out of the Outposts, giving the PCs an opportunity to track or backtrack them. (For example, a Xanathar raid targeting Jarlaxle's ship might be based out of Grinda Garloth's, perhaps even with the Apparatus of Kwalish coming into play.)

From the very beginning of the campaign, keep an eye out for opportunities to point the PCs at the Outposts from unusual angles. For example, maybe they go looking for a supplier of magic armor. Send them to Grinda Garloth's. Or maybe they're sent to Fenerus Stormcastle as someone who can help them unravel some guild trouble. Even if these opportunities don't immediately lead the PCs to investigate these Outposts, it opens the door for them to be [reincorporated](#) later when they crop up as part of the Grand Game.

Also refer to *Part 5: Clues and Timelines* to see the revelation lists which will result in the PCs moving between and through the Outposts.

USING THE CASSALANTER OUTPOSTS

Because the PCs may end up working for the Cassalanters, the use of their Outposts deserves some special consideration.

If the PCs *don't* agree to help the Cassalanters, the dynamics of the Cassalanters' involvement in the campaign will completely change. This is discussed in more detail in *Part 3C: Response Teams*.

On the other hand, if the PCs agree to help the Cassalanters, then the Cassalanters are generally going to want to keep them at arm's-length from the rest of their operations. (They recognize that the risk of outing themselves as devil-worshippers and losing the PCs' support is too high.) In this scenario, the PCs may be able to follow clues from some of the other factions to Cassalanter operations and figure out that something isn't right, but the odds are low.

The DM, therefore, needs to make a decision: Do they want to make it likely that the Cassalanters will get away with it and pull one over on the PCs? Or do they want the PCs to discover what kind of alliance they've made half-way through the Grand Game?

If it's the former, simply do nothing: With the PCs working for them, the Cassalanters probably don't have to do *anything* to get what they want. And they're smart enough to sit back and do exactly that.

If it's the latter, have the Harpers or a similar organization tell the PCs that they've discovered evidence of devil-worshippers active at a site in the North Ward and send the PCs to investigate the Asmodean Shrine: Once there, they have fairly good odds of discovering evidence that implicates the Cassalanter.

PART 3C: FACTION RESPONSE TEAMS

by [Justin Alexander](#) – January 26th, 2019



In remixing [Dragon Heist](#) as a dynamic campaign, it becomes necessary for the DM to be able to respond dynamically to the players' actions. As I mentioned in the description of the [Faction Outposts](#), the DM needs to be actively playing each faction. Response teams are the other half of that equation, providing small, proactive units for each faction that can be deployed as necessary.

These response teams are your primary proactive nodes for *Dragon Heist*. If you're unfamiliar with the use of proactive nodes, they're discussed as part of [Advanced Node-Based Design](#). The short version is that the proactive nodes are the ones that come looking for the PCs. (As opposed to, say, the lairs and the outposts, which the PCs are most likely to go looking for.)

A few examples of what you can use response teams for:

- Competing onsite with the PCs during the Eye Heists (see Part 4), seeking to seize the prize before they can. (Or take it from them after they've gotten it.)
- Sent as negotiators to the PCs.
- Attempting to steal the *Stone* and/or *Eyes* from the PCs (break-ins at Trollskull Manor, attempted muggings on the street, etc.).
- Waylaying the PCs on their way to the Vault.

- Interfering with the PCs' efforts to remove the gold from the vault.

But, ultimately, you're thinking about what the factions know and thinking about how they would respond and then you're going to use the response teams to do that.

GM Tip: If you're new to this sort of thing and struggling to come to grips with it, there are a couple of things you can do.

First, take 5 minutes between sessions to think about what each faction is going to do next. Some of those things won't affect the PCs; some will. Make a list of those and when they'll happen: Gorath will come to Trollskull Manor at 5pm on the 10th. Souun Xibrindas will target one of the PCs for assassination with a sniper team at 10am on the 11th. And so forth. You can do the same thing during a mid-session break. Eventually, you'll be able to do it in real-time while playing.

Second, as you're ready to make that transition, make a simple list of the response teams. Stick it to your GM screen as a Post-It note or otherwise keep it handy. When you feel a need to respond to what the PCs are doing, glance at the list and go. You don't have to keep all this information in your head simultaneously: Make cheat sheets.

COUNTER-INTELLIGENCE: Awhile back I designed [skill guidelines for counter-intelligence](#) — if you're asking questions about certain people or organizations, there's a real risk that they'll find out that you've been asking questions. Those guidelines were designed for 3rd Edition, but you shouldn't find it too difficult to adapt them to 5th Edition.

Once the PCs know that they've gotten themselves tangled up in a Grand Game, you may also want to tell the players about the counter-intelligence procedures. Partly because it'll give them the opportunity to guard their own intelligence-gathering efforts, but more importantly because it will give them the opportunity to perform counter-intelligence: When the factions are trying to figure out who the PCs are or who they're working for or what they're up to, if the PCs are vigilant they may catch wind of that. And that may provide an alternative avenue for investigation (usually taking them to one of the Faction Outposts).

BREGAN D' AERTHE RESPONSE TEAMS

Bregan D'Aerthe's response teams all follow a common profile:

- 1-2 **drow gunslingers** (DH p. 201)
- 4-8 **drow** (MM p. 126)

One of the **drow gunslingers** is likely to be one of Jarlaxle's lieutenants (DH p. 201-202):

- Fel'rekt Lafeen
- Krebbyg Masq'il'yr
- Soluun Xibrindas

Later in the campaign, you might have a team with all of the surviving lieutenants show up for a climactic battle.

Note that Fel'Rekt is also the lieutenant leading the Bregan D'Aerthe team at Gralhund Villa (see Part 2). All of them have quarters on Jarlaxle's ships.

FEL'REKT LAFEEN

- *A Recommendation for Materiel:* A note written in silver ink on black paper. "Regarding the need for alternative sources of materiel, make contact with Grinda Garloth of Mistshore. Use all caution and do not reveal your true heritage, as she is allied with the beholder and that poses certain risks for us now. - J"

KREBBYG MASQ'IL'YR

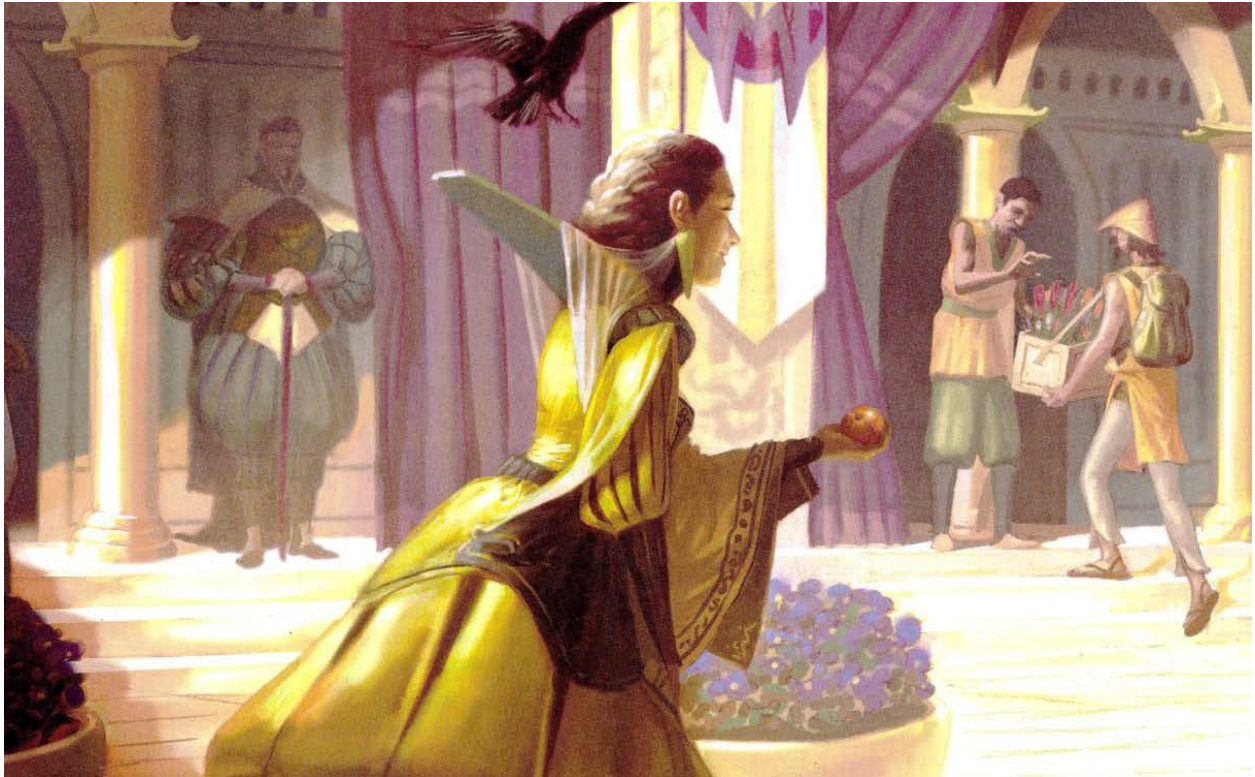
- *Sealed Letter to Fenerus Stormcastle.* A simple missive addressed to "Fenerus Stormcastle, of Quill Alley" thanking him for his service. It is written in silver ink on black paper and signed "J". It is attached to a velvet pouch containing 100 gp.

SOLUUN XIBRINDAS

- Carries a bloodstained playbill from the Seven Masks Theater, belonging to a performance of *Blood Wedding* which took place several nights earlier. (In the play, according to the playbill, a young woman is brought to a castle by a count, only to fall in love with his younger brother, a man of faith. Her betrayal eats away at the jealous count. He murders his brother on his wedding day and pursues the bride, who hurls herself off the castle battlements in despair. The count is cursed by the gods and transformed into a creature of darkness, damned to live in his castle and feed on blood.)
- *GM Note:* Soluun has taken to attending plays at the Seven Masks Theater and then stalking and murdering elven and half-elven members of the audience after the show.



CASSALANTER RESPONSE TEAMS



If the PCs have agreed to help the Cassalanters, then the Cassalanters will generally be fairly passive in their activities. (The PCs are their agents in the field.) If the PCs request assistance from them, however, the Cassalanters might dispatch Seffia Naelryke and her team (either to gather intelligence and deliver it to them, or to fight at their side).

If the PCs turn down the Cassalanters, then the whole shape of the campaign will shift:

- Imps summoned at the Asmodean Shrine will try to keep the PCs under constant surveillance, keeping the Cassalanters apprised of what the PCs are doing and learning.
- Add Seffia's team to the Eye Heist at Xanathar's. They'll be aiming for the same goal.
- Willifort Crowelle will attempt to assassinate Jarlaxle. He'll fail, but a few days later he'll target the PCs in a similar attempt. This may prompt Jarlaxle to reach out to the PCs and propose an alliance against the Cassalanters.

SEFFIA NAELRYKE: Seffia is a loyal Asmodean cultist. She lives at the Converted Windmill outpost with Arn Xalrondar.

- Seffia Naelryke (**cult fanatic**, MM p. 345)
- 2 **spies** (MM p. 349)
- 1 **veteran** (MM p. 350)
- 1 invisible **imp** (MM p. 76)

Seffia's Letter: Seffia carries a letter from Lord Cassalanter. It reads: "Seffia – Lady Ammalia and I are both deeply moved by what your ritual accomplished. It speaks to your true faith in the power of our Master, and you have clearly been blessed by him. As you suspected, we did, in fact, find Neverremember's Third Eye in the crypt of Lady Brandath. Thank you for all that you have done. – Lord Victoro".

- *GM Note:* This is a prized possession for Seffia and she keeps it with her at all times. She will cry out with anguish and rage if it is taken from her.

WILLIFORT CROWELLE: "Willifort" is supposedly the elderly tiefling valet of the Cassalanter. In truth he is a doppelganger and their most trusted lieutenant. Willifort might approach the PCs disguised as a friend or ally in order to pump them for information; or he may try to burn the PCs' bridges by disguising himself as one of them and doing something to piss off powerful people. And when the Cassalanter definitively need a problem solved, Crowelle is the one they'll send in with a team of demonic enforcers.

- "Willifort Crowelle" (**doppelganger**, MM p. 82)
- **bearded devil** (MM p. 70) or 2 **cult fanatics** (MM p. 345)
- 3 **cultists** (MM p. 345)

XANATHAR RESPONSE TEAMS

GORATH: Gorath is the leader of a small team of duergar. His team is sent in one when someone needs to be taught a lesson.

- 4 **duergar** (MM p. 122)

KORGSTROD UXGULM: If Gorath is taken out, Korgstrod is sent out from the Xanathar Sewer Hideout (see Outposts) to send a stronger message.

- Korgstrod Uxgulum (**duergar**, MM p. 122)
- 3 **duergar**
- **half-ogre** (MM p. 238)
 - *Orb Confectioners' Note:* The half-ogre carries a note which reads, "Orb Confectioners. Say: 'Eight small eyes.' 'Around an ocular cake.'"
- **gazer** (DH p. 203)

NOSKA UR'GRAY: Noska, a shield dwarf, is another of Xanathar's enforcers.

- Noska Ur'gray (DH p. 213)
- 6 **bugbears** (MM p. 33)
- **gazer** (DH p. 203)

A DIRECTIVE FROM N'ARL XIBRINDAS: The first or second Xanathar response team the PCs encounter should carry *A Directive From N'Arl Xibrindas*, instructing the leader of the response team to get "properly outfitted" by Grinda Garloth. (If it's the second response team they've dealt with, it might specify that "these gutter-scum upstarts already took out [insert name here], so you'll want to make sure you've got something a little extra to deal with them.")

- This team has a *potion of healing*, *potion of greater healing*, and a +1 weapon. (They were, in fact, outfitted by Grinda.)



ZHENTARIM RESPONSE TEAMS

Manshoon's response teams consist of:

- 1 lieutenant (Vevette, Urstul, or Agorn)
- 3-4 thugs

All of Manshoon's lieutenants carry pass-amulets to Kolat Towers (see Part 4), but will attempt to destroy them if it looks as if they are being captured. (Except Agorn, that feckless weasel, who will attempt to barter it for his own life.) They leave their *teleport rings* with Sidra Romeir when journeying outside Kolat Towers. (If they're slain by the PCs, Sidra will give them to Kaevra; see Part 4E.)

TO THE INTERROGATION HOUSE: Any Zhentarim response team sent to attack the PCs will have been instructed to take them as prisoners to the Zhentarim Interrogation House. If questioned, they'll be able to point the PCs in the direction of the house in Brindul Alley in the Trade Ward.

VEVETTE BLACKWATER: When she was a young girl, Vevette was abused by her mother. A Zhentarim agent came to her when she was twelve, put a blade in her hand, and asked if she wanted to take control of her life. She did. And she's been in the Black Network ever since.

Vevette's past manifests itself in a deep streak of cruelty and ruthlessness, but to most outward appearance she is a charming *bon vivant*. She has fiery red hair with two streaks of brilliant platinum, which can actually glow in the dark on her command.

Stats: CE female Tethyrian human **swashbuckler** (DH p. 216)

Notes:

- Vevette carries *Seffia Naelryke's Visiting Card*. It gives Seffia's address as "the Windmill on Coachlamp Lane". (*GM Note:* Seffia approached Vevette in order to open a discrete line of communication between the Cassalanter and Manshoon, but her overtures were rebuffed. After their experiences with Xanathar, the Zhentarim suspected a trap.)

AGORN FUOCO: Agorn made such a good impression on Manshoon that he was elevated quickly through the ranks of the organization, but his life was full of disappointment otherwise. He has not achieved the fame he craved nor earned the wealth he felt he was entitled to. He has adopted the Zhentarim credo that power comes to those who deserve it. In fact, he believed it so much that he murdered his own mother in order to "escape" her poverty. He has come to see the Black Network as a new family of sorts.

Agorn is a hollow coward. When engaging with the PCs, he will generally send the thugs under his command to attack while he remains at a safe distance. If his men are being slaughtered, he will bravely run away as quickly as possible in order to save his own worthless hide. As noted above, he will offer up his pass-amulet to Kolat Towers in exchange for his own life.

Agorn is friends with Amath Seccent (see Yellowspire in *Part 3B: Faction Outposts*), but he will gladly sell her out, too, revealing the existence of the teleportation circle in Yellowspire.

Stats: NE male Turami **bard** (DH p. 195)

Notes:

- Agorn carries a *Report to Agorn Fuoco*. “Korgstrod Uxgulf’s outfit is based out of the Orb Confectioners’ on Rising Ride just off Caravan Court. Not sure how the backroom can fit them all, but there’s no question that Xanathar’s duergar come in and out of there on the regular.”



URSTUL FLOXIN: Urstul is a thuggish man who notably leads both the Zhentarim attempt to capture Dalakhar (and gets blown up for his trouble) and their operation at the Gralhund Villa. If he survives the latter, he can crop up later leading a response team.

Stats & Background: DH p. 216

Notes:

- Urstul carries the *Directive to Urstul Floxin*: “Any prisoners taken from the other players of the Grand Game should be delivered to Avaareen in Brindul Alley. – By Order of the Zhentarim”

DESIGN NOTE

Vevette Blackwater and Agorn Fuoco are supposed to appear in Appendix B of Dragon Heist. As far as I can tell, however, they’re missing in action, so I’ve provided more detailed backgrounds for them here.

Note that the Zhentarim response teams are generally weaker than the response teams from the other factions. This probably means the Zhents won’t be taken as seriously by the PCs as the other factions, but it also makes them a good selection if you want to or need to hit the PCs when they’re already weakened.

Also check out the “Secret Simulacrum” option on page 162 of Dragon Heist for another Zhentarim response option.

PART 3D: OTHER RESPONSE TEAMS

[by Justin Alexander - January 27th, 2019](#)

GRALHUND RESPONSE TEAM

Depending on how [Part 2: Gralhund Villa](#) resolves itself, the Gralhunds might remain engaged with the Grand Game. They'll know that the only way to re-establish their position will be to take possession of Golorr artifacts, and they'll probably identify any artifact(s) held by the PCs as the most vulnerable. (But they are likely to use covert means to obtain it if possible.)

If the Gralhunds have somehow managed to retain possession of the *Stone*, they may be emboldened by their success and more actively pursue the Eyes. It's more likely, however, that they will eventually realize that they're out of their depth and use whatever Golorr artifact(s) they've managed to obtain as collateral for forming an alliance with another player in the Grand Game. Any of the four major factions can make enticing offers to them, but another possibility is that the Gralhunds simply decide to cut their losses and approach the Open Lord: They won't get a cut of the money that way, but if they can spin it the right way they may get a lot of political capital out of their "material assistance to the realm".

Their response team is modest, consisting of:

- Hrabbaz, Lady Yalah's bodyguard (DH p. 205)
- A **spy** (MM p. 349)
- A **martial arts adept** (DH p. 209)

GM Tip: Remember that the Gralhunds also have agents in Renaer Neverember's home. If the PCs keep Renaer in the loop about their activities, those agents become a potential vector of information back to the Gralhunds.



OPEN LORD RESPONSE TEAM



Laeral Silverhand has the entire apparatus of Waterdeep's government at her command. If she wants something from the PCs, that command will trickle down through the bureaucracy and be executed by a local team of city watchmen:

- 1 **veteran** (MM p. 350)
- 4 **guards**
- Possibly accompanied by an **apprentice wizard** (DH p. 194)

DESIGN NOTE

The initial team sent by the Open Lord is designed to be a Medium encounter for the PCs. Which means that the PCs can totally take them in a fair fight (or have very good odds of running away successfully). This intentionally gives the PCs the option of doing so. (Once they do, of course, they're probably living on borrowed time because the Open Lord has much deeper – and much more powerful – resources to call upon.)

This also means that the City Watch can easily be pitted against response teams from the other factions without trivially overwhelming them.

UNSEEN RESPONSE TEAM

If you're using the Unseen (from Introcaso's [Unseen Waterdeep](#), see [Part 1B](#)), they'll most likely make their presence primarily felt through proactive response teams. (Sort of a, "Player Unseen has joined the game!" kind of thing.)

THE ILLUSIONISTS: Aila and Dalia Illmatti are twin sisters and also illusionists. They actually perform a stage act using their skills, and you might consider adding them to the [Seven Masks Theater](#), with the Unseen infiltrating Jarlaxle's operation there. If pursued, one of their favorite tricks is to have one of the sisters create an illusion of the other (giving them an opportunity to escape with whatever they've stolen).

- Aila and Dalia (**illusionists**, *Unseen Waterdeep* p. 29)
- Kelso Fiddlewick (a **wererat** who disguises himself as a vagrant child, MM p. 209)
- 2 **thugs** (MM p. 350)

STRIKE TEAM: As detailed on p. 4 of *Unseen Waterdeep*, this is a generic strike team that can be used to achieve any number ends.

- **Doppelganger** (MM p. 82)
- *01-50*: 2 **spies** (MM p. 349)
- *51-75*: 2 **thugs** (MM p. 350)
- *76-00*: a second **doppelganger**

GALLO & FERRA: A male and female pair of lightfoot halfling wererats who often disguise themselves as beggar children in order to set up observation posts (see *Unseen Waterdeep*, p. 14). They could show up almost anywhere, and the PCs might not realize something's amiss until the second or third time they spot them.

GM Tip: Kelso Fiddlewick, who's part of the crew Emmek Frewn uses to harrass the PCs' attempts to open Trollskull Manor (see Dragon Heist, p. 42), belongs to the same pack as Gallo and Ferra.



FREELANCERS

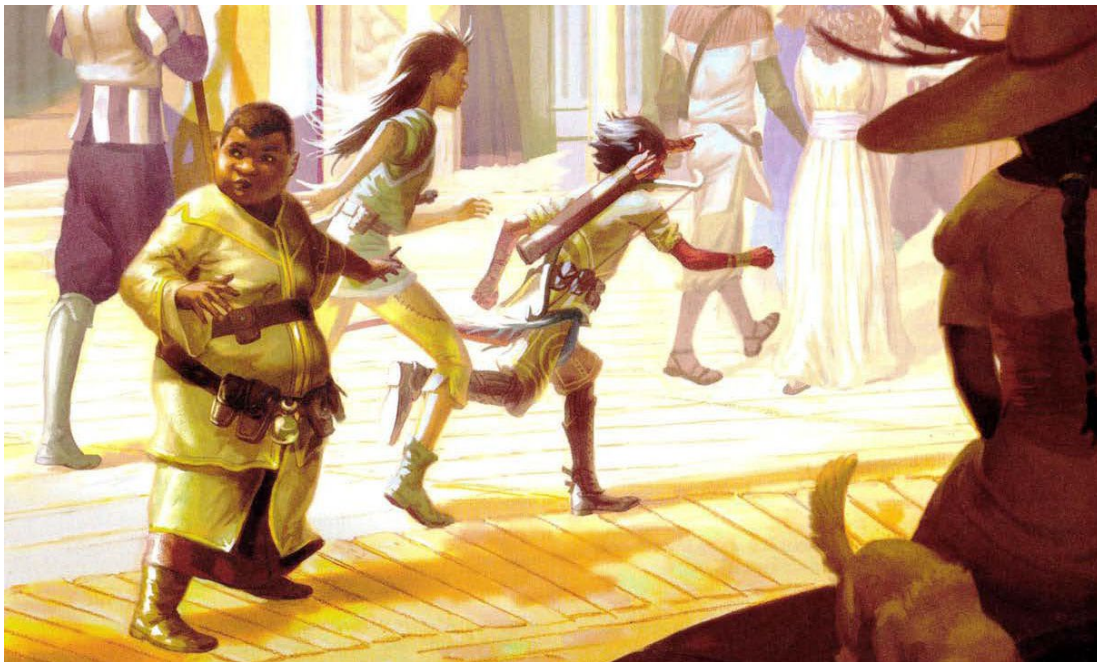
As discussed in [Part 1B](#), Bonnie's Doppelgangers and the Black Viper should both be used as proactive elements.

BONNIE'S DOPPELGANGERS: See *Dragon Heist* p. 20. They are also part of faction missions on p. 35 and 27.

- 5 doppelgangers (MM p. 82)

BLACK VIPER: See *Dragon Heist* p. 196. Also part of faction missions on p. 39 and p. 40.

THE THREE URCHINS



The Three Urchins are detailed in a sidebar on p. 63 of [Dragon Heist](#):

- **Nat** is a lanky, 10-year-old deaf Illuskan girl with a wooden toy sword. She is the leader of the group and communicates using a sign language that she invented and taught her friends.
- **Jenks** is a portly 9-year-old Turami boy with a cloak, a toy wand, and a stuffed owlbear “familiar”. He’s shy around strangers but brave when it comes to helping his friends.
- **Squiddly** is a slim 9-year-old tiefling boy with an eye patch, a small bow, and a quiver of toy arrows. He rarely thinks before he talks or acts.

It may be odd to think of the Three Urchins as a “response team”, but they are a proactive node that the GM can bring onscreen as desired. A few things I’d consider:

- **Introduce the Urchins in Trollskull Alley**, possibly even as part of the first scene where the PCs arrive at Trollskull Mansion. (They might be inside the abandoned building, rampaging around,

pretending to fight trolls and such, and offering all kinds of stories about the ghost of a troll skull which haunts the building.)

- Have them **follow the PCs**. They “fancy themselves as adventurers of sorts, and they are quick to idolize and emulate real-life ones.”
- Have them **interfere with faction missions** (most likely while trying to help, unless the PCs have pissed them off).
- Let them be **valuable sources of information**. They can show up in the streets around Gralhund Villa, familiar with the neighborhood. Nat might know Agorn because she grew up in the same neighborhood he lived in (and knows that he murdered his mother). And so forth.
- Have them **eavesdrop on the PCs** and **volunteer to help**.

If you’re content to just have these kids as friendly, rambunctious supporting characters, that’s more than enough. They’ll be a charming and lovely part of your campaign.

But if you’re willing to go a little darker, there are a couple of additional options:

- If the bad guys are looking for someone to **kidnap** in order to gain leverage over the PCs, one or more of the Urchins makes a great target. (Going to rescue them and discovering that they’ve already broken out of their cell and are causing huge headaches for the bad guys by sneaking around the outpost or lair where they’re being held also offers great comedic opportunities.)
- As I will discuss at further length in Part 5, I think it necessary to give the PCs a stronger motivation to investigate the *fireball* that kills Dalakhar beyond “it happened sort of near us and it’s obviously a plot hook, so we should just go for it.” One way to provide that motivation is to **kill** someone the PCs care about as collateral damage. If it won’t be a deal-breaker for your group, I guarantee that killing one of the Urchins after the PCs have become friends with them will set them permanently on the warpath no matter how many city officials tell them to back off.

PART 4: THE EYES OF THE STONE

by [Justin Alexander](#) – January 28th, 2019



After hiding the secret of the Vault's location in the *Stone of Golorr*, Lord Neverremember chose to further secure it by blinding the *Stone*: He removed the *Stone's* three eyes, robbing it of the ability to both see and communicate its secrets, and hid those Eyes in different places.

In order to discover the location of the Vault, someone needs to restore the Eyes to the *Stone of Golorr*. (Which is simply a matter of having both in the same location and placing an Eye within an empty socket.) As described in Part 1, the Eyes are currently held by the Cassalanters, Manshoon, and Xanathar. Each of these Eyes have been secured in their respective lairs, and if the PCs want to restore the *Stone of Golorr*, discover the location of the Vault, and end the Grand Game, then they're going to have to go into those lairs and get them.

HEIST STRUCTURE

This part of our remix, therefore, restructures the four villain lairs so that the PCs can run exciting and successful heists in them. This includes providing [adversary rosters](#) and explicit heist frames for each lair, along with minor tweaks and the like where necessary.

Before we dive in, let's take a moment to discuss the structure of a heist scenario. It superficially resembles the [location-crawl](#) (usually featuring a room-and-key design), but with the – very important! –

distinction that the PCs are expected to know the floor plan and some (or all) of the defensive measures present before the actual heist begins. In this it also closely resembles the [raid structure](#), but the difference is that, whereas in the raid scenario the PCs can quickly figure out the floorplan and defensive measures largely through observation in the immediate moment, in the heist discovering these elements usually requires additional effort during the prep phase of the heist.

The heist structure is heavily player-driven, but if the players haven't done proper heists before, they can prove unusual enough that the DM should let the players know that they have opportunities they might not normally consider viable. (This is particularly true specifically *because* of the heist's similarity to the dungeon crawl: Players may assume that they're "supposed" to engage the heist in the same way that they engage a traditional dungeon.)

The heist structure consists of five steps.

STEP 1: IDENTIFY THE SCORE. For the purposes of [Dragon Heist](#), this means identifying where the Eyes are (i.e., the lairs of the villains). Part 5 will have the revelation lists with all the clues the PCs can follow to figure this out.

STEP 2: GATHER INFORMATION. The next step is for the PCs to gather information on their target. This should include being able to gain access to some or all of the **blueprints** and **defensive measures** in the targeted complex. It may also include an **event schedule**, which will often feature one or more opportunities for performing the heist (by either providing unique access to the target and/or providing cover for the operation).

The descriptions of the lairs below will include brief descriptions of what form the Gather Information phase might take for each lair, but the GM should always remain open to alternative thinking from the PCs.

Re: Blueprints. You may benefit from high-quality player versions of the maps. These are not, unfortunately, available in the book as printed, and due to copyright reasons I'm not going to produce them here. They are available in the Fantasy Grounds pack for *Dragon Heist*, and I believe they're also available from D&D Beyond.

You may want to prepare:

- A full blueprint (i.e., the entire player's map).
- A version with secret areas removed.
- Partial versions, particularly reflecting the limited knowledge of certain underlings who might be questioned. (Although it may be easier to simply sketch these out *ad hoc* as they come up during play.)

Be aware of the lack of windows in all of these maps. Place them logically or be prepared to tell the players where they're located.

It's important for the DM to remember that, in a heist scenario, the expected outcome is for the PCs to succeed in getting this information. That doesn't mean it's guaranteed: The expected outcome of combat in D&D is for the PCs to win, but that doesn't mean it always happens. But DMs can sometimes get a little too enamored of keeping their cards close to their chest, and you may need to consciously remind yourself to fight that instinct: 90% of the fun in a heist scenario comes from seeing a problem and coming up with a solution for it. Only about 10% comes from being surprised by the unknown in the middle of the heist (and that'll usually arise organically as the heist plays out).

STEP 3: ONSITE SURVEILLANCE. After the initial gathering of information, most heist stories will give the protagonists an opportunity to conduct onsite surveillance *before the heist happens*. This surveillance allows them to gain information they missed or were unable to gather earlier, clarify the information they already have, and/or discover that some of their information was inaccurate or outdated (and now they have a whole new set of problems to solve!).

One really easy division is to make it easy to obtain floor plans of the target, but to only be able to ascertain limited information about the security measures in place without onsite surveillance.

Each lair will detail at least one **surveillance opportunity** that the PCs can take advantage of.

STEP 4: PREP WORK. Possibly running in tandem with the onsite surveillance, the team will also need to make preparations for the job. Prep often takes the form of *altering* the information the PCs have received – creating new entrances, blinding security cameras, subverting guards, etc. It may also involve creating bespoke resources (or simply shopping for necessary supplies).

STEP 5: THE OPERATION. Finally, the operation itself. The PCs try to carry out their plan.

In running the operation, there may be one or more pre-planned **twists**: Unexpected circumstances that the PCs didn't anticipate or that they missed in their research. These will often evolve organically from earlier missed checks. Lean into those. Gotchas that the PCs had no way of anticipating and which create unexpected complications for the job ("Oh crap! Mrs. Johnson came home early!") are also great in moderation, but gotchas that automatically scuttle the entire job and negate all the PCs' planning generally suck and should be avoided.

Successfully executing a heist will usually involve a series of skill checks. A single failed check should not cause the entire plan to immediately fail. Use [fail forward techniques](#) that generate **complications on failed checks**.

These complications on failed checks are also why you can get away with giving the PCs perfect information during Step 2 and Step 3: Among other things, you can use complications to introduce "oh fuck, he got a new safe" obstacles that effectively alter or reveal gaps in the information the PCs acquired on-the-fly.

(The difference between a gotcha and a complication is that the former are things which you, as the DM, plan to have happen before the heist starts. The latter arise as the heist is happening.)

THE FESTIVALS



As a final note here, this remix is set in the Springtime, during the back-to-back festivals of Fleetswake (Ches 21st thru 30th) and Waukeentide (Tarsakh 1st thru 10th). There are a couple reasons for this.

First, these festivals are filled with gold- and wealth-filled events, which is very thematically appropriate for the dragon-fueled pursuit of Lord Neverember's Vault.

Second, and more importantly, these festivals provide wide opportunities for social events – parties, galas, gladiatorial games, etc. – to take place at each of the villains' lairs. These provide both surveillance opportunities and access for the operations themselves.

The broad date range (and multiple events) give us a lot more flexibility in terms of how this section times out: If we instead aimed for just Trolltide on Klythorn 1st, for example, and the PCs do things a little slower than we anticipate, then we could easily miss the holiday entirely. If they go a little slower in our case, then we just slide into the next slate of events during the dual festivals.

This long festival season can also explain why Jarlaxle has chosen this moment to appear in town with the Sea Maidens' Faire: It's the perfect cover for his traveling carnival.

FLEETSWAKE: This festival is the beginning of the Spring Social Season in Waterdeep. Celebrating the sea, maritime trade, and the gods of the sea, navigation, and weather, it spans the last tenday of Ches, and includes a series of **boat races** and **guild-sponsored galas** at the Copper Cup festhall. According to custom, the winners of the various competitions don't keep their trophies and earnings, but deliver them to the priests of Umberlee at the Queenspire, her temple on the beach by the east entrance to the Great Harbor, at the conclusion of the festival (see below).

- **Ches 21 – Selûne Sashelas:** A celebration of Selûne, goddess of the moon and navigation, and Deep Sashelas of the Seldarine, elven god of the sea. It is supposedly based on a mangled legend dating back to the time when the elven city of Aelinthaldaar stood where Waterdeep does today and telling of a time when the elves of the sea said farewell to their brethren upon the land and

moved into the deep ocean. The elves largely declare this to be a bunch of hogwash, but nevertheless the “historical event” is commemorated by the Twin Parades: A huge line of ships (varying greatly in size) proceeds from the harbor, loops up the coast, and returns. Simultaneously, a land-based parade proceeds from the Docks and through the streets of Waterdeep.

- **Ches 25 - Shipwrights' Ball:** Held at the Shipwrights' House, what was once a guild celebration has turned into one of the biggest social events of Fleetswake.
- **Ches 29-30 - Fair Seas Festival:** Much feasting on seafood, the harbor is strewn with flower petals, and the City Guards go from tavern to tavern to collect offerings for Umberlee. Collection boxes also appear at large festival gatherings. Upon sunset of the final day, the collected coin is placed in chests and dumped into the deepest part of the harbor. (See *Dragon Heist*, p. 185 for anyone who thinks they should try to loot it.)
- **Ches 30 - Highcoin Balls:** When Lord Peirgeiron was High Lord of Waterdeep, he threw the Highcoin Ball on the 30th of Ches which would last all through the last day of the Fair Seas Festival. It was considered the absolute necessity for those intending to be on the scene that season, and those who missed it became an afterthought for the rest of the year. After Lord Peirgeion's passing, a number of noble families tried to pick up the tradition. The result are the Highcoin Balls, which now generally begin *after* sundown (when the ceremonies of Umberlee's Cache take place). It's not unusual for guests to wander from one party to the next.

WAUKEENTIDE: This festival has long gathered a number of older holidays under one name, stretching those celebrations and rituals into a holiday season that lasts a tenday in homage to Waukeen, the goddess of wealth and trade.^{fs}

- **Tarsahk 1 - Caravance:** This gift-giving holiday commemorates the traditional arrival of the first caravans of the season into the city. Many parents hide gifts for their offspring in their homes, telling the children that they were left by Old Carvas - a mythical peddler who arrived with the first caravan to reach Waterdeep, his wagon loaded down with toys for children to enjoy.
- **Tarsahk 5 - Goldenight:** This festival celebrates coin and gold, with many businesses staying open all night, offering midnight sales and other promotions. Some celebrants and customers decorate themselves with gold dust and wear coins as jewelry.
- **Tarsahk 7 - Guildsmeet:** On this holiday, guild members gather in their halls for the announcement of new policies and a celebration of business concluded for the year. These gatherings culminate in a gala festival and dance sponsored by several guilds, which lasts from dusk till dawn and overruns the Market, the Cynosure, the Field of Triumph, and all areas in between.
- **Tarsahk 10 - Leiruin:** In times long past, Waukeen caught Leira, the goddess of illusions and deception, attempting to cheat her in a deal, and buried her under a mountain of molten gold as punishment. A commemoration of that event, Leiruin is the day for guild members to pay their annual dues and for guildmasters to meet with the Lords of Waterdeep and renew their charters for another year. In the evening, the Leiruin Feasts are held, in which gold coins (and other golden treasures) are baked into random items of food to be won by those who are lucky enough to receive them.

HOLIDAYS AT THE TAVERN: See the notes on hosting the Deadwinter Day Feast at Trollskull Manor on page 162 of *Dragon Heist* for some light, adaptable notes on how the various holidays of Fleetswake and Waukeentide can come home to roost.

DESIGN NOTES

The Highcoin Balls are derived from [this wiki](#). I've sought for an original source in all the Waterdeep lore I own and have been unsuccessful, leading me to suspect that it may be an original creation of Joseph D. Carriker, Jr. for his campaign.

NOTES ON THE LAIRS

The notes on the various lairs below include revisions made to some of the keyed areas in those lairs. After years of doing this, I've discovered that, rather than attempting to simply annotate the changes to an area, it is usually easier to just "overwrite" the entire area. (That way, as the GM, you only need to check to see if any area has been updated. You don't have to simultaneously try to combine and interpolate text across multiple sources.)

Therefore, that's the approach I've taken below. If an area appears in the notes below, you can simply ignore the original key entry in *Dragon Heist* and use the entry as found here. (Unless noted otherwise.)

Remember that NPCs now appear on the adversary roster and should be ignored when they appear in the *Dragon Heist* room keys.

PART 4B: BREGAN D' AERTHE – SEA MAIDENS FAIRE

[by Justin Alexander – January 29th, 2019](#)



As the PCs become embroiled in the Grand Game, Jarlaxle does not control an Eye. Nevertheless the Sea Maidens Faire and his ships are likely to become a target for a heist before the campaign is done:

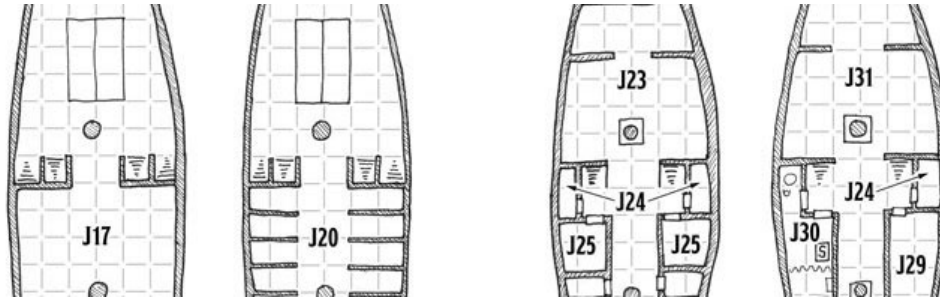
- As noted in Part 1 and Part 5, Jarlaxle sold the nimblewright which murdered Dalakhar and can identify the purchasers. PCs may break into the ships in order to steal his shipping records or to access the *crystal ball* connected to the nimblewrights.
- The Bregan D'Aerthe team at Gralhund Villa (Part 2) successfully take possession of the *Stone of Golorr*.
- Jarlaxle's agents may come into possession of an Eye at a later date, either by stealing it from the PCs or by beating them to the prize in Xanathar's Lair (see below).

Therefore, we're going to break down the heist structure for this lair, just like all the others.

It's also an unusual lair because it really consists of four distinct areas:

- The docked ships *Hellraiser* and *Hellbreaker*
- The Sea Maidens Faire carnival which is erected on the pier between the two ships
- The flagship *Eyecatcher* anchored in the harbor

BLUEPRINT NOTES



Unlike a city building, there won't be any plans of Jarlaxle's ships readily available. However, it's relatively easy to keep them under surveillance. I recommend preparing a player's copy of the ship maps which includes the upper decks and the portholes on the lower decks.

EVENT SCHEDULE

CARNIVAL PARADES: The Sea Maidens Faire carnival goes on five different parades during its stay in Waterdeep.

- Ches 10th, announcing its arrival
- Ches 21st, participate in the Twin Parades of Selûne Sashelas
- Ches 25th, parade to Shipwrights' House and then set up local attractions for the evening as part of the Shipwrights' Ball (Jarlaxle's agents happily use the occasion to infiltrate this important social event)
- Tarsakh 1st, join the Caravance holiday parade
- Tarsakh 5th, a special midnight parade during Goldenight

During the parades, the Sea Maidens Faire attractions are shut down and the ships themselves are depopulated (see the Parade adversary roster, below).

ZORD'S BUSINESS: At irregular intervals, Jarlaxle (as "Captain Zord") will leave the *Eyecatcher*. On these occasions his rowboat can be seen docking at the Sea Maidens Faire pier, and then he and his group will move off into the city on various errands (often splitting up).

During these times, the following characters should be stricken from the *Eyecatcher's* adversary roster:

- Jarlaxle
- Margo Verida & Khafeyta
- Any lieutenants who would otherwise be present on the ship
- 1d3 mates
- 1d6+2 sailors

Although these expeditions cannot be easily planned for, when they occur the *Eyecatcher* will be substantially less guarded than under normal circumstances.

END OF THE SEA MAIDENS FAIRE: On Tarsakh 20th, the Sea Maidens Faire packs up and sails out of Waterdeep harbor. (If the business of the Grand Game has not been concluded, then it's likely that Jarlaxle will remain behind with a team of operatives.)

SURVEILLANCE OPPORTUNITY

The drow generally don't bring strangers onto the ship, and although it may seem like there's a lot of chaos where the carnies are concerned, the truth is that they've been journeying together long enough that everyone pretty much knows each other on sight. Other than becoming one of Jarlaxle's "romantic" conquests, the PCs are unlikely to get onboard any of the ships under any sort of legitimate pretenses in order to conduct surveillance. However, there are a couple of options which can offer comparable information.

SEA MAIDENS FAIRE: The carnival itself, operating on the pier between the ships, runs from mid-morning until late into the night. This provides the perfect cover for those interested in keeping the *Heartbreaker* and *Hellraiser* under surveillance. This surveillance position is able to:

- Identify the total number of crew on each ship – 1 captain, 3 mates, 17-18 sailors, 16 carnies (when they're not working on the dock; a handful onboard taking breaks at any given time when the carnival is operating)
- Find opportunities to peer in through portholes and get some knowledge of the interior layout of the ship(s)
- Intuit that the *Heartbreaker* and *Hellraiser* are virtually identical in layout, suggesting that the same is also likely true of the *Eyecatcher*
- Note that the *Eyecatcher* goes on full alert when a local yacht steers too close, but has no reaction to rowboats from the *Heartbreaker* or *Hellraiser* approaching

THE DRAGON ZELIFARN: As described in *Dragon Heist* on p. 145, the dragon Zelifarn is a curious **young bronze dragon** who wants the PCs to investigate the submarine attached to the bottom of the *Eyecatcher* and learn nothing in particular about it for no particular reason.

We're going to swap that up a bit: If Zelifarn spots the PCs surveilling Jarlaxle's ship, he'll approach them with a request for help. (If the PCs spot Zelifarn watching Jarlaxle's ship without being detected themselves, they might also choose to approach the dragon.)

Zelifarn's mother was, in addition to being a dragon, a master crystalmancer. Jarlaxle and his agents killed his mother, Asphosis, and stole from her the special *crystal ball* that he uses to spy through the nimblewrights. Zelifarn doesn't know exactly what the *crystal ball* does, but he wants it back so that he can restore his mother's horde. Zelifarn knows that Jarlaxle keeps it in the *Scarlet Marpenoth*, but hasn't been able to figure out a way to get it by himself.

By default, Zelifarn would prefer to pay the PCs to do the work for him. They may be able to convince him to actively assist in their raid on the *Eyecatcher* with a Charisma (Persuasion) check.

(This counts as a surveillance opportunity because the PCs can learn about the existence of both the submarine and the *crystal ball* from Zelifarn.)

SPECIAL EVENTS: These events may be observed if the PCs are keeping the Sea Maidens Faire under long-term surveillance.

- Escaped Bear (DH p. 146) - evening
- Lieutenants Meet with Laeral (DH p. 145) - night



THE SHIPS



Area J18 (Eyecatcher Only) – Nimblewright Storage: Each of these cabins contain 4 deactivated nimblewrights.

- *GM Note:* These are the nimblewrights which Jarlaxle has not yet sold. The process for activating them can be intuited with 5 minutes of work and a DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) test. Jarlaxle and his lieutenants all know the procedure and can activate one of the nimblewrights with a single action.

Area J29 (Eyecatcher Only) – Guest Cabin: A small bag of multihued dragon scales has been strewn across the bed (or is kept in a small bag in the bedside table). Jarlaxle uses them like other people might use rose petals.

Area J30 – Zardoz Zord’s Cabin: In addition to the normal entry for this area, a **small desk** contains a variety of papers. Among these is the *Ledger of Nimblewright Sales* (see Part 5) and, if Jarlaxle has become involved in the Grand Game, *A Report on the Cultists of Asmodeus* and *Jarlaxle’s Report on the Grand Game*.

- *Report on the Cultists of Asmodeus:* This report compiles information from a number of different sources – most contemporary, although a few surprisingly historical – exploring indications that there is a well-established cult of Asmodeus “which has infiltrated the highest strata of Waterdhavian society”. After what appears to be a considerable amount of legwork, the report identifies a house on Aveen Street in the North Ward as being a secret front for one of the cult’s shrines. This does not appear to be the center of worship, however. That distinction, according to references in some of the documentation captured from the Asmodean cultists over a century ago, appears to belong to an ancient site of worship located below the Sea Ward. A recommendation is made that gaining access to the records of the Suveyors’, Map-, and Chart-makers’ Guild might prove useful in identifying this site, although likely only if its location could be narrowed down.

- *GM Note:* The house on Aveen Street is the Asmodean Shrine (a Cassalanter outpost). The “ancient site of worship” lies beneath Cassalanter Villa.

Area U3 – Soluun’s Stateroom: The footlocker contains *A Letter from N’arl*.

- **A Letter From N’arl:** “Brother – I hope this letter finds you in good spirits. Thank you for the evening at the Seven Masks last tenday. A delightfully bloody affair. I think it wonderful that Jarlaxle has decided to purchase the theater, even if his intentions are not purely artistic. It was quite a joy to escape from Xanathar’s lair for a few hours and remember who I truly am. It’s a pity that we can’t do it more often, but the risk of X discovering my true allegiance is simply too great. On that note, I have taken some pains to arrange assurances for myself. When the time comes, I’ll be able to bring this whole wretched ant’s nest down on that floating fool’s head. – N’arl Xibrindas”

Area U4 – Jarlaxle’s Stateroom: In addition to the normal entry for this area, a **crystal ball** sits upon a plush cushion of black velvet on a pedestal at the foot of the bed. This is the *Nimblewright Crystal Ball* (see Part 5).

ADVERSARY ROSTERS

HEARTBREAKER (CARNIVAL ANIMALS)

1 mate + 3 sailors	Area J1 - Main Deck	
2 mates	Area J3 - Mates' Cabin	(off-duty, unarmored)
4 sailors	Area J4 - Crew Cabins	(1 per cabin, off-duty, unarmored)
Cook (Commoner)	Area J5 - Gallery	
6 sailors + 1d4 carnies	Area J7 - Dining Cabin	
2 sailors	Area J9 - Aft Castle (Lower)	
Captain* + Nimblewright	Area J10 - Captain's Cabin	
2 sailors	Area J11 - Aft Castle (Upper)	
1d8 carnies	Area J14 - Carnies' Cabins	(resting, 16 sleeping at night)
1 sailor (25%)	Area J15 - Brig	(in cell)
1d2 Animal Handlers (Commoners)	Area J20 - Creature Pens	(animals present only at night)
2 drow gunslingers	Area J23 - Gunslingers' Hold	

HELLRAISER (PARADE FLOATS)

1 mate + 3 sailors	Area J1 - Main Deck	
2 mates	Area J3 - Mates' Cabin	(off-duty, unarmored)
4 sailors	Area J4 - Crew Cabins	(1 per cabin, off-duty, unarmored)
Cook (Commoner)	Area J5 - Gallery	
6 sailors + 1d4 carnies	Area J7 - Dining Cabin	
2 sailors	Area J9 - Aft Castle (Lower)	
Captain* + Nimblewright	Area J10 - Captain's Cabin	
2 sailors	Area J11 - Aft Castle (Upper)	
1d8 carnies	Area J14 - Carnies' Cabins	(resting, 16 sleeping at night)
1 sailor (25%)	Area J15 - Brig	(in cell)
2 drow gunslingers	Area J23 - Gunslingers' Hold	

EYECATCHER (FLAGSHIP)

1 mate + 3 sailors	Area J1 - Main Deck	
2 mates	Area J3 - Mates' Cabin	(off-duty, unarmored)
4 sailors	Area J4 - Crew Cabins	(1 per cabin, off-duty, unarmored)
Cook (Commoner)	Area J5 - Gallery	
6 sailors	Area J7 - Dining Cabin	
4 giant spiders	Area J17 - Upper Cargo Hold	MM p. 328
2 sailors	Area J9 - Aft Castle (Lower)	
Captain* + Nimblewright	Area J10 - Captain's Cabin	
2 sailors	Area J11 - Aft Castle (Upper)	
Random response team (25%)	Area J14 - Cabins	(resting)
1 sailor (25%)	Area J15 - Brig	(in cell)
8 Nimblewrights	Area J18 - Storage	(deactivated)
Margo Verida + Khafeyta + Jarlaxle (25%)	Area J29 - Guest Cabin	
Jarlaxle (26-50%) + Nimblewright	Area J30 - Zardoz Zord's Cabin	
5 attack mannequins	Area J31 - Training Area	
Jarlaxle (51-00%)	Area J32 - Jarlaxle's Sauna	

SCARLET MARPENOTH

Soluun Xibrindas (50%)	Area U3 - Soluun's Stateroom
Fel'Rekt Lafeen (50%)	Area U5 - Fel'Rekt's Stateroom
Krebbyg Masq-il'yr (50%)	Area U6 - Krebbyg's Stateroom
3 gnome engineers +2 mates	Area U7b - Command Center
4 gnome engineers	Area U8 - Engineers' Staterooms

* Has key to captain's trunk and all doors on their ship.

ADVERSARY ROSTER – DURING PARADES

HEARTBREAKER (CARNIVAL ANIMALS)

1 mate + 1 sailor	Area J1 – Main Deck	
2 mates	Area J3 – Mates’ Cabin	(off-duty, unarmored)
4 sailors	Area J4 – Crew Cabins	(1 per cabin, off-duty, unarmored)
Cook (Commoner)	Area J5 – Gallery	
2 sailors	Area J9 – Aft Castle (Lower)	
Captain* + Nimblewright	Area J10 – Captain’s Cabin	
2 sailors	Area J11 – Aft Castle (Upper)	
1 sailor (25%)	Area J15 – Brig	(in cell)
2 drow gunslingers	Area J23 – Gunslingers’ Hold	

HELLRAISER (PARADE FLOATS)

1 mate + 1 sailor	Area J1 – Main Deck	
2 mates	Area J3 – Mates’ Cabin	(off-duty, unarmored)
4 sailors	Area J4 – Crew Cabins	(1 per cabin, off-duty, unarmored)
Cook (Commoner)	Area J5 – Gallery	
2 sailors	Area J9 – Aft Castle (Lower)	
Captain* + Nimblewright	Area J10 – Captain’s Cabin	
2 sailors	Area J11 – Aft Castle (Upper)	
1 sailor (25%)	Area J15 – Brig	(in cell)
2 drow gunslingers	Area J23 – Gunslingers’ Hold	

EYECATCHER (FLAGSHIP)

1 mate + 3 sailors	Area J1 – Main Deck	
2 mates	Area J3 – Mates’ Cabin	(off-duty, unarmored)
4 sailors	Area J4 – Crew Cabins	(1 per cabin, off-duty, unarmored)
Cook (Commoner)	Area J5 – Gallery	
4 giant spiders	Area J17 – Lower Cargo Hold	MM p. 328
2 sailors	Area J9 – Aft Castle (Lower)	
Captain* + Nimblewright	Area J10 – Captain’s Cabin	
2 sailors	Area J11 – Aft Castle (Upper)	
Random response team (25%)	Area J14 – Cabins	(resting)
1 sailor (25%)	Area J15 – Brig	(in cell)
8 Nimblewrights	Area J18 – Storage	(deactivated)

SCARLET MARPENOTH

Soluun Xibrindas (50%)	Area U3 – Soluun’s Stateroom
Fel’Rekt Lafeen (50%)	Area U5 – Fel’Rekt’s Stateroom
Krebbyg Masq-il’yr (50%)	Area U6 – Krebbyg’s Stateroom
3 gnome engineers +2 mates	Area U7b – Command Center
4 gnome engineers	Area U8 – Engineers’ Staterooms

* Has key to captain’s trunk and all doors on their ship.

STAT REFERENCE

Jarlaxle Baenre – DH p. 206

Margo Verida – female Amnian human bard (DH p. 195)

Khafeyta – female Mulhorandi human swashbuckler (DH p. 216)

Captain – drow mage, MM p. 129 (prepare *sending* instead of *fly*)

Mates – drow elite warrior, MM p. 128

Sailors – drow, p. 128

Carnies – commoners, MM p. 345

Gnome Engineers – apprentice wizards, DH p. 194

- NG, Small, 7 (2d6) hp
- *Racial Traits:* Advantage on Int, Wis, Cha saving throws vs. magic. Walking speed 25 ft. Darkvision 60 ft. Speak Common and Gnomish.
- *Names:* Lorella Middenpump, Tervaround Waggletop, Anverth Levery, Cockaby Fapplestamp, Ellywick Fiddlefen, Gerbo Reese, Zaffrab Horcusporcus

Nimblewright – DH p. 212

Drow gunslingers – DH p. 201

QUESTIONING CREW

- **Captains:** *Dragon Heist*, p. 132
- **Sailors:** *Dragon Heist*, p. 132
- **Carnies:** *Dragon Heist*, p. 132
- **Margo / Khafeyta:** *Dragon Heist*, p. 140
- **Gnome Engineers:** *Dragon Heist*, p. 141-142



PART 4C: CASSALANTER VILLA

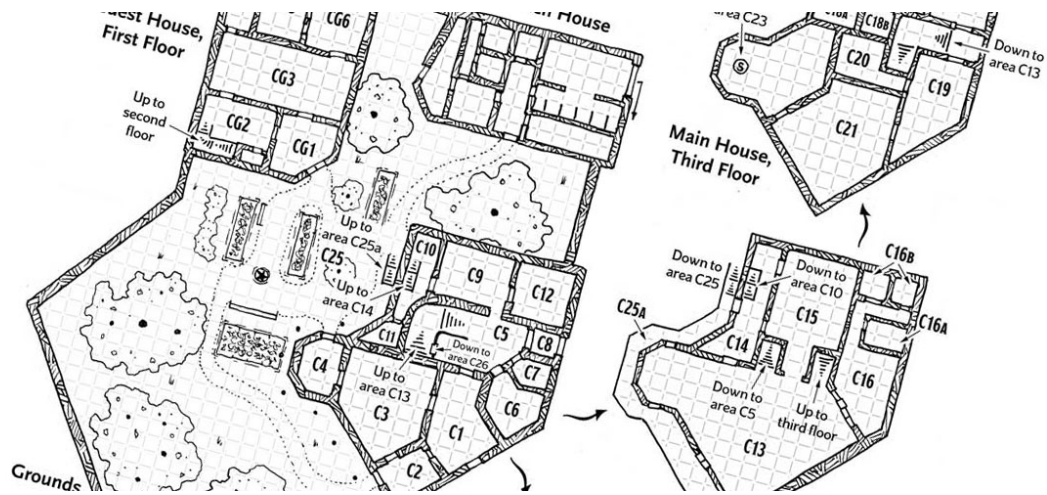
[by Justin Alexander – January 30th, 2019](#)



As *Dragon Heist* begins, the Cassalanter control one of the Eyes. (They stole it from the crypt of Lady Alethea Brandath, Renae’s mother.) If the PCs are working with the Cassalanter, however, it is quite likely that they will have no need of performing a heist to obtain this Eye: If the Cassalanter are kept apprised of the PCs’ progress, they’ll inform them that they possess one of the Eyes and turn it over to them once they’ve secured the other two.

The Cassalanter *will* want the *Stone of Golorr* once the PCs have used it to locate the Vault. If the PCs turn it over and later come to regret that action, they may need to carry out a belated heist at a later date.

BLUEPRINT NOTES



As the PCs discovered when renovating Trollskull Manor, nothing gets done without the guilds getting involved. This very much includes the construction of expensive villas by noble families, and many of those guilds will have the original construction on file. (Getting access to them may require some fast-talking, a few well-placed bribes, or perhaps a little mini-heist in its own right.)

Guilds that are likely to have useful plans:

- Carpenters', Roofers', and Plasterers' Guild
- Cellarers' and Plumbers' Guild
- Guild of Stonecutters, Masons, Potters, and Tile-makers
- Surveyors', Map-, and Chart-makers' Guild

If it would be interesting, feel free to split up the useful plans across multiple guilds: The Stonecutters might have the outer walls and first floor (where detailed carvings were done). The Roofers might have a detailed plan of the upper floor. The cellar might only appear in the records of the Cellarers. And the Surveyors' might have a very old map of the region showing that there was a sizable underground construction on the site before the Cassalanter Villa was constructed (suggesting the presence of the Temple of Asmodeus without providing any meaningful detail of it).

In preparing blueprints for your players to obtain, I recommend the following alterations:

- The hatch between C22 and C23 was not initially concealed and will likely appear on any blueprints the PCs obtain.
- C28 and C29 were not part of the original construction. They are unlikely to appear on any blueprints the PCs obtain.
- It is quite likely that C27 will be prominently identified as a highly secure VAULT.

EVENT SCHEDULE

CHES 30th - HIGHCOIN BALLS: See surveillance opportunities, below.

TARSAHK 1st - CARAVANCE: During this gift-giving holiday, the Cassalanterers give most of their staff the night off. Presents are hidden throughout the house and the Cassalanterers celebrate with their children by hunting the presents down. (The Cassalanterers are taking one last chance to share joy with their children before possibly losing them forever.)

The only people left in the Villa during this time, beyond the Cassalanterers themselves, are:

- The guards
- Willifort Crowell
- The imps guarding Osvaldo Cassalanter

This makes it an excellent opportunity to perform a heist onsite, particularly if the PCs can learn that it's happening ahead of time from the servants.

Later in the evening, however, after the Cassalanter children go to bed, Asmodean cultists arrive onsite for a ritual in the Temple. (See the Cult Gathering roster below.)

TARSAHK 9th - LEIRUIN FEAST: This is the feast at which the Cassalanterers poison 99 guests and perform the ritual necessary to save their children's souls (assuming they've managed to secure the gold from the Vault). If they haven't secured the Vault and are, thus, unable to rescue their children, their plans for this feast are abruptly canceled.

TARSAKH 11th - THE TWINS' BIRTHDAY: The twins' ninth birthday, on which Asmodeus will claim their souls.

SURVEILLANCE OPPORTUNITY



The PCs will have an opportunity to observe some of the household's regular routine when they are first invited to the Villa to hear the Cassalanter's plea for help. And they may be able to conduct similar surveillance on future meetings with the Cassalanter (which are likely to take place in different areas of the house).

The best general surveillance opportunity, however, is the **Highcoin Ball**. The house will be swarming with upper class guests, and if the PCs can somehow swing an invitation, join the retinue of someone who has an invitation, or otherwise slip their way in, they'll be able to get a good sense of the place.

THE VILLA

Area C4 – Reading Room: A black dragon's head is mounted on the wall as a hunting trophy.

Area C6 – Victor's Office: In addition to the normal entry for this room, the Eye is secured in the hidden compartment in Victor's desk. The locked drawer also contains a *Report from Seffia Naelryke*.

- *Report from Seffia Naelryke:* "Milord – There are fresh eyes everywhere. We had a watcher keeping an eye on the Coachlamp Lane windmill, but I sent a message by way of arrow. They survived, and I think we can be fairly certain they work for Xanathar, as Arn followed them back to Terasse's house on Elsambul's Lane. – Seffia Naelryke"

Area C22 – Ammalia's Private Study: In addition to the normal entry for this room, the desk contains the *Cassalanter Report on the Grand Game* (see Part 6D).

ADVERSARY ROSTERS

CASSALANTER VILLA

Willifort Crowelle (75%) or Servant
1 guard
Victoro Cassalanter (01-25%)
2 guards
Victoro Cassalanter (26-50%)
Jandar Chergoba + 6 chefs
Victoro Cassalanter (51-75%) + 1 guard
Mimic
Laiba "Nana" Rosse (25%)
Tissina Khyret
Victoro (75-90%) + Ammalia (01-25%)
Ammalia Cassalanter (26-65%)
Victoro (91-00%) + Ammalia (91-00%)
2 imps + Osvaldo Cassalanter
Ammalia Cassalanter (66-90%)
4 servants

Area C1 - Entrance Hall
Area C2 - Garden Mudroom
Area C4 - Reading Room
Area C5 - Foyer
Area C6 - Victoro's Office
Area C10 - Kitchen
Area C12 - Smoking Room
Area C15 - Banquet Hall
Area C17 - Playroom
Area C19 - Sitting Room
Area C21 - Master Bedroom
Area C22 - Ammalia's Study
Area C24 - Osvaldo's Prison
Area C24 - Osvaldo's Prison
Area C25 - Butterfly Garden
Guest House

(or with the children)
(attendant to Lady Cassalanter)

TEMPLE OF ASMODEUS (CULT GATHERING)

1 bearded devil
5 cultists
3d10 cultists + All Named NPCs

Area A3 - Anterior Vestibule
Area A6 - Secret Vestry
Area A7 - Ceremonial Hall

(up to 1 hour before gathering)

MEALTIME

- Cassalanters are all located in Area C9 (Dining Room).
- 10 servants located in Area C8 (Covered Porch).

THE CHILDREN

Roll 1d6 to determine where Terenzio and Elzerina are. (They are generally accompanied by Nana Rosse, unless she is determined to be in Area C17 on the roster above.)

- | D6 | CHILDREN'S LOCATION |
|----|---|
| 1 | Area C3, playing on the sliding ladders. |
| 2 | Area C16, practicing piano. |
| 3 | Area C17, playing with toys while Nana Rosse knits. |
| 4 | Area C18, playing make-believe in costumes (see area description). |
| 5 | Area C25, playing in the garden. |
| 6 | Children are in two different areas; roll again twice ignoring this result. |



STAT REFERENCE

Cooks – commoners, MM p. 345

Cultists – MM p. 345

Guard – MM p. 347

Servants – commoners, MM p. 345

Imps – MM p. 76

Oslando Cassalanter – chain devil, MM p. 72

Jandar Chergoba (Head Chef) – tiefling cult fanatic, MM p. 345 (DH p. 117)

Laiba “Nana” Rosse (Tutor/Caretaker) – tiefling cult fanatic, MM p. 345 (DH p. 117)

Tissina Khyret (Chief Housemaid) – tiefling cult fanatic, MM p. 345 (DH p. 117)

Willifort Crowelle (Head Butler/Agent) – doppelganger, MM p. 82 (DH p. 116)

Victoro Cassalanter – DH p. 218 (has gold key which opens desk in his office)

Ammalia Cassalanter – DH p. 193

QUESTIONING STAFF

The risk of questioning the Cassalanter’s staff is that there is a 10% chance that they’re asking someone who is a secret member of the cult. Cult members are virtually certain to report the questioning to their masters as soon as possible, and may also mislead PCs by providing false information.

Likely information that can be provided by servants, however, include some subset of:

- A general layout of the areas of the villa they’re familiar with (generally the first three floors).
- Victoro keeps valuables locked in the desk in his office.
- There’s a vault in the basement.
- When working on the third floor once, they heard horrible screams coming from above them on the roof. (*GM Note: That was Oslando on a particularly bad day.*)
- The servants are periodically asked to gather in one area of the house or another; it’s an open secret that this is done so that the Cassalanter can host secret guests.
- Ammalia is worried sick about her children, although they seem in perfect health.
- They once saw a number of people go down into the wine cellar. They waited around for twenty minutes before Willifort shoed them away, but nobody came back up.
- There’s a secret orgy room under the guest house. (*False*)

PART 4D: XANATHAR'S LAIR

[by Justin Alexander – January 31st, 2019](#)



Xanathar stole the *Stone of Golorr* from Lord Neverember and he stole one of the three Eyes from the Zhentarim. Then he lost the *Stone* when Dalakhar took it from him.

As a result, once the PCs become truly involved with the Grand Game, it is likely that Xanathar is on a level playing field with Manshoon and the Cassalanter, holding but a single Eye.

EVENT SCHEDULE & SURVEILLANCE OPPORTUNITY

Throughout the festival season, Xanathar hosts gladiatorial games every 2-4 days. As noted in Part 3B, those interested in attending the fights must learn the secret pass phrases and go to gladiatorial gathering points throughout the city.

In addition to the arena itself (X6), those attending these fights are allowed to congregate in areas X2, X17, and X18. Servants circulate through these areas, serving drinks and food. Additional guards are placed in the entrance to hallways X21 and X22, however, to turn guests away. (See the *Tournament* adversary roster, below.)

Panopticus Dwarves: The panopticus dwarves in Area X16 keep the following areas constantly under surveillance:

- Area X2 - Entrance Hall
- Area X6 - Arena
- Area X18 - Audience Chamber
- Area X23 - Antechamber of Madness
- Area X32 - Downstairs Hallway

Identifying the function of the ghostly eyes during onsite surveillance is probably crucial to carrying out an effective heist. Their function can be determined with a DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check, making it clear that there must be a panopticus circle somewhere nearby being monitored by a number of watchers equal to the number of ghostly eyes. A *detect magic* spell combined with a DC 14 Intelligence (Arcana) check will allow the caster to follow the magical lines of force between the eyes and the panopticus circle, effectively triangulating the location of the circle if they can observe at least two eyes.

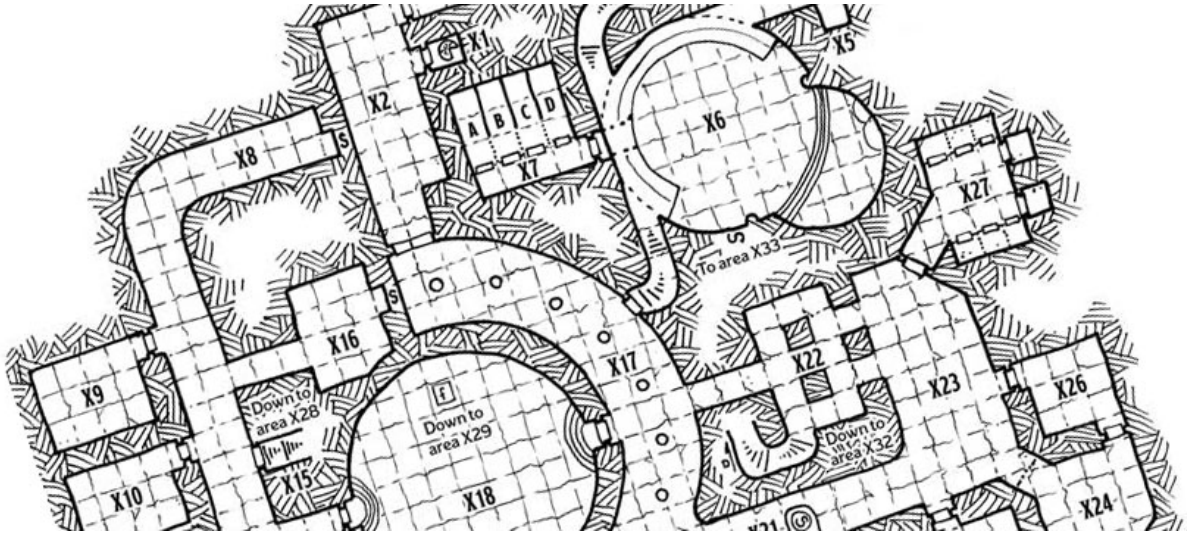
In addition, as described in Area X16 below, the panopticus circle can be suborned.



DESIGN NOTE

Note that the list of areas surveilled by the panopticus dwarves is deliberately altered. The easiest access to Xanathar's Sanctum (X19) is through the door in Area X18. By placing a scrying sensor there, it more or less forces the PCs to either suborn the panopticus or find an alternative route to Area X19.

BLUEPRINT NOTES



There are no blueprints of Xanathar's Lair to be found. Questioning Xanatharian agents might give the PCs an opportunity to piece out information, but convincing them to do so when the consequence is Xanathar's displeasure is not an easy task.

Far easier is contacting one of the many people who have attended the gladiatorial games to describe what they've seen. In general their recollections will be limited to the "public" areas listed above, but:

- There's one halfling who remembers seeing some of Xanathar's personal guard come through the secret door between X17 and X16 ("I was looking at this fresco of a leafless tree that had lidless eyes embedded in its branches and suddenly – presto! – the whole wall swung back and some of those shifty-eyed bugbears came through"). She didn't see how the door operates.
- If they get particularly lucky, they might track down a foolhardy couple who snuck through the door from the Audience Chamber (X18) into Xanathar's Sanctum (X19) and can describe what they saw there.

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

As described on p. 101-102 of *Dragon Heist*, there are a number of other powerful factions throughout the city that are aware of Xanathar's Lair and can reveal the secret entrance to Area X1.

There is a magical portal to Xanathar's Lair in the Guild Sewer Hideout in *Chapter 1: Finding Floom*. It's possible (although unlikely) that the PCs already gained access to the lair at that time. If not, they could theoretically put the hideout under surveillance, ambush Nihiloor, and use his amulet to activate the portal and enter the lair.

If Ott Steeltoes is rescued from the Zhentarim (see Part 3B), he may also be gulled into leading the PCs to this secret entrance.

PLAYER TWO ENTERS THE GAME

Whenever the PCs choose to launch their actual heist, it turns out that Jarlaxle is simultaneously attempting to do the exact same thing.

The Team: Jarlaxle's team consists of himself, one of his lieutenants, and a Bregan D'Aerthe response team (see [Part 3C](#)).

Entrance: Generally speaking, there are three methods of entry to Xanathar's Lair. You can come in the secret entrance (X1), you can try to sneak in from Skullport (X4), or you can be brought in as part of the audience for the gladiatorial games (also via X4, but almost certainly arriving in X6 before you'll have a chance to slip away).

I recommend having Jarlaxle's team use a method of entry which the PCs *didn't*. So if the PCs came in through X1, for example, then Jarlaxle's team arrived from either Skullport or as part of the crowd for the gladiatorial tournament.

Jarlaxle's Plan: The ace in the hole for Jarlaxle is that he's aware of the secret passage (X14) leading to Xanathar's Sanctum. How, exactly, he gains access to the passage is heavily dependent on the circumstances in which the heist takes place. (And, dramatically speaking, the DM should ideally make it cross the path of the PCs' heist as much as possible: Seeing Jarlaxle or his lieutenants from across a crowded room or at the far end of a deserted hallway about their business will be a satisfying complication. This will also be easier to do if Jarlaxle's team includes someone the PCs have seen before during the Grand Game, if that's not Jarlaxle himself.)



Jarlaxle's *modus operandi* will generally be using secondary teams to create distractions in order to draw people (including Xanathar) away from where he wants his primary team to be. For example, if the heist is going down during a gladiatorial match, Jarlaxle's plan might look something like this:

- One of his men picks a fight with the guards blocking entrance to hallway X21. This draws the guards preventing entry to X22 away from their posts.
- Jarlaxle's lieutenant and two more of his men slip into X22 and down the stairs to X32. They make their way to the Recreation Hall (X28) and throw smoke bombs through the door.
- Men from X28 rush to the Audience Chamber (X18), causing the guards on the door there to rush out to X8. Jarlaxle and his remaining men slip through the door behind them and then through the secret door to X19.
- After locating the Eye, they go down the emergency escape route to X21. Jarlaxle uses his *hat of disguise* to don the appearance of Ahmaergo, orders the guards to assist in the commotion downstairs, meets up with the rest of his team as they emerge back up the stairs and through Area X22, and then heads for the exit.

Nar'l Xibrindas: Nar'l is an agent of Bregan D'Aerthe, but his ability to directly assist Jarlaxle during the heist is limited due to the presence of the grell bodyguard Xanathar has placed on him. Jarlaxle would also prefer to keep him *in situ* as a valuable source of intel until the Grand Game has concluded.

However, once the distractions start causing turmoil, Nar'l might contribute to Jarlaxle's plan in subtler ways. (For example, by ordering key guards out of the way on plausible pretexts at the right moment.)

Effect on the PCs: The presence of Jarlaxle's team will almost certainly cause complications for the PCs' plans, but the PCs' actions are also likely to cause complications for Jarlaxle. It will be most satisfying if you let *both* those things play out naturally, and keep in mind that it's equally possible for the PCs to *benefit* from security holes Jarlaxle opens for his own team (and vice versa).

DESIGN NOTE

Competing with a second crew trying to pull off the same job is a really exciting situation that opens up a lot of unique tactical choices and dramatic situations. But there's another reason for including Jarlaxle's crew here: Xanathar's Lair is probably the hardest nut to actually crack. If things get out of hand, the presence of Jarlaxle's crew gives the DM a tool to either (a) easily pull heat off of the PCs or (b) steal the Eye, prompting an easier heist at the Sea Maidens Faire.

THE LAIR

X7 – *Cell Block*: See *Dragon Heist* for full description.

- **Questioning Samara**: Samara was part of the original delegation sent to Xanathar to negotiate a Golorr-related allegiance. The rest of her team was killed, but she was thrown in here and has been fighting for her life ever since. Her information is dated, but she believes that Xanathar holds the *Stone of Golorr* (which is the key to Neverember's Enigma, although she doesn't know that's half a million gold coins) and that he's taken Manshoon's Eye. She also knows that there are two other Eyes. She can tell PCs that Manshoon is based out of Kolat Towers, and that the Towers can be accessed from Yellowspire.

X12 – *Ahmaergo's Quarters*: In addition to the normal entry for this room, the chest contains *A Briefing for Xanathar Concerning the Grand Game*.

X16 – *Panopticus Station*: In addition to the normal entry for this room, it is possible to suborn the panopticus network. A DC 16 Intelligence (Arcana) check can determine that altering two specific runes in the circle will create an "echo" in the vision provided by the ghostly eyes. (In other words, yes, they can loop the video feed.) Doing so will require sneaking past the dwarves, but that's not too hard because they're only half-aware of their immediate surroundings.

X18 – *Audience Chamber*: In addition to the normal entry for this room, there is a ghostly eye scrying sensor.

X19 – *Xanathar's Sanctum*: In addition to the normal entry for this room, Xanathar keeps the Eye in Sylgar's fishbowl.

X28 – *Guild Recreation Hall*: In contradiction of the normal entry for this room, there is no scrying sensor in this room.

X35 – *Nar'l Xibrindas' Office*: In addition the normal entry for this room, the desk contains a *Report on the Seven Masks Theater*.

- **Report on the Seven Masks Theater**: A letter Rostrum Feilcook of the Fellowship of Innkeepers, a guild which also oversees local theaters, confirms "your exalted suspicion" regarding the new ownership of the Seven Masks Theater, insofar as the purported owner – "Rongquan Mystere" – is actually being funded by another source, most likely with money originating from outside Waterdeep. A second letter, dated two days later, reports that Rostrum has identified Rongquan's mysterious patron as "Captain Zord of the Sea Maidens Faire" with his money "originating from Luskan".
- *GM Note*: Nar'l Xibrindas stole these letters and hid them before Xanathar could see them.

ADVERSARY ROSTER – XANATHAR’S LAIR (STANDARD)

Xanathar (01-25%)	beholder zombie + 4 gas spores	Area X2 – Watched Hall
Noska Ur’gray (01-25%) + Prisoners	animated armor	Area X5 – Horror’s Alcove
10 bandits	telepathically summoned by X	if X present, see <i>A Private Fight</i>
Noska Ur’gray (25-50%) + Rust Monster	Area X6 – Arena	see p. 104 for prisoner list
Ahmaergo (01-50%)	Area X7 – Cell Block	not present during <i>A Private Fight</i>
Thorvin Twinbeard	Area X9 – Guild Barracks	
	Area X10 – Noska’s Quarters	
	Area X11/X12 – Ahmaergo’s Quarters	
	Area X13 – Thorvin’s Workshop	
	Panopticus Dwarves	Area X16 – Panopticus Station observe
through ghostly eyestalks		
Xanathar (25-50%)	Area X18 – Audience Chamber	if X present, see <i>A Public Audience</i>
Xanathar (51-75%, with Ott Steeltoes)	Area X19 – Xanathar’s Sanctum	talking to his fish
Xanathar (76-00%, sleeping)	Area X19 – Xanathar’s Sanctum	
1 kuo-toa whip + 6 kuo-toa	Area X23 – Antechamber of Madness	
Nihiloor (01-50%) + drow prisoner	Area X24 – Extraction Chamber	Area X25 – Food for Thought
	Nihiloor’s Prisoners	
Nihiloor (51-00%) + 4 intellect devourers	Area X26 – Spawning Pool	
3 kuo-toa whips + prisoners	Area X27 – Nihiloor’s Prison	see p. 111 for prisoner list
10 bandits + 2 goblins	Area X28 – Recreation Hall	
2 gazers + 7 chefs	Area X30 – Gourmet Kitchen	
	Halfling Cook	Area X31 – The Other Kitchen
Nar’l Xibrindas	Area X35 – Nar’l’s Office	

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

When entering any public area, there is a 1 in 10 chance of having a random encounter.

d4	Encounter
1	Flutterfoot Zipswiggle (see DH p. 104)
2	Ahmaergo (conducting a routine inspection)
3	N’arl Xibrindas + Grell bodyguard
4	Ott Steeltoes

A PRIVATE FIGHT

- Xanathar (invisible in southeast alcove)
- Ahmaergo
- Noska Ur’gray
- 10 bandits + 5 bugbears as an audience
- 2 goblins serving salted rat intestines and stirge meat pies
- 1d4 random combatants from Area X7

A PUBLIC AUDIENCE

- Xanathar, using psychedelic light display to deliver an incoherent, self-aggrandizing speech to a group of sycophantic underlings who have never seen his true form
- Nar’l Xibrindas
- Grell Bodyguard
- 10 bandits
- 2 duergar

ADVERSARY ROSTER – DURING TOURNAMENT

During a tournament, there will be gathered an audience of 30-60 people. This crowd will either be in the Arena (X6) or congregating socially in Promenade (X17) and Audience Chamber (X18).

GUARDS: Xanathar’s bandits act as guards. (These numbers are included in the adversary roster below.)

- **X6:** 2 guards at either end of the audience.
- **X17:** 2 guards are stationed at the exits to X2, X21, and X22.
- **X18:** 2 guards on all three doors.

XANATHAR: Xanathar enters the Audience Chamber (X18), gives a short speech extolling how wonderful it is that he’s doing this for everyone, and then floats through the Promenade (X17) to the Arena (X6), where he sets up court in the southeast corner.

THE ARENA CROWD:

- Xanathar
- Ahmaergo
- Thorvin Twinbeard (01-50%)
- Nihiloor (01-50%)
- Ott Steeltoes
- Nar’l Xibrindas (01-50%)

IN THE ARENA: See *Dragon Heist*, p. 114 for details on participating in the tournament.

ADVERSARY ROSTER

Arena Crowd + 4 bandits	beholder zombie + 4 gas spores	Area X2 – Watched Hall
Noska Ur’gray + Prisoners	animated armor	Area X5 – Horror’s Alcove
Thorvin Twinbeard (51-00%)	telepathically summoned by X	
	Area X6 – Arena	
through ghostly eyestalks	Area X7 – Cell Block	see p. 104 for prisoner list
6 bandits	Noska’s Rust Monster	Area X10 – Noska’s Quarters
6 bandits	Area X13 – Thorvin’s Workshop	
1 kuo-toa whip + 6 kuo-toa	Panopticus Dwarves	Area X16 – Panopticus Station observe
Nihiloor (51-75%) + drow prisoner		
	Area X17 – Promenade	
Nihiloor (76-00%) + 4 intellect devourers	Area X18 – Audience Chamber	
3 kuo-toa whips + prisoners	Area X23 – Antechamber of Madness	
4 bandits + 2 goblins	Area X24 – Extraction Chamber	
2 gazers + 7 chefs	Nihiloor’s Prisoners	Area X25 – Food for Thought
	Area X26 – Spawning Pool	
Nar’l Xibrindas (51-00%)	Area X27 – Nihiloor’s Prison	see p. 111 for prisoner list
	Area X28 – Recreation Hall	
	Area X30 – Gourmet Kitchen	
	Halfling Cook	Area X31 – The Other Kitchen
	Area X35 – Narl’s Office	

STAT REFERENCE

Ahmaergo – DH p. 193
Flutterfoot Zipswiggle – DH p. 104
Thorvin Twinbeard – dwarven commoner, MM p. 345 (DH p. 216)
N’arl Xibrindas – drow mage, MM p. 129 (DH p. 211)
Noska Ur’gray – shield dwarf thug, MM p. 350 (DH p. 213)
Ott Steeltoes – dwarf cultist, MM p. 345 (DH p. 214)

Bandits – MM p. 343
Bugbears – MM p. 33
Duergar – MM p. 122
Grell – MM p. 172
Kuo-toa / Kuo-toa whip – MM p. 199-200
Chefs – kobolds, MM p. 195
Halfling Cook – commoner, MM p. 345

QUESTIONING THE HENCHMEN

Any member of the Xanathar Guild will be fairly familiar with all of the public spaces in the lair.

- Xanathar is even more paranoid than usual right now and hasn’t left his lair in weeks. That isn’t likely to change as long as the gang war with the Zhentarim is ongoing.
- Xanathar has some kind of machine that “wakes him up in emergencies”. (*GM Note: This is a mangled version of what his dream machine (X20) is actually for.*)
- Virtually all of the Xanatharians steer clear of the mind flayer’s demesne (X23-X27). It’s not unheard of for even loyal members of the Guild to disappear over there. As a result, they don’t know much about the layout or what’s there (although they know prisoners are delivered over there). Conniving Guild members might try to convince the PCs that this is where whatever it is they’re looking for is located (with the expectation that Nihiloor will eat their brains).
- Xanathar doesn’t allow anyone to enter the Area X33 and most don’t even know what’s in there, but some know that there’s a secret door connecting the Arena (X6) and “whatever Xanathar has hidden down there”.

N’arl Xibrindas knows more than most. He’s even snuck into the Crypt of Xanathars Past (X33). But he’ll also suspect that anyone questioning him is actually an agent of Xanathar trying to reveal him as a double agent.



PART 4E: ZHENTARIM – KOLAT TOWERS

by [Justin Alexander](#) - February 1st, 2019



Although Manshoon lost the original Eye he had obtained, as [Dragon Heist](#) begins the Zhentarim seize possession of the Eye unwittingly carried by Renaer Neverember. This Eye is then immediately taken back to Kolat Towers and secured.

Unlike the other lairs in *Dragon Heist*, Kolat Towers operates more like a fortified bunker. This creates a very non-typical heist scenario which, in some respects, will play more like a raid or dungeoncrawl scenario. The primary heist-like aspect of the scenario, in fact, is simply gaining access to the Towers in the first place.

Kolat Towers is structured like an onion:

- You need to obtain a **pass-amulet** in order to pass through the force field surrounding Kolat Tower. A pass-amulet is a silver disc with the initials “DK” (for Duhlark Kolat) written in Espruaran runes on either side of a small, central blue gemstone. Someone holding a pass-amulet, or touching someone holding a pass-amulet, can simply walk through the force field as if it wasn’t there. (Other methods for bypassing the force field are described on pages 148-149 of *Dragon Heist*.)
- You need to obtain a **teleporter signet ring** in order to reach the inner sanctum., as described on page 157 of *Dragon Heist*. These brass signet rings have a stylized M. written upon them.

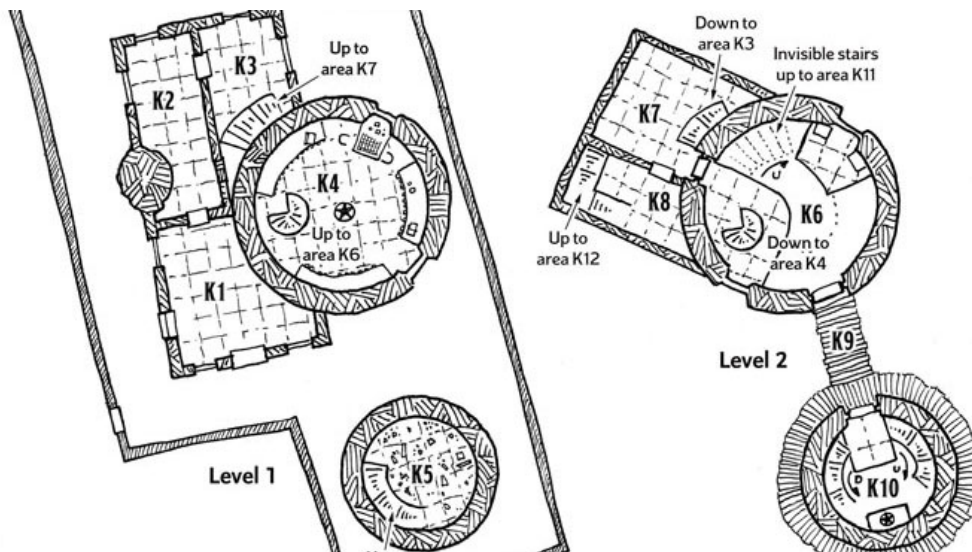
SURVEILLANCE OPPORTUNITY

Barring unusual circumstances or out of the box thinking, the PCs are unlikely to have a surveillance opportunity inside Kolat Towers.

More traditional surveillance (i.e., simply watching the Towers from a nearby building) reveals the crucial point of data required, however: The use of pass-amulets by anyone entering or leaving the tower. (They may glimpse some taking them out from their shirts and holding them aloft, although that's not strictly necessary. They may also note the strange habit of those accompanying pass-amulet holders of touching them as they move through the force field.)

In addition, most of the Towers' inhabitants will simply assume that anyone who has bypassed the force field must have a pass-amulet and, therefore, must have legitimate business there. Their incredible security system has, ultimately, made them somewhat lax when it comes to actual security, and PCs who are smart enough to lean into that assumption can effectively seize a surveillance opportunity for themselves mid-heist.

BLUEPRINT NOTES



The original tower which stood on this site was a small library owned by the Watchful Order of Magists & Protectors. The Kolat brothers purchased the site, altered the original tower, and built a second tower. Buried deep in its records, the Watchful Order still has copies of the original plans drawn up when they acquired the tower as part of a deceased wizard's estate. These plans, however, only show the Tower as it existed before the Kolat brothers began their renovations. It:

- Consists of only of the Main Tower.
- Does not include areas K7, K8, K12, K13, or K14.
- Level 6 is a single room.

It should be noted that Xanathar has a superior set of blueprints for the Towers, obtained by his agents (see Part 4D).

THE TOWERS

Area K14 – Servants’ Quarters: Sidra Romeir also bunks in this room (in a larger bed opposite the four bunk beds used by the thugs she bunks with). She keeps her *teleporter signet ring* in the locked drawer in the bedside table.

Area E9 – Library: Alabaster shelves line the porphyry walls and jut out into the center of the room. On one wall, an arcane rune has been carved into the porphyry and filled with some form of bright green metal.

- **Books:** 10 particularly rare books have bookplates identifying them as belonging to Duhlark Kolat are laid out on a small table with a notebook nearby showing that someone has been studying them and taking notes; they are worth 50 gp each. The entire collection is worth 5,000 gp.
- **Rune:** This rune is the keymark for an astral vault bloodlocked to Manshoon. By design, Manshoon (and only Manshoon) can trace a specific set of patterns on the rune, causing the wall to temporarily phase out of existence and grant access to a small astral vault. In practice, *dispel magic* can disable the bloodlock or a *disguise self* (or similar illusion) can fool it, while an Intelligence (Arcana) or Dexterity check can figure out the pattern (defeating it like any other lock).
- **Inside the Astral Vault:** The vault contains the Eye, 5 *pass-amulets*, a dozen *teleporter signet rings*, and *Manshoon’s Report on the Grand Game* (see Part 6D).

Area E10 – Audience Chamber: This room is lit by a *sunglobe* which levitates in midair near the ceiling. (On command, a *sunglobe* glows with the light of the sun itself. It can be commanded to maintain its current position, levitating in mid-air until grasped.)

ADVERSARY ROSTER – KOLAT TOWERS

Sidra Romeir + 2 thugs	Area K2 – Dining Room	(playing Three-Dragon Ante)
Manafret Cherryport*	Area K3 – Kitchen	
2 gargoyles	Area K4 – Musty Library	
Yorn the Terror*	Area K7 – Reading Room	
	Lady Gondafrey	Area K13 – Holding Cell
4 thugs	Area K14 – Servants’ Quarters	
	3 apprentice wizards* + barlgura	Area K15 – Summoning Chamber
	(chanting ritual; cannot be disturbed)	
	animated armor	Area K16 – Construct Workshop
	spectator + 4 flying snakes	Area K22 – Teleportation Circle
Kaejva Cynavern*	Area E3 – Guard Station	(can see into Area E1)
Urstul Floxin*	Area E5 – Laboratory	
Manshoon Simulacrum*	Area E7 – Simulacrum	
Vevette Blackwater* + Agorn Fuoco*	Area E8 – Reading Room	
Havia Quickknife* + Mookie Plush*	Area E10 – Audience Chamber	
	Area E11 – Zhent Quarters	(Kaejva, Vevette, Agorn, Havia, Mookie)
Manshoon (01-50%)*	Area E12 – Manshoon’s Quarters	
Manshoon (51-90%)*	Area E13 – Manshoon’s Study	
Manshoon (91-00%)*	On Business Elsewhere	

* Has a *teleporter signet ring*.

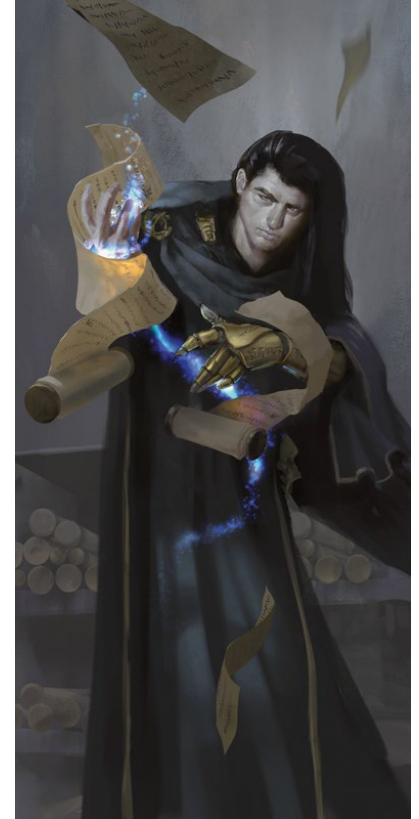
STAT REFERENCE

- Sidra Romeir (LE female Callishite human) – veteran, MM p. 350
Manafret Cherryport – lightfoot halfling mage, MM p. 347; see DH p. 149
Yorn the Terror – half-orc thug, MM p. 350; see DH p. 150
Lady Gondafrey – gargoyle, MM p. 140; see DH p. 152
Kaejva Cynavern (female Mulan human) – mage, MM p. 347; see DH p. 158
Urstul Floxin – assassin, MM p. 343; see DH p. 216
Vevette Blackwater (CE female Tethyrian human) – swashbuckler, DH p. 216
Agorn Fuoco (NE male Turami human) – bard, DH p. 195
- Havia Quickknife / Mookie Plush (LE lightfoot halfling) – martial arts adepts, DH p. 209
- Lawful Evil
 - 49 (11d6+11) hit points
 - *Racial Traits:* Small, walking speed 25 ft., move through the space of a Medium or larger creature, advantage on saving throws vs. being frightened.
 - Speak Common and Halfling.

Manshoon Simulacrum – DH p. 209
Manshoon – DH p. 209

Thugs – MM p. 350
Apprentice Wizards – DH p. 194

Animated Armor – MM p. 19
Bargura – MM p. 56
Spectator – MM p. 30
Flying Snakes – MM p. 322



QUESTIONING THE ZHENTARIM

Thugs know the general layout of the tower:

- They've been told not to enter the Outer Tower or go above the third level of the Main Tower.
- Manshoon's lieutenants wear special rings that let them access Manshoon's sanctuary atop the Outer Tower (although they don't know that this is actually an extradimensional space; they think he just lives up there).

Apprentice wizards know the same, but also know:

- That Manshoon lives in an extradimensional sanctum.
- He protects his valuables in an astral vault hidden somewhere in the sanctum. His former fourth apprentice tried to gain access to it and was *disintegrated* when Manshoon caught him.

- That the *Stone of Golorr* was blinded and Manshoon is attempting to find its three Eyes. He already has one. He once had another that was stolen by Xanathar. And he has recently identified that a local noble family has the third. (They don't know the identity of the noble family.)

Manshoon's lieutenants know what the apprentice wizards know, but also:

- The layout of the extradimensional sanctum, including the location of the astral vault.
- That the Cassalanterers are the noble family who possess the third Eye.

THE DEMON

If the PCs encounter the summoning ritual in Area K15 and *don't* disrupt it, then eventually the apprentice wizards succeed in binding the bargura and Manshoon is able to send it on a mission. Options to consider might include:

- Attacking the PCs at Trollskull Manor.
- Sending it as part of an operation to steal back "his" Eye from Xanathar, possibly inflicting damage in Xanathar's Lair. (This could easily happen in the middle of the PCs attempting their heist there.)

PART 5: CLUES AND TIMELINES

by [Justin Alexander](#) – February 20th, 2019



In this penultimate section of the Remix, we're going to use the principles of [node-based scenario design](#) to retrofit the campaign's fundamental structure. This work can broadly be divided into three parts:

- Strengthening the Three Clue Rule for *Finding Floon* (Chapter 1)
- Heavily revising the *Nimblewright Investigation* that leads to the Gralhund Villa (Chapter 2)
- Linking together all of the elements of the Grand Game (primarily the faction outposts and lairs)

This will primarily consist of revelation lists, the use of which is discussed in the original [Three Clue Rule](#) essay.

Where the clues on these revelation lists can be integrated into the material we've treated at length in the Remix, I've done so. In these cases, the revelation lists can be used strictly for their normal function: As a reference for helping the GM to understand and track the structure of the scenario.

In some cases, however, clues are added to other sections of the campaign which we haven't visited in detail as part of the Remix. (This is particularly true for the material in *Part 5B: Finding Floon*, for example.) These clues will be called out, and the GM will need to use the revelation lists to make sure that this material is properly incorporated into those sections of the campaign.

THE REFERENCE TIMELINE

Before diving into the revelation lists, however, we're going to organize all of the back story of the campaign (revised and otherwise) into a single reference timeline. This partly exists in order to eliminate

the myriad continuity errors found in the original campaign, but mostly to provide an easy reference for the GM while they're actually running the campaign.

RISE AND FALL OF LORD NEVEREMBER

- 1451 DR: Neverwinter is destroyed when a small adventuring party (including Jarlaxle Baenre) awoke the primordial Maegera beneath Mount Hotenow.
- 1467 DR: Lord Dagult Neverember, Open Lord of Waterdeep, proclaims himself ruler of Neverwinter and begins the New Neverwinter movement to rebuild the city.
- Lord Neverember begins embezzling money from the Waterdeep treasury.
- Lord Neverember discovers the *Stone of Golorr* in Neverwinter.
- When Lady Alethea Brandath (Lord Neverember's wife) dies, Lord Neverember learns of the existence of an ancient dwarven vault beneath the Brandath Mausoleum.
- Lord Neverember gains access to the old Melairkyn Vault beneath the Brandath Mausoleum. He begins storing the embezzled money (eventually totaling half a million gold dragons) in the Vault and uses the *Stone of Golorr* to hide its existence.
- As an additional security precaution, Lord Neverember blinds the *Stone of Golorr*: Leaving the *Stone* in Waterdeep Palace, he keeps one of the Eyes with him in Neverwinter, secretly gives one to his son (hidden inside a mourning locket), and hides the last within the Brandath Mausoleum.
- During this time, various factions become aware that Lord Neverember is engaged in some grand scheme, of which only the contours are known. The phrase "Neverember's Enigma" is coined.
- 1489 DR: Laeral Silverhand returns to Waterdeep and Lord Neverember is deposed.
- In the confusion of the transition of power, Lord Neverember sends agents to retrieve the *Stone of Golorr* from the palace. As those agents leave the city, they are ambushed by Xanatharian agents who steal the *Stone*.



THE GRAND GAME

- The Cassalanters retrieve what they believe to be Neverember's Enigma – but is actually just one of the Eyes – from the Brandath Mausoleum. Their research quickly reveals that it is part of the *Stone of Golorr*.
- Lord Neverember sends a network of agents into Waterdeep. Many of these agents are attempting to locate the *Stone*. One of them, Dalakhar, is assigned to keep a watchful eye on Dagult's son, Renaer. (Dalakhar isn't told this, but Lord Neverember's primary concern is that the Eye unwittingly carried by Renaer is kept safe until he can regain the *Stone*.)

- Manshoonian Zhentarim steal the Eye from the Protector’s Enclave in Neverwinter.
- Laeral Silverhand’s auditors discover Lord Neverember’s embezzlement. The news soon leaks.
- Zhentarim go to Xanathar to propose an alliance. Xanathar kills the embassy and takes their Eye. A gang war breaks out between the Guild and the Black Network.
- Lord Neverember discovers that Xanathar stole the *Stone*. Dalakhar is sent to infiltrate Xanathar’s organization and steal the *Stone* back. (At this point Lord Neverember believes that Xanathar has the *Stone* and that the Zhentarim still have the Eye they stole from him. To maintain the original siloing of information, Dalakhar is not told about the Eyes and doesn’t know to look for the one Xanathar now holds.)
- Jarlaxle Baenre arrives in Waterdeep and begins selling nimblewrights.

DRAGON HEIST BEGINS (1492 DR)

- With Dalakhar’s network removed from watching over Renaer, he’s exposed. The Zhentarim kidnap Renaer and take the Eye hidden in his mourning locket. (The PCs then presumably rescue Renaer.)
- Ches 20th: Dalakhar successfully steals the *Stone* from Xanathar.
- Ches 22nd: Dalakhar’s attempts to leave town are unsuccessful. (Xanathar tracked down and killed his extraction team before he could rendezvous with them, and he has agents surrounding Renaer Neverember’s house.) Dalakhar attempts to meet Renaer at Trollskull Manor, but by this time he’s being actively tracked by the Gralhund, Zhentarim, Cassalanter, and possibly others. Dalakhar is killed by the Gralhund Nimblewright. (See Part 2 and Part 5C.)

REVELATION LIST: THE STONE OF GOLORR

The first part of [Dragon Heist](#) is procedurally driven by investigations which are, structurally, unrelated to the *Stone of Golorr*: The PCs can solve the mysteries of Floon’s kidnapping and Dalakhar’s assassination without necessarily understanding what the ultimate motivation behind those crimes was.

Thus, the key turning point in the campaign is when the PCs realize what’s truly at stake and, importantly, begin to proactively drive the Grand Game.

REVELATION: DALAKHAR WAS CARRYING THE STONE OF GOLORR

- Casting *Speak with Dead* on Dalakhar or the dead Zhentarim (see *Dragon Heist*, p. 46, but note that we’re specifically adding that the Zhentarim knew that Dalakhar was carrying the “Stone of Golorr”).
- Questioning any number of people involved in the Grand Game (Urstul Floxin, the Gralhunds most likely, but also members of Xanathar’s Crime Guild or, later, Bregan D’Aerthe lieutenants).
- Observing Jarlaxle’s nimblewright recordings. (*Sea Maidens Faire*)
- A Directive from Jarlaxle (*Gralhund Villa – Arthen Manor*)

REVELATION: WHAT IS THE STONE OF GOLORR?

- Researching the *Stone of Golorr* (see Part 6A)
- Any significant player in the Grand Game (lieutenant or up within any faction) will know that the *Stone of Golorr* is they key to finding Lord Neverember’s Enigma

- Faction Reports on the Grande Game (see Part 6D)

REVELATION LIST: THE THREE EYES

The PCs need to figure out that (a) the *Stone of Golorr* is missing three Eyes and (b) where those Eyes are being held, so that (c) they can go steal them. This is basically the core structure of the campaign.

REVELATION: THERE ARE THREE MISSING EYES

- Studying the *Stone of Golorr*
- Gralhund Study of the Grand Game (*Gralhund Villa*)
- Jarlaxle's Report on the Grand Game (*Sea Maidens Faire*)
- Cassalanter Report on the Grand Game (*Cassalanter Villa*)
- Xanathar's Report on the Grand Game (*Xanathar Lair*)
- Manshoon's Report on the Grand Game (*Kolat Tower*)
- Letter to Lord Neverember (*Kalain*)

REVELATION: CASSALANTERS' EYE

- If the PCs are working for them, the Cassalanter provide their Eye once they have the other two.
- Jarlaxle's Report on the Grand Game (*Sea Maidens Faire*)
- Manshoon's Report on the Grand Game (*Kolat Tower*)
- Seffia's Ritual & Seffia's Note (*Converted Windmill / Resposne Team: Seffia*)

REVELATION: XANATHAR'S EYE

- Gralhund Report on the Grand Game (*Gralhund Villa*)
- Jarlaxle's Report on the Grand Game (*Sea Maidens Faire*)
- Cassalanter Report on the Grand Game (*Cassalanter Villa*)
- Manshoon's Report on the Grand Game (*Kolat Tower*)

REVELATION: ZHENTARIM'S EYE

- Gralhund Report on the Grand Game (*Gralhund Villa*)
- Jarlaxle's Report on the Grand Game (*Sea Maiden's Faire*)
- Xanathar's Report on the Grand Game (*Xanathar's Lair*)
- Questioning Samara (*Xanathar's Lair*)

REVELATION LIST: THE VAULT KEYS

- Examining and researching the vault entrance (*The Vault*)
- Cassalanter's Report on the Grand Game (*Cassalanter Villa*)
- Vision of the Vault (*Stone of Golorr*)
- Questioning Kalain (*Backtracking Dalakhar*)

PART 5B: FINDING FLOON

[by Justin Alexander - February 21st, 2019](#)



[Dragon Heist](#) launches with the PCs being hired by Volothamp Geddarm to find his missing friend Floon Blagmaar. Unfortunately, the scenario structure for this investigation is quite fragile, being formed from long sequences of linear clue-finding. There are also several continuity problems that we're going to straighten out.

VOLO'S HIRING SPEECH

There are several problems here.

First, if the PCs don't fight the troll or stirges that emerge from Undermountain, Volo has no reason to hire them. So if the PCs decide that discretion is the better part of valor here, the whole campaign never happens. (This is relatively low risk, but something you might want to give some thought to.)

Second, the adventure oddly claims, "Volo is embarrassed to admit he might have gotten his friend Floon in trouble, and he resists providing all the details of what happened the night Floon disappeared." That must be some vestige from a previous version of the scenario, because in the published version of the scenario he does, in fact, tell the PCs everything that happened and has absolutely no reason to think he's responsible for Floon's disappearance. (Just ignore this continuity error.)

Third, when Volo hires the PCs, his hiring speech sets up a timeline of events which doesn't line up well with the events described in the rest of the chapter. (According to Volo, Floon was kidnapped by the Zhentarim two nights ago, but "before the interrogation could begin", the Xanathar Guild kidnapped him from the Zhentarim, and when the PCs arrive at the Xanathar sewer hideout, their interrogation of Floon has just begun. Where did the missing day go?) We're going to clear this up (and prelude a later clue) with two new chunks of boxed text:

The figure who approached you strokes his mustache, adjusts his floppy hat, and tightens his scarf. "Volothamp Geddarm, chronicler, wizard, and celebrity, at your service. I am most impressed by your derring-do, and the truth is that I fear I have misplaced a friend amid the odious violence which has recently been seizing the streets of this fair city, and I could use your assistance in finding him. You'd be well paid, of course."

PAYMENT: 100 gp per character, with 10 gp per character up front.

DC 10 Wisdom (Insight): Volo is stretching the truth about how much he can pay immediately. (Currently low on cash, Volo is awaiting royalty payments from *Volo's Guide to Monsters* and he's currently endeavoring to finish *Volo's Guide to Spirits and Specters*, for which he is certain receive a handsome advance.)

FLOON: Once the job is taken, Volo identifies his missing friend.

My friend's name is Floon Blagmaar. He's got more beauty than brains, but he's a great drinking companion. Last night he accompanied me to the Skewered Dragon, a dark, bawdy tavern in the Dock Ward. I called it an early night, but Floon remained – drinking and merrymaking.

His wife tracked me down here in the Yawning Portal half an hour ago and told me that Floon never came home last night. This was doubly surprising, as I had not previously been aware that he was married.

Floon is a handsome man in his early thirties with wavy red-blond hair. He is not difficult to pick out of a crowd, however, for he insists on always wearing a gaudy, 6-inch bas relief of a unicorn's head on a chain of blue pearls around his neck.

(The necklace is a holy symbol of Lurue. It was Floon's mother's, but he'll tell any of a dozen different stories for how he got it.)

TO THE ZHENTARIM WAREHOUSE



Tracking Floon from the Skewered Dragon to the Zhentarim warehouse is restructured as a two-part investigation.

BLOOD IN THE STREETS: Make sure to frame the “Blood in the Streets” incident on the way to the Skewered Dragon.

- Mention that the three men who have been arrested each have a black tattoo of a flying snake (one on the hand, two on their arms).

REVELATION #1: Floon was kidnapped by men with flying black snake tattoos.

- *Canvassing the Neighborhood:* Several people saw Floon and another man (Renaer) waylaid in front of the Old Xoblob Shop (see *Dragon Heist*, p. 23). Xoblob the Gnome can describe the attack (see *Dragon Heist*, p. 24). Searching outside Xoblob’s shop will turn up a gaudy, 6-inch bas relief of a unicorn lying in the gutter (see below).
- *Questioning at Skewered Dragon:* As the PCs arrive, the evening regulars are probably rolling back in. Several of them will remember Floon and be able to describe how he drank with Volo, Volo left, and then he was joined by another man, a “spoiled, rich noble who likes to rub our noses in it!” (Note: Berca, the bartender, knows that the other man was Renaer Neverember, the son of Waterdeep’s previous Open Lord, Dagult Neverember, but she won’t be free with that information.) Floon and the other man left around midnight. They were followed out by several men, one of whom had a tattoo of a flying black snake on his neck.

(Note: Contrary to the published scenario, the patrons of the Skewered Dragon do NOT know that the “flying black snake” men can be found on Candle Lane. Some of them may be able to identify them as Zhentarim gangsters at the GM’s discretion.)

REVELATION #2: Floon was taken to the Zhentarim warehouse on Candle Lane.

- *Canvassing the Neighborhood (Looking for Tattoos):* Several locals have seen men with flying black snake tattoos “up by the candle on Candle Lane” (see *Dragon Heist*, p. 24). Surveying the lane identifies the correct warehouse because it had a black winged snake painted above the front door’s handle. Asking workers at the other warehouses along Candle Lane can also point them at the right warehouse, and may also reveal that there was some kind of “ruckus” over there early this morning, with large groups of people coming and going.
- *Questioning the Prisoners:* The PCs may backtrack to the “Blood in the Streets” crime scene and figure out a way to talk to the Zhentarim agents being held by the city watch. (They’re likely to speak with Captain Staget, see *Dragon Heist*, p. 27). If they can convince these agents to talk, they’ll learn that they aren’t local, but were told to report to the warehouse as a safe haven after performing the hit on the Xanatharians.
- *Tracking Floon’s Beads:* Floon kept his wits about him as he and Renaer were being kidnaped. Breaking the necklace around his neck, he let the blue beads drop into the streets and alleys as they were carried to the warehouse. PCs who find the unicorn’s head in the street outside Xoblob’s may be able to track the trail of beads back to the Zhentarim warehouse.

PROACTIVE FAILSAFES: If the PCs’ investigation is running aground, consider using these proactive elements.

- Zhentarim hear that the PCs are asking questions about Zhentarim agents, safe havens, or both. A number of Zhent **thugs** (MM, p. 350) equal to half the number of PCs comes to intimidate them into going away. (Adroit PCs can turn the tables, question them, and learn the location of the warehouse.)
- A small squad of Zhentarim agents arrives at the Zhentarim warehouse. The kenku lying in ambush attack them, and the fight spills out into the street right in front of the PCs.

AT THE WAREHOUSE

As initially described in [Part 1](#), after he lost his Eye to Xanathar, Manshoon needed to get back in the game. His agents eventually concluded that Neverember’s son, Renaer, might have another of the Eyes. They were right, although Renaer didn’t know it: His father had given him an elaborate, ivory mourning locket in honor of his mother. The Eye was hidden inside it.

The full dynamic in the first chapter, therefore, is this:

- Zhentarim agents snatch Renaer Neverember and his friend Floon Blagmaar.
- While questioning Renaer in Area Z5, they realize that the Eye is in the mourning locket and take the locket from Renaer.
- Renaer is hauled back down to Area Z2 and tied up next to Floon. Upstairs, the Zhentarim break open the locket (it can still be found in Area Z5), remove the Eye, and give it to a courier to carry to Manshoon.
- Floon is then hauled upstairs for questioning (the Zhentarim want to see if he might be worth a ransom).

- Xanathar’s agents storm the warehouse. They immediately find “the prisoner” (i.e., Floon), assume he’s Renaer, and several of their agents hustle him out to their sewer hideout. Meanwhile, Renaer takes advantage of the confusion downstairs to slip his bonds and hide in Area Z2.
- Xanathar’s agents do a perfunctory sweep of the warehouse and then take off, leaving the kenku behind to kill any Zhents who show up.

DEAD SNAKE: A black flying snake lies dead in the lower yard, pierced by an arrow. (*GM Note:* The Zhentarim tried to send it as a messenger during the attack, but a Xanatharian watcher shot it down.)

RENAER: Renaer will be able to tell the PCs that he was questioned by the Zhents about the half million dragons his father stole from the city; then they ripped off a locket that was very precious to him. If they find the locket and see the (now empty) secret compartment inside it, Renaer can also tell them that he had no idea that the compartment existed or what was stored inside it.

TO THE XANATHAR GUILD HIDEOUT

Once the PCs realize that Floon was taken by members of the Xanathar Guild, they’ll need to track them back to the Xanathar Guild Hideout in the sewers.

TRACKING: The Xanatharians exited the warehouse through the yard on the lower level and accessed the sewer half a block away down the alley. A DC 11 Wisdom (Survival) check easily tracks them that far.

Once in the sewers, it requires three successful DC 13 Wisdom (Survival) checks. On a failure, the PCs waste considerable time needing to backtrack and pick up the trail. If the PCs fail the test three times, they’ve wasted too much time: When they arrive at the hideout, they find it abandoned except for the goblin watchers in Q2 and Zemk, the usual keeper of the hideout, in Q5. Floon’s dead body lies in Q7. (Zemk will toss it into the sewer later in the day when he gets around to it.)

However, each time the PCs roll a tracking check, whether it’s successful or not, they can also make a DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) test to notice the guildsign (see below).

(*Note:* Even if the PCs only manage to recover Floon’s dead body, Volo, albeit a little disappointed with them, will still reward them for completing their mission.)

QUESTIONING THE KENKU: As described on page 25 of *Dragon Heist*, questioning the kenku may reveal the existence of the guildsign in the sewers (see below). Beyond that, the kenku are largely incapable of describing where the hideout is located. However, they can lead the PCs there (although they’ll be looking for opportunities to lead them into traps or otherwise betray them).

GUILDSIGN: Symbols scrawled in yellow chalk – a stylized representation of Xanathar – is marked at each tunnel intersection in the sewers, indicating the path which should be followed by the direction the main eye is looking. Once the PCs are aware of the guildsign, they can simply follow it back to the hideout.

PART 5C: THE NIMBLEWRIGHT INVESTIGATION

[by Justin Alexander – January 21st, 2019](#)



In *Chapter 3: Fireball*, an explosion kills nearly a dozen people in Trolls skull Alley not far from the PCs' front door. Their investigation takes them to Gralhund Villa, which is described in Part 2 of this remix.

WHAT HAPPENED:

- Dalakhar was attempting to meet with Renaer Neverember at Trolls skull Manor. He was being tracked by the Gralhund, Zhentarim, Cassalanters, and possibly others.
- A small team of Zhentarim agents led by Urstul Floxin attempted to waylay Dalakhar as he came down Trolls skull Alley.
- The Gralhund nimblewright, observing the scene from a nearby rooftop, used a *necklace of fireballs* to launch a *fireball* which kills Dalakhar and most of the Zhentarim agents, with the exception of Urstul Floxin (who barely survives, but is incapacitated).
- The Gralhund nimblewright jumped off the roof, dashed forward, rifled through Dalakhar's pockets, and took the *Stone of Golorr*. It then ran off, returning to Gralhund Villa.

MOTIVATION: A core problem in this scenario is that (a) the PCs are not strongly motivated to investigate the explosion, (b) they are explicitly encouraged to NOT investigate the explosion, but (c) if they don't investigate the explosion, the rest of the campaign doesn't happen.

My recommendation is simple: Kill someone they care about in the explosion.

Who you choose to kill is going to be heavily idiosyncratic to your campaign. It's really difficult to predict exactly which NPCs are going to resonate most strongly with the players during actual play. Honestly, it's just as likely to be some random person that you improvised off-the-cuff. But here are a couple of possibilities:

- **Renaer Neverember.** As described below, he arranged with Dalakhar to meet at Trollskull Manor. In this scenario, however, Renaer spotted Dalakhar on the street as they both arrived, approached him, and they were both killed in the explosion. (If you go this route, I recommend having a note from Dalakhar in Renaer's pocket for the PCs to discover that will cover at least some of the information Renaer would otherwise impart.)
- **One of the Three Urchins** (see Part 3). If it's not a deal-breaker for your group, introducing the cute little urchin kids and then killing one of them is virtually guaranteed to set the PCs on the warpath.

STRUCTURE: Generally speaking, this investigation will break down into three phases.

- **First, the questioning of witnesses to the explosion.** The primary revelation here is that a nimblewright was responsible.
- **Second, finding and investigating known owners of nimblewrights.** The primary revelation here is that they're being purchased from Captain Zord of the Sea Maidens Faire.
- **Third, either speaking with Captain Zord (aka Jarlaxle) or performing a heist (see Part 4B) to retrieve his customer information.** If they perform the heist, they might also stumble across the *crystal ball* Jarlaxle is using to spy through the nimblewrights. Either way, the information will lead them to the Gralhunds.

THE CRIME SCENE: The crime scene is described on p. 44 of *Dragon Heist*.

- **Add black flying snake tattoos to the Zhentarim corpses.**
- **Tracking the nimblewright?** Physically tracking the nimblewright is not really feasible, its trail being quickly obliterated in the crowded streets of Waterdeep.
- **Speak with dead?** See p. 46 of *Dragon Heist*, but tweak answers to fit revised continuity where necessary. The key revelations from Dalakhar is that he was carrying the *Stone of Golorr*, what the *Stone* does (although he doesn't know it's been blinded), that he stole it from Xanathar, and that he was coming to meet Renaer. The key revelations from the Zhentarim is that they were seeking something that Dalakhar was carrying, they worked for Urstul Floxin, and they came from Yellowspire (see Part 3: Faction Outposts).

REMINDER!

During this investigation...

Don't forget to **have Renaer show up at the scene of the crime**, probably 15-30 minutes after the explosion. When he does so, he'll be able to tell the PCs:

- That he had arranged to meet with Dalakhar at Trollskull Manor. The gnome had sent him an urgent message requesting the meeting and Renaer chose Trollskull Manor as the location.
- That Dalakhar was an agent working for his father.
- That his father had assigned Dalakhar to "keep an eye on me. He would skulk around and I would see him everywhere." A few weeks ago, though, he abruptly disappeared and Renaer doesn't know where he's been. (If the PCs ask, it happened just before Renaer was kidnapped by the Zhentarim.)
- That he doesn't know what Dalakhar wanted. "His message simply said that he was carrying something valuable for my father, was unable to deliver it, and was hoping that I could help."

Don't forget to **have the Cassalanters contact the PCs** and ask for their help in saving their children. It's strongly recommended that this occur before they reach the Gralhund Villa.



PHASE 1: QUESTIONING WITNESSES



There's generally three types of witnesses:

- Those who didn't see anything, and merely relate their personal experience. (Heard a huge explosion, rushed into the street. Saw a friend immolated in front of their eyes and the heat of the flame on their face. All their windows blew out. Et cetera.)
- Those who saw the nimblewright throw a bead from a *necklace of fireballs*. (Variation: As described on p. 45, young Martem Trec recovered the spent *necklace* from where it fell in a rain barrel after the nimblewright tossed it away.)
- Those who saw the nimblewright approach Dalakahar's body, take something from it, and run away. If the PCs inquire about which direction it went, the answer is between two buildings and heading east. (Variation: Some people may have also seen the nimblewright leap down from the roof from which it launched its attack.)

Which witnesses saw which events doesn't really matter. The key revelation is that a nimblewright was responsible for the attack.

BONUS CLUE - THE HOUSE OF INSPIRED HANDS: One of the witnesses who saw the nimblewright remembers seeing a similar automaton participating in the Twin Parades yesterday as part of the Temple of Gond's procession. (Following up on the Temple of Gond will lead to the House of Inspired Hands, see below.)

Option: There's no reason the PCs couldn't attend the Twin Parades themselves (see Part 4). If they do, you can describe several impressive processions participating in the parade, including the nimblewright who was operating a number of wondrous mechanical contraptions. (If you want to force it, arrange for one of the PCs' faction missions to require action during the parade.)

DESCRIPTION OF THE NIMBLEWRIGHT:

- A construct made of both burnished copper and pale wood.
- Wore a red robe and foppish red hat with a feather.
- A long, stylized Van Dyke beard. (This is unique to the Gralhunds' nimblewright and may help identify it to Captain Zord later.)
- You can see its clockwork mechanisms constantly whirring and pistoning under its rune-etched skin-plating.

POTENTIAL WITNESSES

- **Fala Lefaliir**, owner of Corellon's Crown (*Dragon Heist*, p. 32)
- **Tally Fellbranch**, owner of the Bent Nail (*Dragon Heist*, p. 32)
- **Rishaal**, owner of the Book Wyrms' Treasure (*Dragon Heist*, p. 33)
- **Jezryne Hornraven**, client of Vincent Trench (*Dragon Heist*, p. 45)
- **Martrem Trec**, 12-year-old boy and friend to the dead halflings (*Dragon Heist*, p. 45)
- **Emmek Frewn**, owner of Frewn's Brews and rival (*Dragon Heist*, p. 42).
- **Shard Shunners**, gang hired by Frewn to interfere with the PCs' business (*Dragon Heist*, p. 42)
- **Ulkoria Stonemarrow**, regular at Trollskull Manor (*Dragon Heist*, p. 42)
- **The Three Urchins**, particularly if one of them was killed (see Part 3C)

WITNESS - URSTUL FLOXIN: Urstul Floxin obviously survived the explosion, but he was badly hurt and will attempt to leave the area as quickly and surreptitiously as possible. If the PCs respond to the explosion quickly, however, they may have the question to briefly question him (particularly if they immediately move to assist the wounded).

- Somewhat disoriented, Urstul will give his real name if questioned.
- He'll claim to have come to Trollskull Alley in order to go to (he glances around and points at a storefront) the Book Wyrms' Treasure. He doesn't know what happened; there was just a bright light and a lot of heat and he's pretty sure he was knocked out.
- A DC 13 Wisdom (Insight) test suggests that he's not being entirely truthful. If pushed, he'll say, "Look, I must have been hallucinating. But just after the explosion, I could have sworn I saw a mechanical angel of death moving among the bodies. I thought he was going to come for me next, but then it turned and ran away." (*GM Note:* Urstul doesn't actually believe it was an "angel of death", but he wants to present himself as a confused rube who just happened to be passing by.)

Note: Urstul also has a black flying snake tattoo, but his is located on his left breast and is not visible unless the PCs somehow (and for some reason) strip him down.

THE WATCH ARRIVES: See *Dragon Heist*, p. 44-45.

DESIGN NOTES

The witness list has been expanded here specifically to reincorporate NPCs the characters may have been interacting with during Chapter 2. Accent the list with any other familiar faces the PCs might recognize, although not everyone in the area should be someone the PCs know.

Note that the in the published version of the campaign Urstul is the one to steal the Stone of Golorr from Dalakhar's corpse, but in this continuity the nimblewright steals the Stone (and it's the nimblewright's trail the PCs will be following). This also means Urstul can still be onsite, allowing the PCs to encounter him face-to-face before interacting with him at the Gralhund Villa.

PHASE 2: ON THE MATTER OF NIMBLEWRIGHTS

Once the PCs have the description of the mechanical man responsible for the attack, the next step is to figure out exactly what it was and where it came from.

RESEARCH: A DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana) can reveal that it was a nimblewright, most likely built by the technomancers of Luskan and based on ancient Calishite designs of the Shoon Imperium. They had not previously been seen in Waterdeep and the Luskan technomancers have been reticent about sharing their secrets. If they succeed at DC 17, however, they learn that Bowgentra Summertaen, Lady Master of the Watchful Order of Magists and Protectors, is known to have recently come into possession of one.

Following up on the Luskan angle is possible, with a DC 17 Charisma (Investigation) check revealing that the Sea Maidens Faire carnival ships recently came to Waterdeep from Luskan and the performers might know more.

CANVASSING: A DC 13 Charisma (Investigation) check reveals two owners of nimblewrights (see below). For every two points of margin of success, they discover an additional owner.

OTHER APPROACHES: Perhaps the PCs approach their faction for information on the mechanical man. Or they could easily come up with some completely unanticipated idea. If the approach seems plausible, default towards providing them 1-2 nimblewright owners.

THE BONUS CLUE: The bonus clue, described above, will also point the PCs towards one of the nimblewright owners (the Temple of Gond).

DESIGN NOTE

The PCs aren't meant to find all the owners of nimblewrights here. The intention is for them to trace the nimblewrights to Jarlaxle. If they do so and then steal Jarlaxle's records of sale, they'll find a list of all the owners, including those on the list below that they didn't already identify + the Gralhunds.

(This path is actually more difficult than just asking "Captain Zord" for help – because the PCs have to (a) steal the records and then (b) investigate all the



different buyers before identifying the Gralhunds. But it has the advantage of not tipping off Jarlaxle, possibly eliminating an entire faction from the Grand Game.)

The bonus clue will preferentially point the PCs towards the fully developed Temple of Gond from the published scenario. If you want to open things up a bit, give the PCs two owners via the bonus clue. For example: "I think I saw a similar automaton in the Twin Parades yesterday. He was part of the Temple of Gond's procession." And then a bystander pipes up, "Hey! You're right! I've seen something like it before, too! It was dueling down at the City Armory!" Or whatever owner you want to evoke.

OWNERS OF THE NIMBLEWRIGHTS

Jarlaxle has sold 9 nimblewrights. His asking price is just 25,000 gold dragons – which is a lot of money, but shockingly cheap as far as constructs go. That's because he's selling them at loss. His interest is not in making a profit from selling mechanical constructs: The nimblewrights have *clairvoyance crystals* built into them, allowing Jarlaxle to use a special *crystal ball* to capture "records of witness" through the eyes of each nimblewright, which he can review at his leisure. (See "Nimblewright Crystal Ball", below.) He simply wants to get nimblewrights positioned in as many advantageous households and organizations as possible, collecting intelligence and blackmail opportunities.

TEMPLE OF GOND: The House of the Inspired Hands is described on p. 46 of *Dragon Heist*. The nimblewright they've named Nim has, much to their surprise, proven remarkably adept at interacting with and even creating their mechanical marvels. (He does not, however, have a nimblewright detector.)

- *Appearance:* Its "hair" consists of multi-layered, overlapping metal feathers.

BOWGENTRA SUMMERTAEN: Lady Master of the Watchful Order of Magists and Protectors, a guild for wizards and sorcerers in Waterdeep. Her nimblewright is serving as a majordomo-cum-curiosity piece at the Order's guildhouse.

- *Appearance:* The nimblewright's head is featureless – no eyes, no mouth, no nose, no ears, no hair. (This does not impede its senses of sight or hearing.)

LORD LABDAR ADARBRENT: Head of a noble Waterdhavian family who owns the fourth-largest shipping fleet in the city and has strong ties with the Master Mariners' Guild. His nimblewright stands as a guard in his front hall, replacing the human guard who once stood there.

- *Appearance:* Its eyes are black onyx and its face is fixed in a permanent, rictused scowl. It wears the tabard of House Adarbrent.

LORD CORIN DEZLENTYR: The wizened, half-elven head of the Dezlentyr family. They first rose to prominence in the 13th century as caravan masters, traders, and explorers. They own a villa in the Sea Ward (\$51 on the 3rd Edition [City of Splendors](#) map). The nimblewright was actually purchased by his headstrong, swashbuckling daughter, Hermione Dezlentyr.

- *Appearance:* Its right eye is a green gemstone which glows faintly. Hermione has dressed it in traditional swashbuckling gear – the hat, the doublet, and so forth. (This lends it an appearance quite similar to the Gralhunds' nimblewright, although it lacks the Van Dyke beard.)

HOUSE OF WONDER (TEMPLE OF MYSTRA): Jarlaxle may have gotten a little cocky here. The servants of Mystra obtained the nimblewright in the hope of unraveling the secrets of its construction.

They have not done so (at least not yet), but they did discover the *clairvoyance crystal* and have successfully removed it from their nimblewright. (If you want to complicate things, send a Bregan D'Aerthe response team to reclaim the compromised nimblewright from the [House of Wonder](#).)

- *Appearance*: Feminine in appearance, dressed in a simple white robe. Silver “hair” has been carved to resemble a bob cut.



MOTHER TAMRA'S HOUSE OF GRACES: A finishing school catering to young ladies of ambitious families located on Mendever Stret in the Castle Ward. Their nimblewright is serving as a housecleaner.

- *Appearance*: Eight halos of different precious metals circle the nimblewright's head at strange, intersecting angles.

CITY ARMORY: Located in the Sea Ward (\$75 on the 3rd Edition [City of Splendors](#) map), the members of the Armory Guard have a nimblewright who serves as a fencing partner. They appropriated the funds to purchase the nimblewright without really having proper authorization.

- *Appearance*: Simple, generic facial features, but this nimblewright has additional plates of gleaming metal positioned around its body to resemble a stylized breastplate and greaves.

THE GRALHUNDS: The guilty party.

FACTION MEMBER: A prominent member of one of the factions the PCs belong to. Possibly their direct contact, but it's arguably more effective to have it be someone they're not personally acquainted with yet: It will make the outcomes of the investigation less certain, raise more questions in their mind, and have wider-ranging consequences in terms of deepening (or radically changing) their relationship with the faction.

INVESTIGATING THE OWNERS

As the PCs track down and question the owners, their stories and interactions will all be different, but make sure to establish the key revelations:

CORE REVELATION: The nimblewrights were all purchased from Captain Zord of the Sea Maidens Faire. His carnival ships are currently docked at a rented pier.

SECONDARY REVELATION: Captain Zord is selling the nimblewrights for a shockingly low price.

NIMBLEWRIGHT APPEARANCE: It's important to note during these visits that the nimblewrights all look different from each other. While they share certain key features (a slight, nimble build; construction from thin, curved plates of burnished metal and pale wood; their visible clockwork mechanisms), each is a bespoke creation with distinct, unique features. If you slip up and describe the nimblewrights as all being identical to each other (and, particularly, identical to the Gralhunds' nimblewright), the PCs will have no way of figuring out who the guilty nimblewright belongs to and their investigation is likely to turn into a muddle.

THE JARLAXLE CONNECTION

Once the PCs have tracked the nimblewrights back to "Captain Zord", there's generally three directions their investigation can take.

TALKING TO ZORD: If the PCs simply seek a meeting with Captain Zord, it's relatively easy to obtain. If they ask him about the ownership of a particular nimblewright, he'll first want to know *why* they're looking for it. His curiosity satisfied, he'll excuse himself for a few minutes, and then return to tell them that the nimblewright they're looking for was purchased by the Gralhunds. He can even give them an address.

Easy-peasy. (Except for the part where they've inadvertently tipped off Jarlaxle and brought him into the Grand Game.)

ZORD'S RECORDS OF SALE: If the PCs stage a heist to steal Zord's records of sale, they'll find the *Ledger of Nimblewright Sales* in Area J30 of the *Eyecatcher* (see Part 4B). This ledger records all the current owners of nimblewrights in Waterdeep.

THE CRYSTAL BALL: If the PCs discover the existence of the *nimblewright crystal ball* (see below), this can be found in Area U4 of the *Scarlet Marpenoth* (see Part 4B). If PCs stage a heist to access or steal the *crystal ball*, they can review the records of witness and easily discover that the nimblewright responsible for the *fireball* was sent by the Gralhunds.



THE NIMBLEWRIGHT CRYSTAL BALL

The *nimblewright crystal ball* is actually a rare and incredibly powerful crystalmantic artifact that's not inherently associated with the nimblewrights: It is attuned to specially created *clairvoyant crystals*, and is capable of not only perpetually scrying through those crystals, but also creating and storing records of witness. Basically, it allows you to not only view "live feeds" from any attuned *clairvoyant crystals*, you can also review everything those crystals have "seen" in the past.

Jarlaxle and his agents killed the dragoness Asphosis and stole the *crystal ball* from her horde. The technomancers of Luskan have been creating attuned *clairvoyance crystals* and building them into the nimblewrights. Thus, the *crystal ball* is currently capable of seeing out through the eyes of any nimblewright.

STUDYING THE NIMBLEWRIGHTS: The *clairvoyance crystals* are very carefully hidden deep inside the nimblewrights' clockworks (and, at least initially, appear to be an integrated part of their operation; they're not just wedged in there randomly). If several hours can be taken to carefully study a nimblewright (including at least partially disassembling it), a DC 18 Intelligence (Arcana) check will discover the *crystal's* superfluous nature and then normal efforts can be used to identify its function.

The attunement between *crystal* and *crystal ball* can be traced. A *detect magic* spell combined with a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check is sufficient to identify that the *crystal* is attuned to something onboard the *Eyecatcher* (assuming the trace is followed to the harbor).

DESTROYING A CLAIRVOYANCE CRYSTAL: A *clairvoyance crystal* is actually quite delicate and will shatter like glass if appropriate physical force is employed.

CREATING A CLAIRVOYANCE CRYSTAL: Players who take possession of the *nimblewright crystal ball* have a very powerful and versatile tool. Attuned *clairvoyance crystals* can be scavenged from the nimblewrights (both those "in the field" and also those still located in Jarlaxle's ships), but if they want to create more crystals, they'll need to visit Luskan and perform a raid on the technomantic workshops there.

WHAT ELSE CAN YOU SEE? In addition to identifying the Gralhunds' nimblewright, the PCs can access records from all of the other nimblewright owners. This is a vast body of knowledge that is either banal or essential.

You might even include older records of witness from before the time that Aphosis took possession of the *ball*. These might be fragmentary and incomplete, but their study could reveal any number of adventure seeds for the PCs.

Perhaps there's even a very old crystal that remains attuned to the *crystal ball* and located somewhere within Undermountain.

PART 5D: BACKTRACKING DALAKHAR & KALAIN

[by Justin Alexander – February 22nd, 2019](#)



BACKTRACKING DALAKHAR

Once the PCs identify Dalakhar as the primary target of the explosion, they may want to try backtracking his activities.

A successful Charisma (Investigation) check can track him back to the [Inn of the Dripping Dagger](#), located in the Trades Ward (location T3 on the 3rd Edition *City of Splendors* map). He rented his room for one night and then left.

HIS ROOMS: Inspection will reveal that his room was scrubbed clean in a very professional fashion. A DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation) check will reveal ash in the base of the room's oil lamp suggesting that a piece of correspondence was burned. (It can't be reconstituted through non-magical means, but was Renaer's response to Dalakhar's original missive setting up the meeting at Trollskull Manor.)

Laying out in plain sight on the pillow, however, is a round disk of black stone painted with Xanathar's stylized beholder sigil. It's a death mark, left here as a threat after Xanathar's minions tracked Dalakhar here.

XANATHAR RESPONSE TEAM: The room is also being watched by a Xanathar response team (see Part 3C). If they see the PCs enter the room, they'll most likely accost them and see what they know about Dalakhar.

If it's been more than a day since Dalakhar was killed, the response team has been briefed on that and is also aware that "the boss knows a guy name Floxin – one of those Zhent bastards – was following that gnome dungbag; the boss has got eyes on Floxin now".

(This might give the PCs an alternative route to the Gralhunds by tracking down and following Urstul Floxin. Putting in some more legwork might discover that Floxin is currently operating out of Yellowspire (see Part 3B), and they might be able to follow him from there to the Gralhund Vila.)

If it's been more than three days since Dalakhar's death, the response team is pulled from this location.

THE LETTER: Four days after Dalakhar's death, a letter arrives at the Inn of the Dripping Dagger for him.

Dalakhar,

I had to give considerable thought to your request. But you were always kind to me even when your demonic master was not. If you are still in need of my aid, you may claim whatever sanctuary I can offer.

Kalain of the Nine Waters

Before he was killed, Dalakhar was thrashing around trying to find whatever aid he could. He was even desperate enough to contact Kalain, a former mistress of Lord Dagult's. Inquiries can identify Kalain's place of residence in the Sea Ward.

DESIGN NOTE

The late arrival of the letter is designed to push a clue to PCs after their initial visit: Those who leave their names with the owners of the Dripping Dagger, particularly those who specifically ask the owners to contact them if any new information crops up, will be rewarded with a proactive follow-up. (Alternatively, but probably less likely, it can reward PCs who follow-up on old leads.) Since the clue is non-essential for the current investigation, the slightly heightened risk of them missing the clue is offset by the benefit of adding depth to the game world: Little details like this make the players feel as if the game world is a fully functional, living environment that persists beyond their immediate line of sight. (Largely because that is, in fact, what you're doing.)

KALAIN'S TOWER

Kalain lives in a dilapidated tower in the Sea Ward. See *Dragon Heist*, p. 88, although the Vault is not secretly located there.

AREA W8 – KALAIN'S STUDIO: Here are Kalain's most recent paintings, documenting her descent into madness.

- **DOCUMENT LOCKBOX:** A document lockbox with three drawers sits on one of the tables (DC 13 Dexterity check to unlock). One of the drawers contains love letters she exchanged with Lord Dagult. Another drawer contains similar letters, but these have been torn to confetti. (She periodically removes a letter from one drawer, rips it to shreds, and deposits it in the other.) The third drawer contains a number of work papers left behind by Lord Dagult (see below).

KALAIN

Appearance: A beauty ruined by tragedy; lines of sadness are etched into her face. Long black tresses are streaked with silver turning to gray.

Roleplaying:

- Believes everyone is secretly an assassin sent by Dagult Neverember to murder her.
- Loses track of the conversation and abruptly starts talking about completely different subjects.
- Rubs her cheek with her hand with increasing vigor as she becomes distressed.
- Will activate creatures from her smaller, older, more peaceful paintings to assist her (fetching small objects, etc.).
- Sees Dagult, Waterdeep, and the monsters of her newer paintings as all being the same thing; will refer to them interchangeably.
- Speaks of Neverwinter as if she were a red-headed maiden who seduced Lord Dagult from her arms. Occasionally confuses Neverwinter and Alethea Brandath.

Background: Kalain, a famous Waterdavian painter, was commissioned to paint a portrait of Lord Dagult Neverember, then Waterdeep's Open Lord, in 1475 DR. Her meeting with Neverember marked the beginning of a torrid affair that lasted over a year.

Their relationship faltered as Dagult's visits to Neverwinter became more frequent and extended. He made promises to Kalain that he failed to keep, and when she raised the subject of a faithful commitment, he treated her poorly, for his true love was Neverwinter. Kalain became enraged after Dagult's rejection and turned to painting monsters that, in her mind, represented him. Her power to harness the Weave clings to the fabric of her works, giving her the ability to bring these monsters to life on her command.

Ultimately Neverwinter left Kalain a little over four years ago. He used his influence to ruin Kalain and divorce her from Waterdeep's high society. She was allowed to keep her home, but her works and her reputation were destroyed, slowly and methodically. Kalain's spirit was broken, leading to the onset of madness. Now she locks herself away, content to let time erode the last of her conscience.

Key Info:

- She knows that Dalakhar was a spy working for Lord Dagult Neverember. He sent a letter requesting her help, but she waited several days before replying due to her bitter history with Neverember.
- If told that Dalakhar was killed, she will blame the PCs for killing him on Neverember's orders and then rapidly escalate to concluding they're here to kill her (unless they quickly talk her down)!
- During their final days together, Lord Neverember was obsessed with a "Melairkyn ceremonial temple or religious vault or something like that. He was always more focused on anything else rather than me. Rather than us." If questioned, she can provide the papers described above.
- If asked if she knows where the "vault" is located, she will become quite distressed: "I should know this. He was fixated on it. It would make me so angry... so very, very angry... And now I can't remember why." (She was irrationally jealous because it was his ex-wife's tomb, but because of the *Stone of Golorr* she can't remember that any more. No one can.)
- If specifically asked, she will recount speaking with the Lord Victorio Cassalanter about Lord Neverember and the vault a few weeks ago, but she won't otherwise volunteer the information.

Stat Block: CE half-elf bard (DH p. 195).

- **Art Imitates Life:** Kalain touches one of her paintings and causes its subject to spring forth, becoming a creature of that kind provided its CR is 3 or lower. The creature appears in an unoccupied space

within 5 feet of the painting, which becomes blank. The creature rolls initiative when it first acts. It disappears after 1 minute, when it is reduced to 0 hit points, or when Kalain dies or falls unconscious.

LORD DAGULT'S PAPERS

These papers mostly concern minor (and now thoroughly outdated) affairs of the city. There are a few pieces of unusual interest, however:

- A list of otherwise banal, crossed out tasks includes “move the dragon to the Melairkyn ceremonial vault.”
- Correspondence with Hammond Kraddoc of the Vintners', Distillers', and Brewers' Guild making it clear that Kraddoc gave Lord Dagult large bribes to cover up a scandal involving contaminated liquor in the Dock Ward.
- Notes apparently pertaining to a “ceremonial vault” built by the Melairkyn dwarves beneath Waterdeep centuries ago. The notes detail that such vaults were built by worshippers of Dumathoin, the Keeper of the Mountain's Secrets. The dwarven cult believed that Dumathoin encoded his secrets in the veins of ore and precious stones he placed in the mountains he raised from the earth for the dwarven people. In their mining, the dwarves would release Dumathoin's secrets into the world. This angered Dumathoin and there was a period of discord between the dwarves and the Mordinsamman (the council of dwarven gods). In order to appear Dumathoin and to protect his secrets, the cult would mystically bind the “secrets of the mountain” into items of finely-wrought dwarfcraft and then make offering of it to Dumathoin by securing them within ceremonial vaults. Such vaults, according to an ancient source, can be opened by “standing before Dumathoin's doors and striking the scale of a dragon with a mithral hammer in the place where the sun's light should fall.”
- An unsigned letter written to Lord Neverember four years ago stating that “the last of the three Eyes has been secured.”
- A letter from Dalakhar also dating to four years ago, reporting on his unsuccessful efforts to infiltrate the Enclave of Red Magic in the Castle Ward. (*GM Note:* This is literally a red herring. Dalakhar's assignment four years ago has nothing to do with present events. The Red Wizards of Thay use the Thayan embassy as a cover for their local operations; it's connected to the Thayan enclave in Skullport via a portal.)

DESIGN NOTE

I found Kalain to be a really fascinating character. For a long time, unfortunately, I couldn't figure out how to fit her into the Remix. I eventually struck on the idea of having Dalakhar write to her for assistance so that the PCs could backtrack him and find a trail to her. Originally, I thought this would be a dead end: The PCs would meet an interesting character and get filled in a little bit more on the back story of the scenario, but there was nothing Kalain could offer towards their current investigation.

And then, in one of those glorious instances where creative thoughts heap one atop the next, I realized that there WAS a way that Kalain could contribute materially to the scenario. (It also allowed me to link to her from the Cassalanter, too, making it more likely that any given group will encounter her.)

PART 5E: OUTPOST AND LAIR REVELATION LISTS

[by Justin Alexander – February 23rd, 2019](#)



The PCs will spend a significant portion of this remixed campaign engaged with the other factions of the Grand Game: Investigating them, reacting to them, targeting them, getting pissed off at them, etc. Much of that activity will be structured around investigating the factions' outposts and lairs, following the web of connections between them.

The revelation lists for each outpost and lair below adhere, at a minimum, to the Three Clue Rule. But you should remain alert for opportunities to dynamically generate clues in response to the PCs' actions.

DYNAMIC CLUE - RESEARCHING A FACTION: If the PCs want to find a faction by doing general research, point them in the direction of one of the faction's outposts. (Each outpost will contain clues that point to the Lairs, which are generally their ultimate goal.) See [Rulings in Practice: Gather Information](#).

DYNAMIC CLUE - TRACKING BAD GUYS: Or backtracking them. Lean towards these trails leading to/from outposts, too. If the PCs are tracking the bad guys *from* an Outpost, though, it can be toss-up whether they're heading to another outpost or a lair. In some cases, of course, simple logic about what the NPCs are likely to be doing will override this structural guidance, in which case you should go with the logical option.

DYNAMIC CLUE - INTERROGATION: Similar guidance applies when the PCs start interrogating faction members. If these are mooks they've found in the field, the interrogation will usually lead back to the outpost they're based out of. If they're interrogating people in an outpost, on the other hand, they're more likely to spill the beans on the faction's lair. Again, use common sense (particularly when it comes to established NPCs like Urstul Floxin or Nihiloor).

DESIGN NOTE

In distributing clues, my general rule of thumb for any given outpost was to include one clue in a different outpost of the same faction, one clue in a lair or outpost of a competing faction, and one clue with a response team. For the lairs, I included one clue in each of the faction's outposts and then also includes at least one clue with a competing faction.

This was not a formula I followed slavishly and you'll find a number of exceptions, but as a guiding principle it helped make sure that I didn't over-cluster the clues and inadvertently create structural cul-de-sacs.

BREGAN D' AERTHE LOCATIONS

FENERUS STORMCASTLE'S HOUSE

- Letter Regarding Fenerus Stormcastle's House (*Seven Masks Theater*)
- A Directive to Zorbog (*Zhentarim Interrogation House*)
- Sealed Letter to Fenerus Stormcastle (*Response Team: Krebbyg Masq'il'yr*)
- A Directive from Jarlaxle (*Gralhund Villa – Artheyn Manor*)

SEVEN MASKS THEATER

- Message regarding "Westra Moltimmur" and "Sapphiria's Booty" (*Fenerus Stormcastle's House*)
- Report on the Seven Masks Theater (*Xanathar's Lair*)
- Playbill for the Seven Masks Theater (*Response Team: Soluun Xibrindas*)
- Letter from N'arl (*Sea Maidens Faire*)

LAIR: SEA MAIDENS FAIRE

- Report regarding guild difficulties relating to the Sea Maidens Faire. (*Fenerus Stormcastle's House*)
- Following Krebbyg or Questioning Fenerus. (*Fenerus Stormcastle's House*)
- Speaking with Malcolm Brizzenbright (*Seven Masks Theater*)
- Report on the Seven Masks Theater (*Xanathar's Lair*)

CASSALANTER LOCATIONS

ASMODEAN SHRINE

- Arn's Meeting Notification (*Converted Windmill*)
- Report on the Cultists of Asmodeus (*Sea Maiden's Faire*)
- Proactive: Harpers hire the PCs to investigate the shrine. (see "Using the Cassalanter Outposts", Part 3B)

CONVERTED WINDMILL

- Seffia Naelryke's Visiting Card (*Response Team: Vevette Blackwater*)
- Arn's Book of Worship (*Asmodean Shrine*)
- Injury Report (*Terasse Estate*)
- Report from Seffia Naelryke (*Cassalanter Villa*)

LAIR: CASSALANTER VILLA

- Proactive: Invitation from the Cassalanter
- Bregan D'Aerth's Report on the Grand Game (*Sea Maidens Faire*)
- Questioning Cultists (*Asmodean Shrine*)
- Noble Sigil on the Mirror of the Fiend (*Asmodean Shrine*)
- Instructions from Lord Cassalanter (*Asmodean Shrine*)

XANATHARIAN LOCATIONS

GRINDA GARLOTH

- Note Regarding Gladiatorial Weaponry (*Terasse Estate*)
- A Recommendation for Materiel (*Response Team: Fel'rekt Lafeen*)
- A Directive from N'arl Xibrindas (*Any Xanathar Response Team*)

TERASSE ESTATE

- A Directive Regarding Materiel (*Grinda Garloth*)
- On the Delivery of a Mechanical Beholder (*Xanathar Sewer Hideout 2*)
- Report from Seffia Naelryke (*Cassalanter Villa*)

XANATHAR SEWER HIDEOUT, TAKE 2

- Orb Confectioners' Note (*Response Team: Korgstrod Uxgulm*)
- Report to Agorn Fuoco (*Response Team: Vevette Blackwater*)
- An Ill Man's Note (*Terasse Estate*)

LAIR: XANATHAR'S LAIR

- Gralhund Report on the Grand Game (*Gralhund Villa*)
- Rescuing Ott Steeltoes (*Zhentarim Interrogation House*)
- A Note Regarding Gladiatorial Weapons (*Grinda Garloth*)
- Gladiatorial Gathering Point (*Terasse Estate*)
- Correspondence with N'arl Xibrindas (*Xanathar Sewer Hideout 2*)

ZHENTARIM LOCATIONS

ZHENTARIM INTERROGATION HOUSE

- Directive to Urstul Floxin (*Response Team: Urstul Floxin*)
- Crumpled Note (*Yellowspire*)
- Questioning the Zhentarim Response Teams (or being captured by them)

YELLOWSPIRE

- Tracking Urstul Floxin before the Gralhund Villa operation (*Response Team: Urstul Floxin*)
- Threatening Agorn Fuoco; he'll sell out his friend to save his own life (*Response Team: Agorn Fuoco*)
- A Missive from Castle Ward (*Gralhund Villa*)
- Questioning Samara (*Xanathar Lair*)

LAIR: KOLAT TOWERS

- Xanathar's Report on the Grand Game (*Xanathar's Lair*)
- Cassalanter's Report on the Grand Game (*Cassalanter Villa*)
- Teleportation circle (*Yellowspire*)
- Capturing Agorn Fuoco (*Response Team: Agorn Fuoco*)
- Questioning Samara (*Xanathar's Lair*)

PART 6: GOLORR ARTIFACTS

[by Justin Alexander – February 24th, 2019](#)



The *Stone of Golorr* is described on p. 192 of [Dragon Heist](#). What many people don't realize, however, is that the *Stone of Golorr* previously appeared as part of [WotC's Stream of Many Eyes event and a tie-in ARG](#):

The Sage of Shadowdale hath hid on Earth a stone, of great power and imminent import. Its guardian, an exile from my realm, was spirited to Earth with this in tow; to keep it safe and secret 'ere its prophesied return.

The continuity of the Stream of Many Eyes features a number of elements from *Dragon Heist*, but although it seemed to lead directly into the published scenario, that promise didn't really come to fruition. The *Stone of Golorr* as it appeared here [had a different back story, different properties, and even a prophesied destiny](#).

Since I found a number of elements in the Stream of Many Eyes continuity for the *Stone* intriguing, I attempted to blend the two continuities together. This effort, however, quickly went awry: Rather than simply combining the two continuities, I ended up riffing on the basic conceptual ideas and ended up basically reinventing the *Stone*.

There are no principles of design or anything like that which led me down this path; it's a purely idiosyncratic creative response to the raw material. Maybe you'll end up liking what you'll see here, and maybe you won't. If you do, great. If you don't, the good news is that you can generally just use the *Stone of Golorr* as it appears in *Dragon Heist*. The only element you'll need to pick up from here are the Three Eyes.

WHAT THE STONE IS

The *Stone of Golorr* is an artifact that once belonged to the Abolethic Sovereignty. For millennia it was held in a vault within the ancient floating city of Xxiphu on the world of Abeir, but it was lost during the Wailing Years.

According to some histories, it was brought to Abeir-Toril when Xxiphu first plummeted to the world and settled deep below what is now the Sea of Fallen Stars. According to others, an aboleth who came to Abeir-Toril before the arrival of Xxiphu created the *Stone*; or perhaps he fled to Abeir-Toril carrying the stone and Xxiphu came in pursuit of their prize. Some versions of the tale claim that the *Stone* was forged during the primeval battles between Shar and Selûne, in the very moment that the world of Toril was formed.

Whether the *Stone* predates or co-dates the creation of Toril, in arcane terms this gives the *Stone* a position of primacy, making it capable of effects which no magic item or artifact created in these younger days could possibly duplicate.

HOW THE STONE WORKS

When the proper ritual is performed, the *Stone* magically eliminates a memory or piece of knowledge from everyone on Toril except for the person who is attuned to the *Stone*.

PERFORMING THE RITUAL: The use of the *Stone* to erase memory is a special ritual-form of *legend lore* which takes 12 hours to cast. Performing the ritual requires:

- The ability to cast *legend lore*.
- Knowledge of the ritual modifications to the spell.
- The use of a second abolethic artifact, a small tetrahedron of red jade. (This artifact is still in Lord Neverember's possession.)
- Special incenses suffused with the blood of an aboleth (2,500gp cost) and four ivory strips worth at least 50gp each.

During the ritual, the burning of the incense causes the four sides of the tetrahedron to unfold, revealing slots into which the ivory strips are then inserted. The *Stone* is then placed within the tetrahedron and the sides closed around it.

As the ritual completes, the tetrahedron opens once more, revealing the *Stone of Golorr* as it releases a burst of psionic energy. This energy attempts to refract through the person attuned to the *Stone*, forcing them to make a Wisdom saving throw with a difficulty commensurate to the scope of the memory or knowledge they are seeking to eliminate. (The memory of something with little significance and known to very few people would have a smaller DC than something of great significance or known to a large number of people.)

A group of people can attempt to perform the ritual together in order to reduce the difficulty of this saving throw by -2 per additional person (by spreading psionic refraction between them). The number of characters participating in the ritual is limited by the level of the character leading the ritual (i.e., a 5th level character could lead a ritual with up to 5 people), and *all* participants must succeed at the saving throw in order for the ritual to be successful.

On a failure, the ritual member fails to refract the psionic energy and the memory they were seeking to erase is eliminated only from their mind. If a particularly significant piece of knowledge was being targeted, the failure might also invoke a general fugue state for minutes, hours, or days (at the DM's discretion).

On a success, the knowledge is eliminated: Wiped clean from scrolls and inscriptions. Removed from all living memory except for those attuned to the *Stone* or participating in the ritual.

Note, however, that:

- This is very specific. For example, Neverember only eliminated the knowledge of the Vault's *location*, which is why other lore regarding the Vault (like its existence and the keys required to open it) can still be found. As if reality had become a poorly expurgated book, you can still see where the "text" has been snipped out if you know where to look.
- This only destroys current knowledge, not the subject of the knowledge nor the ability to learn that knowledge in the future. Making everyone forget Bob, for example, doesn't stop Bob from saying, "Hi! I'm Bob!"

USING THE STONE: Communicating with the *Stone*, receiving knowledge from the *Stone*, or performing the knowledge-erasing ritual requires the user to be attuned to the *Stone*. This can be a somewhat unpleasant process as the attunement takes the form of your thoughts slowly becoming compatible with the utterly alien, abolethic thoughtforms of the *Stone*.

THE STONE BLINDED

As *Dragon Heist* begins, the *Stone of Golorr* has been blinded by Lord Neverember; he has removed its three Eyes. This is not a physically difficult procedure: If someone is attuned to the *Stone*, an Eye can simply be physically popped out (or popped in). With the Eyes missing, however, the capabilities of the *Stone* are limited.

A simple physical examination of the *Stone* will make it clear that the three Eyes are missing.

BLINDED: The *Stone* is inert.

1 EYE RESTORED: With one Eye restored, the *Stone* can communicate, but still not see the secrets it once contained.

2 EYES RESTORED: Although still crippled, the *Stone* (and a character attuned to it) can now "see" the location of the remaining Eye and the immediate area around it. (This routes around a potential failure to figure out the location of the third Eye, and also speeds up the procedure of the third Eye Heist by essentially allowing the PCs to skip the normal surveillance requirements.)

3 EYES RESTORED: The *Stone of Golorr* is fully restored and operates normally once again.

SECRETS OF THE STONE OF GOLORR

The *Stone of Golorr* is a sentient magic item with an Intelligence of 18, a Wisdom of 16, and a Charisma of 18. It has hearing and darkvision out to a range of 120 feet. It can communicate telepathically with the creature that is attuned to it, as long as that creature understands at least one language. In addition, the *Stone* learns the greatest desires of any creature that communicates telepathically with it.

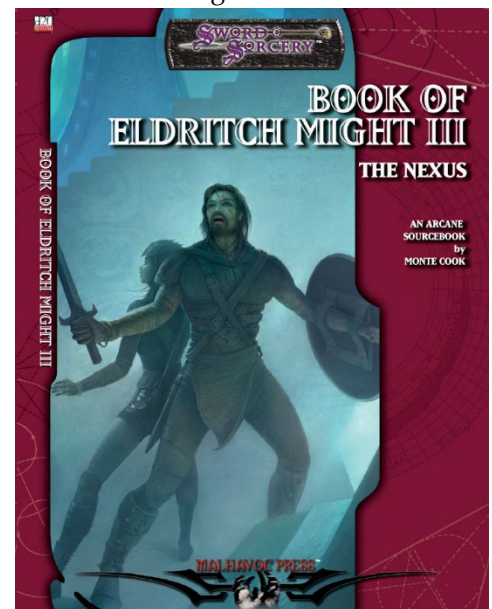
Speaking with the *Stone* is difficult as its thought processes are alien. As a result, the information it provides is often cryptic or vague.

Legend Lore: The *Stone of Golorr* has a maximum of 3 charges and regains 1d3-2 expended charges daily at dawn. While holding the *Stone*, you can expend 1 of its charges to cast the *legend lore* spell.

Using one of these charges, the *Stone* can share with its attuned holder the secrets which have been hidden inside of it, either through speech or through a telepathic burst of imagery and sensation. Its holder can direct this towards a particular secret if they are aware of its existence; otherwise the *Stone* will provide a secret according to its own perverse whim and alien predilection.

Examples of such secrets, ranging from the banal to the profound, include:

- Any number of horrible racial slurs.
- The elvish word *essylathir*, which means the beauty of eyes which are the color of a storm-tossed sea.
- The existence of a race of tawny-haired bipeds known as “fuzzies” that live in the High Forest.
- The Kingdom of Otheria, which ruled a demesne from the Sword Coast to the sands of Anauroch approximately 500 years ago.
- The name “Anu-Devan,” which was once the most popular male elven name.
- The Aurunean Invasion. Strange invaders wearing insectile helmets of mithral-and-gold came from a continent far to the west and invaded Faerûn. Apparently the *Stone* was used to eradicate all knowledge of the war, thus ending the conflict (since it also eradicated the navigational charts the Auruneans had used to reach what they called the Eastern Shores).
- The location of 16 bars of silver, buried in the rear yard of a tavern in Murann in 916 DR.
- The location of the Nexus (see [Book of Eldritch Might III](#)).
- An atrocity performed during the [Crown Wars](#). Although history has long-maintained that the dark elf Ilythiiri attacked the smaller kingdom of Orishaar on the thinnest of pretenses to begin the Second Crown War, it turns out that the Orishaari actually betrayed the Ilythiiri at a wedding which was to unite their two people and slaughtered most of the Ilythiiri royal family. The knowledge of this was wiped from history by the *Stone of Golorr*, leaving the official histories to record only that the dark elves went to war “in supposed retaliation for Aryvandaar’s aggression against the Miyeritari. Considering that the moon elves of Orishaar had no connection with Aryvandar beyond a trade alliance, and the Ilythiiri had little to do with the beleaguered elves of Miycritar, this was a thinly veiled excuse for the Ilythiiri to seize some land from the moon elves.” (*Lost Empires of Faerun*)
- The spells [blacksteel](#) and [midnight shroud](#) (see [Spells of Light and Darkness](#)).
- The ritual required for the creation of a Hell cyst (see Part 3).



- The existence of the Shadowdusk family, and their holdings on Level 22 of Undermountain. (Or perhaps some other hook to [Dungeon of the Mad Mage](#).)

Perceptive PCs may notice that many of these secrets were likely secured on Toril at a time when the *Stone of Golorr* was supposedly being held in a vault on Abeir. If they inquire on this topic, the *Stone* will reveal that when Abeir and Toril were reunited, it was ripped back in time to the point where the two worlds were sundered and then “skipping” through time, appearing in Toril at various, discontinuous points through history.

Memory’s Passing: If you lose attunement with the *Stone* you must attempt a DC 16 Wisdom saving throw or the memories you shared with the *Stone* (i.e., the lost knowledge you gained from it) will begin to fade from your mind

DESIGN NOTES

Another option I looked at here was to allow each secret encoded within the Stone to be locked with a passphrase. To access the secret you would need both Stone and passphrase. (The passphrase for the Vault’s location would have been “Brandath,” which would be seeded throughout the campaign with the Three Clue Rule.)

Passphrases might be vulnerable to certain divination attempts; or maybe it’s a requirement that the passphrase be recorded on a stone disc. If they’re NOT vulnerable to divination “hacking,” the use of passphrases would allow you to control exactly what information the PCs can pull out of the Stone. And the hunt for a passphrase can become an adventure in its own right (many times over).

I decided the use of passphrases was just an extra layer of complexity that Dragon Heist didn’t need, however, and so opted not to implement it. If you do, I’d recommend that the Cassalanter have a list of several passphrases they’re interested in feeding into the Stone.

WHERE IS THE VAULT?

Those seeking Neverember’s Enigma from the *Stone* will receive that information in two simultaneous streams of information:

- A tangled barrage of imagery: Twisted underground tunnels lit by strange lights. An endless field of corpses. Halls of stone. A golden dragon, aging so rapidly that scales shed from its skin. The sound of a silver hammer striking stone. A beam of sunlight in a darkened room. A chisel carving Dethek (dwarven) characters which transform themselves into two words: BRANDATH CRYPTS.
- A cryptic riddle: *Where laid his wife to rest ‘midst bones of son’s blood sealed, there where Anri laid himself to rest lies that which Open Lord concealed.*

PART 6B: THE BRANDATH CRYPTS

[by Justin Alexander – February 25th, 2019](#)



The vault in which Lord Neverember hid his stolen wealth was, in fact, constructed by the Melairkyn dwarves thousands of years ago and, today, lies beneath the Brandath family crypts.

Clan Melairkyn were the first to begin excavating beneath what is now Waterdeep. The earliest portions of Undermountain were, in fact, the Underhalls in which they made their homes and wrought their mithral-craft.

Near the Underhalls, they also built a ceremonial vault. The Melairkyn were worshippers of Dumathoin, the Keeper of the Mountain's Secrets. Their cult believed that Dumathoin encoded his secrets in the veins of ore and precious stones he placed in the mountains he raised from the earth for the dwarven people. In their mining, the dwarves released Dumathoin's secrets into the world. This angered Dumathoin and there was a period of discord between the dwarves and the Mordinsamman (the council of dwarven gods). In order to appease Dumathoin and to protect his secrets, the cult would mystically bind the "secrets of the mountain" into items of finely-wrought dwarfcraft and then make offering of it to Dumathoin by securing them within ceremonial vaults.

After the Melairkyn civilization fell before an invasion of dark elves, the vault was looted and abandoned, its secrets – whatever they may have been – scattered to the corners of the world. The entrance was eventually buried by the passage of time. Nearly a millennia passed before the city of Waterdeep was founded, and the area near the vault became used as a burial ground which would expand to become the City of the Dead.

The Brandath family eventually constructed a mausoleum on the site. A hundred years later, as the mausoleum was being expanded, the excavations broke through into antechambers of the Melairkyn vault. Struck by the grand and mysterious beauty of the vault, the Brandaths of the time concealed the vault's existence and used it as a site for performing ritual mummery based loosely on the original Melairkyn rituals as part of a secret fraternal order known as the Brothers of the Maroon Pin. A scandal eventually saw the Maroon Brotherhood shut down, and the vault lay largely forgotten under the Brandath mausoleum.

When Lady Alethea Brandath died, however, her husband, Lord Neverember, discovered the existence of the vault while making preparations for her internment in the old mausoleum. Gaining access to the inner vault, he realized it would be a perfect place to store the money he was embezzling from the city.

Once the money was safely ensconced, Neverember concealed the location of the vault using the *Stone of Golorr*. After blinding the *Stone*, he hid one of the Eyes in a crypt near his wife's. His logic was that no one knew where the Vault was located except him, so no one would look there.

Lord Dagult, however, had not counted on the perseverance of the Cassalanter. They performed an exhaustive survey of sites associated with Lord Neverember, including his wife's tomb. There they discovered the hiding place of the Eye and took it. (Ironically, they never realized they were standing almost directly above the vault.)

THE CITY OF THE DEAD

In 1250 DR, when Waterdeep's graveyard had become hopelessly congested with the dead, the city began constructing public mausoleums and the character of the City of the Dead was permanently changed. Today much of it is a public park, dotted with mausoleums and crypt-complexes. (See [Dragon Heist](#), p. 179.)

DUSK: At dusk, hundreds of driftglobes make their way from the inhavited part of the city and congregate in the City of the Dead. They spend the night here and then disperse, returning to the waking city at dawn. No one knows the reason for this.

NIGHT: At night, the City of the Dead is closed. Two city **guards** are stationed at each entry gate. It requires a DC 15 Dexterity (Stealth) check to slip over the walls.

GUARDIANS

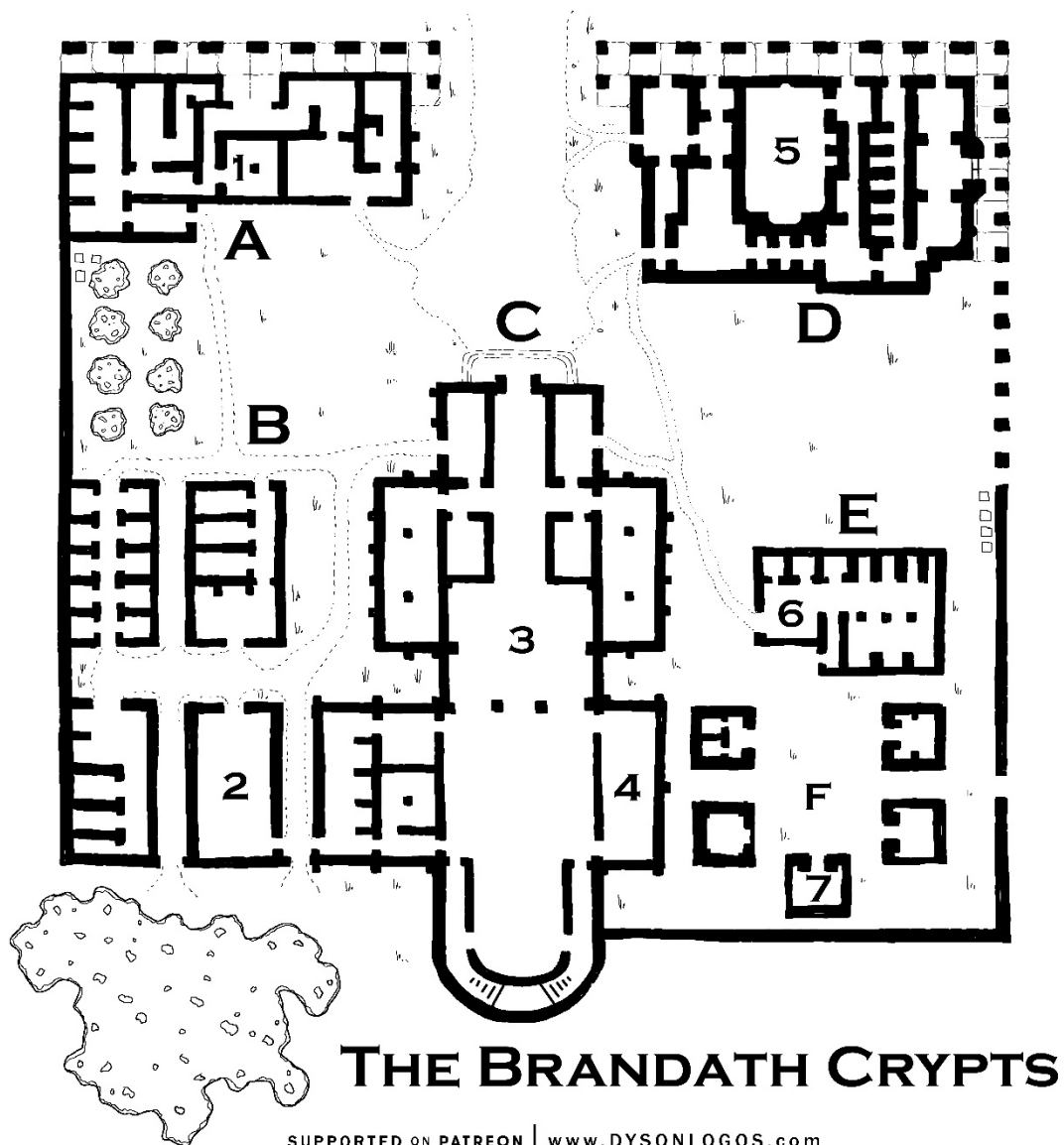
SIR AMBROSE EVERDAWN (LG male human Tethyrian knight): An aging servant of Kelemvor (god of the dead), patrols the cemetery from sunset to sunrise, chasing off grave robbers and making sure the dead stay buried. Characters who creep around the cemetery in the dark have a 30 percent chance of running into him. If that happens, he escorts them out and alerts the City Guard if they refuse to leave.

BRANDATH TREANT: The largest tree growing by the main entrance to the Brandath Mausoleums is a **treant**. It awakens when one or more creatures approach and growls, "Only those of Brandath blood are welcome here! Begone!"

If someone other than a Brandath attempts to enter a mausoleum, the treant will animate two trees and attack. The treant and its animated allies are too big to enter all but the main chambers of Mausoleum C.

If Renaer Neverember (of Brandath blood) is present, the treant allows him and his companions to pass unmolested. It says to Renaer in passing, "Your mother was a lovely person."

MAUSOLEUMS



THE BRANDATH CRYPTS

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The first small mausoleum built on this site was expanded with various antechambers and new crypts to hold additional members of the Brandath family. Other single-occupant mausoleums were added around the original structure, although many of these were subsequently razed to make way for the larger structures which now form the rambling crypt-complex of the Brandath family.

GENERAL FEATURES:

- **Doors:** The stone doors of the mausoleums are generally locked (DC 15 Dexterity check to pick the lock; DC 25 Strength (Athletics) check to force it).

- **Coat of Arms:** The Brandath coat of arms can be found upon the floor of each mausoleum. An DC 15 Intelligence (History) check can determine, based on the variations and progression of the heraldry, which of the buildings is oldest. (D is the oldest, followed by F, B, A, C, and E.)

MAUSOLEUM A - CELESTIAL STATUES: When this mausoleum was built, the popular style was for each grave to be marked with a statue of the deceased rendered as if they had been reborn as a celestial: Wings, glowing eyes (by way of persistent spells), and halos are common. One is carved as if they were an Empyrean – although the statue is life-size, it is surrounded by faceless, miniature people suggesting that its true scale is much larger. Others are accompanied by couatl, pegasi, and the like.

- **AREA 1:** The statue in this chamber was enchanted to sing when mourners drew near. Over the centuries, however, this enchantment is fading and the voice fades and cuts, creating an unsettling and atonal melody.

MAUSOLEUM B - THE OSSUARIES: These four buildings in the southwest corner of the crypt-complex have been transformed into (or were built as) ossuaries. Some were “buried” by having their bones directly placed in these ossuaries, but in other cases bodies were moved here in order to make room for new arrivals elsewhere in the crypt-complex.

- **AREA 2:** The floor-to-ceiling shelving that once held the bones in this ossuary has collapsed, filling the entire building with tumbled piles of bone. 6 **crawling claws** (MM, p. 44) scurry among and tunnel through the bones (leaping out from unexpected angles).

MAUSOLEUM C - THE GRAND CRYPT: This two-storey tall building was built at the height of the Brandath family’s power and influence. Constructed of marble and porphyry, its Doric architecture is redolent of 13th century Illuskan revivalism. The name BRANDATH is carved in Thorassian (common) letters above the doors.

- **AREA 3:** The vaulted main hall of the grand crypt is perpetually lit by three chandeliers with blue *everburning candles*. Plaques upon the floors and walls indicate where dozens of people have been laid to rest seemingly behind every wall. Bas reliefs serve as strange death masks.
- **AREA 4:** This side chamber is taken up almost entirely by the bier of Sir Jom Shiao Brandath, a half-giant. Carvings around his titanic sarcophagus indicate that he died seeking vengeance against “Lord Bombur,” who had “cruelly butchered” Sir Jom’s family with a cowardly assault upon his keep while Sir Jom was on campaign in the First Dragonspear War (1356 YD).
- **SECOND FLOOR:** The stairs at the south end of the building lead up to a second floor of tight, claustrophobic passages lined with crypts.

MAUSOLEUM D - THE FIRST CRYPT: This building is the oldest in the crypt-complex. BR_N_TH CRY_TS is carved in faded letters of the Dethek alphabet above the eastern doors. Age-worn stone can be seen everywhere, along with clear signs of repeated renovation. Individual crypt sites have been renovated, moved, and even removed over hundreds of years.

- **AREA 5:** This room was the original mausoleum on this site. See “Lady Alethea’s Tomb,” below.

MAUSOLEUM E - ULD’S CRYPT: Despite being the newest construction in the crypt-complex, this mausoleum is in very poor repair. Part of the roof has caved in, crushing several of the tomb sites within.

- **AREA 6:** A gravemarker identifies the sarcophagus here as belonging to Uld Brandath, a Waterdhavian magister who died in a freak accident years ago. (A gargoyle broke off the corner of a government building and fell on Uld, crushing him.) One corner of his sarcophagi has been staved in by the collapsed ceiling. Uld’s skeletal corpse wears a *headband of intellect*.

- **CRAWLING CLAWS:** Six **crawling claws** (MM, p.44), made from the hands of murderers who were sentenced to death by Uld, escaped from his sarcophagus and now infest the building.

MAUSOLEUM F - SMALL MAUSOLEUMS: Originally there were several dozens of these smaller mausoleums located in the Brandath crypt-complex, each containing a single body (or perhaps a small family unit). Many were raised in order to build the Grand Crypt and, more recently, Uld's Crypt.

- **AREA 7:** One of the small mausoleums is obviously of much newer construction than the others. The name "LORD ANRI BRANDATH" is carved above the door. On the relatively plain sarcophagus inside, two dice appear to have been carelessly tossed (reading snake eyes). Lord Anri is, in fact, buried here. Lord Dagult had this mausoleum built and transferred Lord Anri's body here when he renovated Lord Anri's original resting place (see "Lady Alethea's Tomb").
- *GM Note:* Combined with the vision granted by the *Stone of Golorr*, this will likely function as a red herring for PCs who believe the Vault lies beneath Lord Anri's tomb.

LADY ALETHEA'S TOMB

This room was actually the first Brandath mausoleum and it was the burial site of Lord Anri, who rested here undisturbed for many hundred years while his descendants lived, died, and were buried around him.

The ego of Lord Dagult Neverember, however, manifests in myriad ways. When his wife, Lady Alethea Brandath, died, Lord Dagult wished to exult her in death. Lady Alethea, however, had requested a simple tomb in the Brandath Crypts. Nevertheless, Lord Dagult got what he wanted by refurbishing Lord Anri's tomb and burying her there, giving her a place of primacy.

LADY ALETHEA'S SARCOPHAGUS: Clearly newer than the rest of the crypt, a bouquet of wilted flowers lies atop her sarcophagus (which is sculpted in her likeness).

- *GM Note:* The flowers were left by Renaer.

PORTRAIT ON THE CEILING: A faded, chipped portrait of Lord Anri adorns the the plaster ceiling. He is identified in the portrait with a labeled banner. Fresh script around the perimeter of the painting reads, in four languages, "The beauty of our age, in death, is watched over by the spirits of her ancestors."

- **DC 14 Intelligence (History):** The portrait was actually added to the crypt several centuries after Lord Anri's time. In the portrait, he is wearing an alexandrite-tipped pin and is holding a distinctive dwarven compass in his left hand. (**DC 17:** These are symbols of the Maroon Brotherhood, an obscure fraternal order that was once active in Waterdeep but not longer exists.)
- *GM Note:* Lord Anri was not a member of the Maroon Brotherhood; the painting was commissioned by the brotherhood and added the symbolism retroactively.

SECRET PASSAGE: A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) test discovers that the southern wall of the crypt is false, disguising the staircase leading to the old crypts beneath the mausoleum.

THE OLD CRYPTS

See the map on p. 71 of *Dragon Heist*.

STAIRS DOWN: Sconces for torches are placed on the walls, but there are no torches within them. The airy is dry. There is a thick coating of dust, but a large amount of fairly recent traffic has disturbed it up and down the main hall.

- **DC 12 Intelligence (Investigation):** The top step is scorched by a recent explosion. A DC 12 Intelligence (Arcana) check identifies this as the remains of a triggered *glyph of warding*. (*GM Note:* Triggered by the Cassalanter team that removed the Eye.)

AREA M2: One of the sconces has been ripped from the wall here and tossed to the floor.

- **DC 14 Intelligence (Investigation):** The remnants of a *glyph of warding* can be found on the floor here. It's been rendered inactive by someone blotting out several key strokes of the *glyph*.
- **Sconce:** There was a secret compartment behind the sconce. It's empty now. (*GM Note:* This is where Lord Neverember hid the Third Eye, which the Cassalanter then stole.)

TO THE VAULT: The collapsed eastern end of the tunnel is actually an illusion that conceals an intact archway filled with a heavy door of steel.

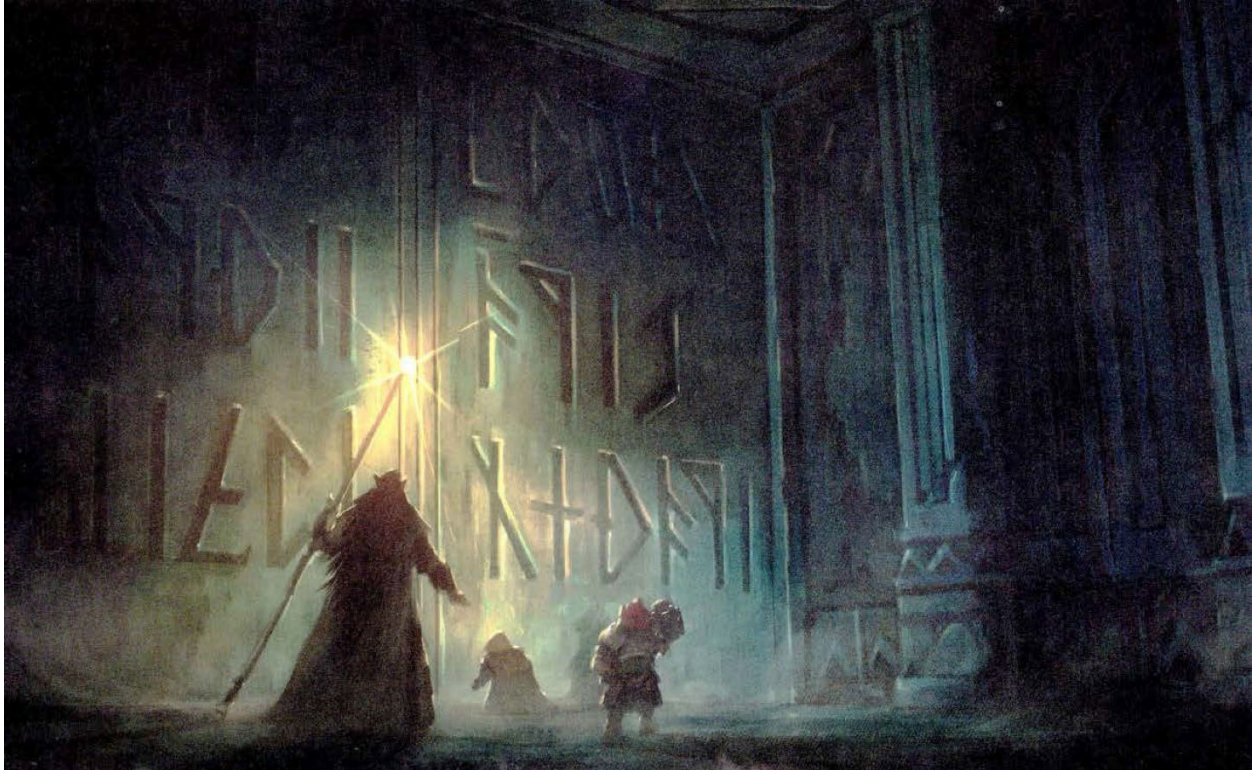
- **The Arch:** The keystone of the arch is decorated to appear like a mountain with a purple alexandrite gemstone in the middle of it (a variation of Dumathoin's holy symbol). The voussoir have various symbols carved in them in alternation with dwarven runes: A dwarven compass, a serpent's forked tongue, a scarabaeus, a brain with two tentacles (Ilsensine's holy symbol), a broken arrow (Laduguer's holy symbol). (*GM Note:* These are all symbols of the Maroon Brotherhood.)
- **The Door:** Obviously much more recent than the surrounding stonework (it was installed by Lord Dagult to provide some actual physical *security* for the vault), and has actually damaged some of the ancient symbols on the arch. It's a 2-foot-thick vault door, with a DC 22 lock. There's an *alarm* spell on the door, but it's keyed to Lord Dagult and, assuming he's still in Neverwinter, he's too far away to get the ping.
- **Beyond the Door:** A 10-foot-wide hallway that slopes down to the Vault (see Part 6C). A *glyph of warding* has been placed so that it triggers on anyone stepping through the door.

DESIGN NOTES

Pretty much everything I'm doing here is aimed at giving the conclusion of the campaign enough weight to feel meaningful. Exploring the mausoleums and their history isn't a particularly meaty interaction, but it invests the player into a specific place with specific meaning before they crack open the Vault. It also provides a nice thematic loop with the beginning of the campaign, which started with the PCs rescuing Renaer Neverember and getting drawn into his family's drama.

PART 6C: THE VAULT

by [Justin Alexander](#) – February 26th, 2019



The entries here modify or replace those found on p. 94-97 of [Dragon Heist](#). They reference the map on p. 95.

THE HALL OF SECRETS

About 15 feet down the sloping hallway, the stone construction changes. To anyone knowledgeable about such things, the lower portion of the hall is clearly dwarven construction.

Roughly 50 feet beyond that, the walls of the hall are covered with what appear to be dwarven graffiti – some painted on the walls, others carved. Each records a secret, most of them banal (“my beard quivers for Lorlai of the stonecutters,” “I tasted pixy dust in the third hall,” “I use rotgrub paste to dye my beard”).

This continues for another two hundred feet before the hall ends in Area V1.

DOOR OF THE CEREMONIAL VAULT

AREA V1 - ANTECHAMBER: The antechamber is twenty feet wide and twenty feet high. It seems to resonate with a silent stillness, suggestive of its great age. The far wall is dominated by a massive pair of adamantine doors bearing dwarvish runes taller than a grown man. In the center of the floor there is a bronze bas relief of a stylized sun, six feet across. Words have been carved into the floor in a circle around the bas relief.

- **The Doors:** The dwarvish runes read, “All that lies within belongs to the Silent Keeper.” The doors cannot be forced open or damaged in any way, and attempts to circumvent them with magic short of a *wish* spell fail automatically.
- **The Sun:** The script running around the sun is in Chondathan (the local human tongue) and, upon inspection, clearly a more recent addition to the antechamber. The inscription reads, “Know ye the hidden truth.” It’s repeated three times.
- **Opening the Doors:** It’s a ceremonial vault and opening the doors requires the performance of a ceremony: A single dragonscale must be laid upon the bas relief of the sun and then struck while lit by sunlight. Once that is done, the doors slide back into the walls and remain open for 15 minutes before sliding shut again. (They can be opened from the inside by simply placing a hand upon them.)
- *GM Note:* The “Silent Keeper” is a title belonging to Dumathoin. The Chondathan inscription was placed here by the Maroon Brotherhood.

SUNLIGHT? Certain magical effects can bring sunlight here (the *sunbeam* spell, for example, or Manshoon’s *sunglobe*). PCs could also set up a series of mirrors; this requires twenty large steel mirrors (20 gp each) and 2d4+2 hours of work get their alignment just right.

DRAGON SCALES? The type of scale doesn’t matter. They’re rare on the market, but can be found in specialty shops for 1d6 x 300 gp. The PCs might also recall running into sources for dragon scales at various points during the campaign (Zelifarn, Jarlaxle’s bedroom, the Cassalanters’ study).

MITHRAL HAMMER? Doesn’t have to be a particularly large one. It can be commissioned from local craftsmen for 150 gp.

LEARNING THE CEREMONY: Clever PCs may be able to guess the necessary ritual from the vision granted by the *Stone of Golorr* when they asked for the Vault’s location. If they cast an additional *legend lore* specifically pertaining to the doors, they’ll be told, “Three keys ye seek. Strike scale of wyrm in light of day. As the vault bears witness, so shall it ope to mithral’s strike.” The notes pertaining to the Melairkyn vault held by Kalain (see Part 5C) also reveal the necessary ritual. Alternatively, the PCs may be able to get information from the Cassalanters.

RESEARCHING THE VAULT DOOR: Researching Dumathoin with a DC 15 Intelligence (History) test reveals the existence of the ceremonial vaults and the ceremony the Melairkyn dwarves would perform to open the doors.

RESEARCHING THE MAROON BROTHERHOOD: Researching the Maroon Brotherhood’s symbols or the phrase “Know ye the hidden truth” will provide a general precis of the Brotherhood’s history:

- They were a secret brotherhood, primarily centered in Waterdeep and most likely founded during the 12th century (although they often obfuscated that date in order to present themselves as a more ancient lineage).

- In the early 14th century they became caught up in the Shadow Thief Affairs, their members were implicated in an assassination attempt, and the group was broken up by Open Lord Lhestyn.
- Rumors persisted for the better part of a century that the Brotherhood of the Maroon Pin had actually survived the purge and were secretly controlling Waterdeep (or even all of the newly formed Lords' Alliance), although these claims eventually faded into legend and conspiracy theory.
- Court records from the time period indicate that a large number of the brotherhood's members were part of the Brandath family.
- The rituals of the brotherhood largely remained secret even after – or perhaps because – their end was so precipitous. It is clear, however, that the brotherhood had accumulated any number of arcane rituals, symbols, and the like. These included the namesake pins of alexandrite, dwarven compasses (often hidden within works of art), a serpent's forked tongue (representing the telling of secrets), scarab beetles, and the like. They seemed particularly fond of appropriating imagery from ancient or exotic civilizations.
- One example of this, found beneath the picture of a broken arrow, is the enigmatic phrase: "In beam of sun, strike dragon's scale with mithral true upon the anvil sun." Mid-14th century scholars exhausted great amounts of work trying to puzzle out what the imagery of "anvil sun" alluded to, with most concluding it must refer cryptically to a site somewhere within Calimshan, possibly dating back to the lost empire of Coramshan. Debates raged endlessly about exactly which site (or sites) the passage might refer to, until Maroon Brotherhood conspiracy scholarship faded away by the end of the 14th

INSIDE THE VAULT

GENERAL FEATURES: Hidden somewhere within each room of the vault (except V6, V7, and V8) is a cartouche bearing the dwarven runes "HN" (see, also, Area V5).

AREA V2 - ENTRANCE FOYER: The three niches on the far wall (instead of holding fake doors) contain chipped frescoes of:

- Dumathoin placing glowing gems into a range of mountains (which appear to be a primeval representation of the Sword Mountains).
- Dumathoin visting the Illithid god Ilsensine (manifested in its form as a disembodied emerald brain) and bathing with it in the greenish psionic energy of the maze-like Caverns of Thought.
- Dumothoin, Ilsensine (in the form of an Illithid avatar), and Laduguer, the god of the duergar, with hands clasped in a circle of friendship.

AREA V5 - THE SECRETS ROOM OF HARLSNOD DARKSHINE: Dwarven runes upon the wall read, "In these halls which his craft has wrought, the master architect Harlsnod Darkshine lays his secrets."

- *GM Note:* Harlsnod Darkshine designed and built the ceremonial vault. The treasure represents his own personal "secret offerings" to Dumathoin; whether the practice of sealing secrets into such offerings is literally true (and those secrets can somehow be extracted or simply whisper into the wind if the treasure is removed from the vault) is up to you. Harlsnod's tomb can be found on p. 183 of *Dungeon of the Mad Mage*.

AREA V6 - HAMMER AND ANVIL:

- **Frescoes:** The frescoes in this room depict the construction of the Temple of Dumathoin and the Heart of the Mountain (Level 6, Areas 15 and 16 of Undermountain, see p. 86-87 of *Dungeon of the Mad Mage*). In addition to the hammer inset into the wall, there is a secret compartment behind that hammer (DC 12 Intelligence to find if you've removed the hammer, DC 17 otherwise). The compartment contains maps of Level 6 of Undermountain, along with detailed notes showing the calculations used to determine the location of the Heart of the Mountain and the divinatory properties which resulted from "the whisper of the Keeper of Secrets Under the Mountain".

AREA V8 - DUMATHOIN'S TRUTH: This entry replaces the original room key.

- Set into the floor is an adamantine trap door with a pull ring.
- The walls are covered with frescoes depicting Dumathoin, Ilsensine, and Laduguer working together on some arcane project; not only are they surrounded by papers covered in dwarven runes, but strange, glowing diagrams fill the air around them. Dumathoin has turned from the work and seems to stare into the center of the room.
- **Trapdoor:** The trapdoor is false and cannot be lifted. Anyone who touches the trapdoor or its pull ring must succeed on a DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or be struck by rays of magical fire that spring from the painted Dumathoin's eyes, dealing 4d10 fire damage. The trap doesn't trigger if the target has total cover.
- **Frescoes:** A DC 15 Intelligence test reveals that work depicted in the frescoes seems to focus on dwarven anatomy.

DESIGN NOTE: THE MAIN VAULT

You can run the main vault exactly as written. Personally, I found the back story of Aurinax and the dragonstaff of Aghairon to be a fairly convoluted bit of continuity to introduce at literally the last moments of the scenario. I considered trying to drop some lore into earlier sections of the scenario regarding Aurinax and his relationship with Lord Dagult, but it still ended up feeling like an unneeded complication. So when I run the campaign I'll simply be dropping a red dragon down there. A straight, uncomplicated dragon fight to end Dragon Heist!

If your players are familiar with the Idle Champions of the Forgotten Realms video game, however, they might get a kick out of the familiar face.

THE BROKEN CIRCLE OF GODS

The images found throughout the vault, if revealed to (and believed by) the dwarven public, would be like dropping a *fireball* into the doctrine of the Morndinsamman (the council of dwarven gods). The events they depict predate the falling out between Laduguer and Ilsensine, and the breaking of the friendship these three gods once shared.

In the official lore, both the strange concord between Dumathoin and Ilsensine as well as the exact details of the falling out between Ilsensine and Laduguer are mysteries. Introducing these images into your campaign will peel back one layer of this mystery, although it may only result in even more questions being asked.

If you (or your players) choose to pursue this, this is my rough canon for this history:

- When the world was much younger than it is today, Dumathoin and Laduguer explored the roots of the world together. There they met Ilsensine. Or, at least, one of his ganglia – the “tentacles of infinite length” that stretch from Ilsensine throughout the many worlds.
- In doing so, they may (or may not) have been responsible for mind flayers coming to Faerûn for the first time.
- In any case, the three of them became friends, joined by a common interest in the secret paths of knowledge, the hyper-mental patterns by which knowledge itself is birthed into the world, and the deep places of the world.
- At a much later point in time, Laduguer approached his two friends with thoughts on how the dwarves Moradin had created could be improved. To perfect these ideas still needed much work, and the three friends fell to work.
- When the Morndinsammar discovered what they were doing, however, they were outraged. Laduguer covered for Dumathoin, but he and his daughter, Duerra, were cast out of the Morndinsammar.
- Laduguer continued his work, straining his relationship with Dumathoin. Things fell apart completely, however, when Laduguer discovered that Ilsensine had appropriated “his” work and actually begun having his illithids experiment on captured populations of dwarves. (This would eventually lead to the creation of the duergar.)
- Laduguer felt betrayed, the gods fell to war, and the acrimony between them became irreparable. During their conflict, Duerra was secretly captured by the illithid and became part of the duergar experiments.

The history which followed, in which the duergar became a slave race only to eventually lead at least one rebellion against their illithid overlords (one of which may or may not have involved Deep Duerra leading an army which captured an illithid city, see *Polyhedron* #110), is a mixture of legend and truth which I leave to someone else to untangle according to their need.

DESIGN NOTE

GM Tip: Encourage any players creating dwarf PCs to choose Dumathoin as their god. It'll let the revelations of the Vault land heavily.

AFTER THE VAULT

The total hoard of 500,000 gold coins weighs 10,000 pounds. Transporting it out of the Vault is not a simple task. And, if the PCs are planning to keep it, the question of where to store it is not an insignificant one. (The sum will raise eyebrows and call a lot of attention if they simply try to deposit it at a bank, for example.)

If the PCs are working for the Cassalanter, their noble patrons are able to literally throw a mass of manpower at the problem. They arrange for a dozen carts loaded with empty barrels and several dozen trusted servants to arrive at the Brandath Mausoleum, rapidly load the gold into the barrels, and then cart it back to their estate.

If all else goes quiet in the Grand Game, the remaining response teams are likely to be assigned to watch the PCs. Whatever plan they came up with for moving the gold (whether it involves the Cassalanter or

not), don't be afraid to use whatever response teams are remaining to complicate their scheme. A running battle through the streets of Waterdeep sounds like a lovely way to wrap the campaign up.

On that note, if the PCs do something to alert Laeral Silverhand that they have the money (and she knows or can easily conclude where it came from), she will politely ask them to return it in exchange for a 10% finder's fee. But she'll only ask once.

The PCs might strike on the idea that the vault is perfectly safe where it is, and they'll just make small withdrawals whenever they find themselves in need of funds. They might even use the *Stone of Golorr* to make it even more secure by wiping out everyone's memory of the Grand Game and/or the embezzled gold and/or the PCs' involvement. That sounds incredibly clever, and unless they make some mistake to draw considerable attention to themselves you should probably let them get away with it.

Which is my final note here: The published adventure advises the DM go to extraordinary lengths to strip the treasure away from the PCs. My recommendation is not do that: Enforce logical consequences. Have people ask the PCs for help if they become aware that they have a windfall. But if the PCs get away with the ultimate heist... well, that's just awesome.

PART 6D/6E/6F: FACTION REPORTS OF THE GRAND GAME

[by Justin Alexander – March 21st, 2019](#)

Suspicion: Neverwinter's Enigma is nothing less than the 500,000 dragons embezzled from the city funds of Waterdeep.

These lengthy reports, which can be discovered within the various faction lairs, are designed to be given to the players as handouts. They provide the PCs an opportunity to peer deeper into the machinations of the Grand Game, and can also serve as a reference for the GM to figure out what knowledge each faction currently has (and which its agents might surrender under questioning).

The reports here do not necessarily reflect the knowledge held by each faction at the very beginning of [Dragon Heist](#). They have been written to reflect the state of the reports at the time the PCs are most likely to encounter them (during the Eye Heists). During earlier events, the factions may still be trying to piece together some of this information. (Most notably, if the PCs stage a heist at the Sea Maidens Faire without tipping off Jarlaxle about the Grand Game, there won't be any report as he will not yet be involved in the Grand Game.) As the events of the campaign develop, you may also want to update these reports to reflect ongoing events (including explicit or implicit references to the activities of the PCs).

You'll note that each faction refers to the Eyes using a different nomenclature. This complicates things slightly for the players (who need to figure out which names equate to which names), but not significantly. The real point of this is to deepen verisimilitude: These factions don't all compare notes. Each faction has a unique perspective on the Grand Game, and allowing the players to see that in practical ways will make it clear that the game world is a dynamic, interactive place, not a monolithic entity.

As a quick reference, when the PCs get drawn into the Grand Game:

- The *Stone of Golorr* was stolen by Xanathar. It was taken from Xanathar by Dalakhar, and taken from Dalakhar by the Gralhunds.
- Xanathar's Eye was originally stolen by the Zhentarim from the Protector's Enclave in Neverwinter. Xanathar slew a Zhentarim embassy and took the Eye.
- The Zhentarim Eye was taken from Renaer's mourning locket.
- The Cassalanter Eye was taken from the crypt of Lady Alethea Brandath.

The reports are presented in both plain text and also as PDFs with fancy handwriting fonts.

GRALHUND STUDY OF THE GRAND GAME

These disparate papers, written in the hand of Orond Gralhund, concern the strategies and machinations of House Gralhund.

Uktar 4th, 1491 DR

They have treated us like fools. In the wake of the Lord Murders, with so many vacancies among the Lords and with Yalah's lineage, it should have required no effort at all for her to be elevated to her rightful place. For the Eralhunds to be elevated to their rightful place, so that she could guarantee the prosperity of the Eralhunds for future generations. Instead they have taken our money. They have taken our favor. And they have spat in our faces. They have closed their ranks against us once again.

This journal entry, and others like it throughout late 1491 DR, speak to the bitterness of the Gralhunds, who felt slighted by being excluded from the ruling council of the city.

Nightfall 21st, 1491 DR

At the fires of Simril last night, Lord Berenger spoke to me of a curious matter. Neverember's Enigma. It seems that the former Open Lord kept some monstrous secret, and now word of that secret is beginning to spread. There are those who believe a Grand Game may be beginning. I sense in this an opportunity to right the great wrong which has been done to Yalah.

It is clear from Orond's notes, however, that over the next few weeks his efforts to penetrate the Grand Game were stymied. The resources of the Gralhunds were limited. But Orond thought outside the box: He embedded agents (referred to by the codephrases "Eagle" and "Catoblepas") in Renaer Neverember's household. As Renaer was estranged from his father this was a long-shot at best, but it paid off. A report from Eagle reads:

We've identified the gnome who's been keeping surveillance on R.N. Dalakhar. An agent of Lord D. Please advise.

Several weeks later, the gnome Dalakhar abruptly stopped his surveillance of Renaer Neverember. Eagle played a hunch, followed up, and discovered that Dalakhar had ended up in the employ of the Xanathar Guild.

Dal. must still be acting under the orders of Lord D. No other explanation for the sudden shift of allegiance.

Contemporary notes from other sources allowed Orond to begin piecing certain facts about the Grand Game and Neverember's Enigma.

There are Three Eyes with which Neverember's Enigma may be seen. The First Eye is held by Kanathar, and lies somewhere within his lair. Bulette's report that this lair can be accessed from teleportal sites within X's sewer hideouts provides a potential means by which this Eye could be seized, but in the absence of a synchronized key these teleportal sites are useless.

A later note states:

The Second Eye has almost certainly been taken from R/V by the Chentarium. It is more important than ever that we discover where M has hidden his head.

And then, this:

Xanatharians are riled. Word on the street is that something was stolen from them. But not the First Eye. The stone of Solarr.

This report is attached to analysis written by Orond.

What if the "Key to Neverember's Enigma" which Kanathar was known to hold in his possession is not, as I have suspected, the Eye? But instead the Stone of Solarr? If so, then what better thief than an agent of Dagutt's? Perhaps even sent there for that purpose. The gnome has taken the Stone, I am certain of it. If we can find Dalakhar, then we can seize the Key. We can take the Stone.

JARLAXLE'S REPORT ON THE GRAND GAME

(written in silver ink upon black paper)

This meticulously organized folder of intelligence reports and summaries appears to have been compiled by "Jarlaxle Baenre." It is clear from its contents that Jarlaxle was, until recently, unaware of the Grand Game currently taking place in Waterdeep. Once he got an inkling of what was happening, however, he evidently took immediate steps to remedy the situation. In these efforts, the "Gralhund nimblewright has proven most useful," but the information obtained by the Gralhunds is apparently "woefully incomplete." Despite that, Jarlaxle was apparently able to draw a significant conclusion.

Suspicion: Neverember's Enigma is nothing less than the 500,000 dragons embezzled from the city funds of Waterdeep.

Once that conclusion was reached, Jarlaxle's interest in the matter clearly spiked and he intensified efforts to bring himself up to speed, dispatching Bregan D'Aerthe, a covert band of mercenary agents in his command, to gather as much information as they could by any means necessary.

It seems that Jarlaxle's interest is driven by a desire to win favor with Laeral Silverhand, the Open Lord of Waterdeep, by returning the stolen money to her.

There are numerous factions in play, but I suspect the most significant are these: The Cassalanter, Xanathar (that bloated bag of gas), the Manshoonian Zhentarim, the Gralhunds, Lord Dagult, and the Open Lord. It seems that other players, like the Black Viper, are also involved, or interested in involving themselves, and some attention should be paid to how they might be turned to good use.

Of prime importance are the Golorr Eyes: Xanathar's Eye, I suspect, has been entrusted to Sylgar's keeping. Manshoon's Eye is almost certainly secured within Kolat Towers. The Cassalanter's Eye probably lies somewhere in their Estate.

Gaining control of an Eye must be our top priority. Those who control a Golorr Artifact are the pivots on which the outcome of the Grand Game will turn.

CASSALANTER FACTION REPORT ON THE GRAND GAME

Notes on Neverember's Enigma

By late 1487 DR, it had become clear to those with the right connections that the Open Lord had begun another of his secretive enterprises. A great deal of quiet attention was turned upon this matter, not the least of which was our own.

Of course, when there are many searching for answers, it is prudent to keep as careful an eye upon the other searchers as upon that for which you search. It was from the Boanishomus we learned that Neverember had sent agents to Candlekeep to make discreet inquiries regarding 'an archmage named Golon.' The Boanishomus mistook this intelligence, first believing that the Enigma ultimately concerned the dark elves by way of the Sorcerer, Archmage of Myerphennarzan, and their expending great energy in pursuing summons of Galari, an Archmage of Ancient Netheril.

Golon was the true name of interest, however. The Stone of Golon. According to some histories, it was brought to Abeir-Tonil when the ancient floating city of Xripku, capital of the Abolethic Sovereignty, first plummeted to the world and settled deep below the Sea of Fallen Stars. According to others, an aboleth who came to Abeir-Tonil before the arrival of Xripku created the Stone. Or perhaps he fled to Abeir-Tonil carrying the Stone and Xripku came in pursuit of their prize. Some versions of the tale claim that the Stone was forged during the primeval battles between Shan and Selune, in the very moment that the world of Tonil was formed.

Whatever the truth, the Stone of Golon was held by the Abolethic Sovereignty within the vaults of Xripku on the world of Abeir, only to be lost during the Wailing Years.

Of far more interest is what the Stone is capable of. Whether it predates or co-dates the creation of Tonil, in arcane terms this gives

the Stone a position of primacy, making it capable of effects which no magic item or artifact created in these younger days could possibly duplicate.

When the proper ritual is performed, the Stone can utterly eradicate a memory or piece of information, wiping it clean from scrolls and inscriptions while simultaneously stripping it from every living soul on Toril except for the person who is attuned to the Stone. The Stone itself also retains the knowledge, making it the ultimate repository of countless ages of knowledge deemed valuable enough to hide from the world. Exactly what piece of knowledge Neverember sought to claim from the Stone pales utterly in comparison to the totality of secrets which its owner can literally hold in the palm of their hands.

The ritual required for the Stone to destroy a piece of knowledge requires a second abolethic artifact, a small tetrahedron of red jade. We now believe that this artifact remains in Lord Neverember's possession.

It was those gossipmongers the Brassfeathers who first babbled out the revelation that Neverember had embezzled half a million gold dragons from the treasuries of Waterdeep. Half a million dragons which had seemingly vanished from the knowledge of man, woman, and fae.

It was then that we realized that, unlike ourselves, Neverember had not been captivated by the secrets held by the Stone. He wished to forge a new secret of his own. We are now certain that he used the Stone to hide the location in which he has secreted the embezzled dragons. As such, it is virtually certain that the only path to this hoard lies through the Stone itself.

Notes on the Melainkyer Vault

In addition to the Stone of Golann, our own researches indicated that Lord Neverember had been researching the religious mummery of the Melainkyer dwarves.

Clan Melainkyer were the first to begin excavating under what is now Waterdeep. The earliest portions of Undermountain were, in fact, the Underhalls in which they made their homes and wrought their mithral-craft. They were worshippers of Dumathoin, the Keeper of the Mountain's Secrets.

When we learned of the Stone's relationship to the keeping of secrets, it seemed clear to us that Neverember's two esoteric pursuits must be linked. The nature of this link, however, eluded us until our attention turned to the ceremonial vaults which the Melainkyer once built. Their cult believed that Dumathoin encoded his secrets into the veins of one and precious stones he placed in the mountains he raised from the earth for the dwarven people. In their mining, the dwarves supposedly released Dumathoin's secrets into the world. This angered Dumathoin and created a period of discord between the dwarves and the *Mordiansammau*, the council of dwarven gods. In order to appease their petty gods, the Melainkyer would mystically bind the 'secrets of the mountain' into items of finely-wrought dwarfcraft and then make offerings of it to Dumathoin by securing them within their ceremonial vaults.

One of these vaults had been built near the Underhalls, most likely somewhere beneath what is now Waterdeep. We quickly discovered, however, that the knowledge of its location has been lost. Indeed, the more we delved into this matter, the clearer it became that there was a very specific pattern to the loss of this knowledge. Although a recherche topic, once we had found the proper sources from past ages it was fairly trivial to find any number of facts

regarding the Vault. The only piece of information that was systematically missing from every account was its location.

It is difficult to say for certain, but it seems overwhelmingly likely that this loss is consistent with a Golom-wipe. The knowledge lost in such a wipe is very specific, and if someone had sought to eliminate the knowledge of the Vault's location, it would nevertheless leave other lore regarding the Vault intact, in just such a fashion as we discovered it.

The first suspicion was that Neverember had been seeking the location of the Mplainsyer Vault and had similarly concluded that it was a secret which could now only be learned from the Stone.

When Neverember's true interest in the Stone became clear to us, however, we quickly concluded that it was Neverember himself who had used the Stone to hide the Vault's location. Furthermore, it is recorded that the Vault was looted during the dark elf invasion which ended the Mplainsyer civilization and its secrets, whatever they may have been, were scattered to the corners of the world. Whatever there may be of value within the Vault, therefore, must have been placed there by Neverember.

The doors of a Mplainsyer Vault were ceremonially sealed. Opening the doors required a single dragonscale to be laid upon the bas relief of the sun and then struck while lit by sunlight. If the doors should shut upon us while we stood within the Vault, they can reputedly be opened from within by simply laying a hand upon them.

Notes on the Disposition of the Eyes

As one of numerous inquiries, we discovered a hiding place beneath the crypt of Lord Dagult's late wife. Although we initially believed the powerful magical item we discovered there to be Neverember's Enigma, its identity and purpose eluded us until we became aware of the Scour of Goldorn.

It is now clear that Lord Dagult had the Scour of Goldorn blinded by removing its Eyes, and that the artifact we recovered was Alethea's Eye. Although it seems certain that Dagult's intention was focused on increasing the difficulty of anyone uncovering his own secrets, one is nevertheless left with the impression of a small child defacing that which they cannot understand out of petty spite.

Nevertheless, the complexity of the game has multiplied and we seek now not one Goldorn Artifact, but several.

Dagult's Eye was kept close by the Lord Protector, who carried it with him to Neverwinter and most likely had it on his person when Haeral deposed him as Open Lord. Nevertheless, Dagult's Eye was stolen from him by the Zheentarium and held for a time within the Kholat Towers. We attempted to seize the eye from Maerhoken, but found our efforts repulsed by the energy field surrounding the Towers. Before we could obtain one of the pass-amulets which allow access, Dagult's Eye was lost when Maerhoken sent it as part of an embassy to Savathar. Savathar had Maerhoken's agents slain and took Dagult's Eye for himself.

Brevaer's Eye was held by Lord Dagult's son. This Eye appears to have been taken from Brevaer during his kidnappings, although it is currently unclear to us whether its ultimate disposition lies with the agents of Savathar or Maerhoken.

A BRIEFING FOR XANATHAR CONCERNING THE GRAND GAME

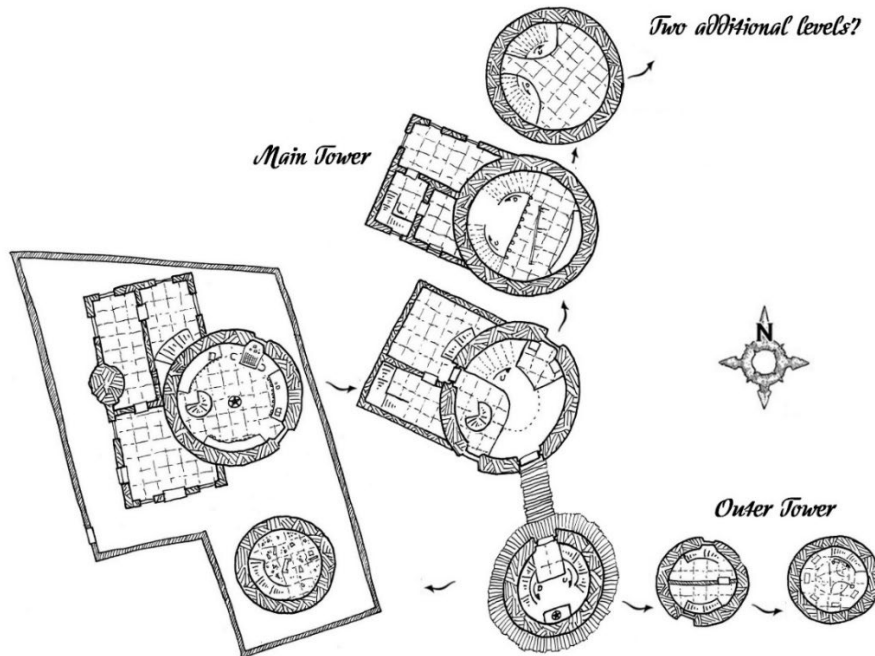
From the Hand of Ahmaergo—

I am very sorry that we have failed you lord Xanathar. You should not have been surprised by the revelations of the emissaries of the ZhenArim.

The litany of what we now know—

The Eye you hold is one of Three which belong to the Stone.

The Eye which should have been yours has been taken from Neverember's get by Manshoon to Kblat Towers. We currently seek to capture a ZhenArim lieutenant and take possession of one of the pass-amulets which would allow us access to the Towers. Unfortunately, Manshoon's agents are well-trained and have either evaded our attempts or destroyed their amulets before we could secure them. Through N'ihiloor's enhanced interrogations, however, we have ascertained blueprints for the Towers which will prove essential when it comes time to take that which by right belongs to you.



We have also learned that Manshoon himself resides in an extradimensional citadel, accessible from a portal of some sort at the upper level of the Outer Towers.

The disposition of the Final Eye is uncertain to us at this time.

The gnome Dalakhar was an agent of Lord Neverember, seeking to reclaim Neverember's Enigma, which you had by rights taken from our former Open Lord.

The Enigma is, in fact, the Stone of Golorr. I have agents en route to Candlekeep to delve deeper into its secrets. The Stone once belonged to the Abolethic Sovereignty, and was reputedly stolen from the Vaults of the Floating City of Hæiphu by Mask, the Lord of Shadows. As a Hæiphuan Artifact, it is likely that the Stone predates the creation of Toril itself, granting it, within the circles of mysticism, a position of primacy. Its true powers, and thus the reason why Neverember sought to blind it, are unclear to us, but from a position of primacy it would be capable of feats impossible to duplicate even by Mystara herself in this Age.

MANSHOON'S REPORT ON THE GRAND GAME

Ritual of the Stone of Golorr

The use of the Stone to magically eliminate a memory or piece of knowledge from the realms of Abeir-Toril requires a special casting of the legend lore rite which requires twelve hours to perform. In addition, one must possess a second Abolethic artifact, a small tetrahedron of red jade which I am certain is still held by Lord Dagult in Neverwinter.

During the ritual, burn incenses infused with the blood of an aboleth. The sides of the tetrahedron will unfold, revealing slots into which four ivory strips may be inserted. The Stone is then placed within the tetrahedron and the sides will close upon it.

As the ritual is completed, the tetrahedron will open once more, revealing the Stone of Golorr as it releases a burst of psionic energy. This energy will refract through the person attuned to the Stone, translating the knowledge they focus upon and erasing it from the known world.

The Stone of Golorr has been blinded by Lord Dagult.

The Neverwinter Eye was obtained from the Protector's Enclave in Neverwinter, but was taken by Xanathar's treachery. It remains in the beholder's possession.

The Waterdeep Eye has been taken from Renaer Neverember and secured within the library's Astral Vault.

It is apparent, based on interrogations of their impish agents, that the Cassalanterers possess the third eye, although it is uncertain where the Cassalanter Eye originated. Perhaps Lord Dagult entrusted it to them.²

PART 7: HOW THE REMIX WORKS

by [Justin Alexander](#) – March 25th, 2019



Our time with [Dragon Heist](#) is drawing to a close. I have a few more Addendums I want to explore, and there are a number of Running the Campaign columns based on my actual play that I think are likely to provide useful insight and cool ideas. But the core of the Alexandrian Remix is complete.

When I wrote [my original review of Dragon Heist](#) in November last year, I did not anticipate that the campaign would become the central focus point of the Alexandrian for the next several months.

Even when I started writing the Alexandrian Remix of the campaign a few weeks later, I wasn't expecting to still be writing about it in February. My rough plan was that it would run through December and wrap up. What happened?

One of the major shifts was the decision to do full [adversary roster](#) breakdowns for each heist in the campaign. This was basically essential for me actually running the campaign, and it turned out to be a great opportunity to introduce a wide swath of new GMs to these really powerful techniques. But it was also the seed which saw my original intention of more-or-less briefly saying, "Use this lair to run a heist!" grow into a much more expansive concept of [breaking down the entire heist structure](#) and showing how each lair could be fully adapted to that structure.

The Faction Outposts also outgrew their original scope. My plan had been to highlight how material from the chase sequence in Chapter 3 of the book could be repurposed, and my expectation had been that I could basically say, "Use the Autumn Version of this location." In order to balance the number of outposts between each faction, however, I ended up adding several all-original locations to the campaign. The process of making the clue-progression of the campaign more robust also meant including significantly more material with each outpost.

For something that stuck much closer to the original spec, look at the Faction Response Teams: The Faction Outposts were supposed to look more like that, with one post for the outposts and one post for the response teams. (Although the response teams actually expanded, too, as I realized that response teams should be included for factions beyond the four villains.)

In the end, a feature that I had originally thought would be perhaps 10,000 words ended up being more than 55,000 words. Seeing this, some have suggested that my early comments that the Remix primarily represents what the campaign *could* have been and arguably *should* have been was in error. (That clearly adding all of this new material would have considerably expanded the size of the book.) I don't think this is accurate; reshaping material (and explaining the design choices I was making) is often more costly in terms of word count.

I primarily mention this length, however, to explain why this final installment of the Remix is necessary.

You see, when the original intention was a fairly short series of a little over half a dozen posts, I decided that the best structural organization was *design-oriented*:

- Discuss general principles (how the factions are organized and the new, heist-oriented structure of the campaign)
- Introduce adversary rosters and a proto-heist (Gralhund Villa)
- The path from Gralhund Villa to the Eye Heists (Faction Outposts & Response Teams)
- The Eye Heists (the heist structure and the four villain lairs)
- Making the Three Clue Rule and node-based scenario design of the campaign more robust (revised revelation lists tying all of the material together)

Most of these, with the exception of the Eye Heists themselves, were visualized as being one post. In actual practice, only one of them – Gralhund Villa – actually achieved that goal, and the tail end of the series also saw feature creep (adding full remixes of both Finding Floom and the Nimblewright Investigation, plus reference timelines and faction reports).

As the length increased, the original intention became obfuscated. The material had also become more specific than originally intended, encouraging GMs to simply pick up the Alexandrian Remix and run it... except the material wasn't actually organized for doing that. It was organized as a design discussion.

All of this created a lot of confusion and frustration, particularly as the series began attracting new readers who weren't necessarily familiar with the Alexandrian or the discussions out of which the Remix had arisen.

RUN-TIME ORGANIZATION

As I've discussed these issues with people, there has been some confusion about what the distinction is between a design-oriented structure of the material and a run-time organization of the material.

Here's what the final organization of the Remix series here at the Alexandrian looked like:

- [Part 1: The Villains](#)
- [Part 1B: Other Factions](#)
- [Part 1C: Player Character Factions](#)
- [Part 2: Gralhund Villa](#)
- [Part 3: Faction Outposts](#)
- [Part 3B: More Faction Outposts](#)
- [Part 3C: Response Teams](#)
- [Part 3D: Other Response Teams](#)
- [Part 4: The Eyes of the Stone](#)
- [Part 4B: Bregan D'Aerthe – Sea Maidens Faire](#)

[Part 4C: Cassalanter Villa](#)
[Part 4D: Xanathar's Lair](#)
[Part 4E: Zhentarim - Kolat Towers](#)
[Part 5: Clues and Timelines](#)
[Part 5B: Finding Floon](#)
[Part 5C: The Nimblewright Investigation](#)
[Part 5D: Backtracking Dalakhar & Kalain](#)
[Part 5E: Outpost and Lair Revelation List](#)
[Part 6: Golorr Artifacts](#)
[Part 6B: The Brandath Crypts](#)
[Part 6C: The Vault](#)
[Part 6D: Faction Reports \(Gralhund/Jarlaxle\)](#)
[Part 6E: Faction Reports \(Cassalanter\)](#)
[Part 6F: Faction Reports \(Xanathar/Zhentarim\)](#)
[Part 7: How the Remix Works](#)

(To aid with navigation, this table of contents has also been added to the first post of the series now that it's wrapping up.)

As noted, this was a design-oriented structure: I was grouping the material, and discussing the material, by the method of design. For example, the revision of the Floon investigation came almost last because it was part of the discussion about how to structure revelation lists in investigations throughout the campaign.

From a run-time perspective, of course, this makes no sense: The Floon investigation should come first because it's the first thing that happens in the campaign, and it shouldn't be grouped with the Nimblewright Investigation because they have virtually nothing to do with each other. So when I actually sat down to run the campaign, this was how I organized the material:

0.0 Campaign Overview
1.0 Finding Floon
2.0 Trollskull
3.0 Nimblewright Investigation
3.1 Gralhund Villa
4.1 Faction Response Teams
4.2 Faction Outposts
5.0 Heist Overview
5.1 Bregan D'Aerthe - Sea Maidens Faire
5.2 Cassalanter Estate
5.3 Xanathar's Lair
5.4 Zhentarim - Kolat Towers
6.0 Brandath Crypts
6.1 The Vault

The difference is stark, and I suspect abundantly clear to anyone who has been reading the Alexandrian Remix.

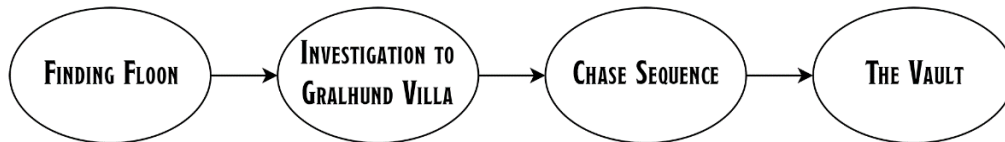
It should be noted that I largely don't regret presenting the Alexandrian Remix in the way that I did: A design-oriented approach was valuable and allowed the presentation of material that would not have been possible in a run-time presentation. A run-time presentation, by its very nature, is stripped down and utilitarian, and I believe there was value in actually discussing and exploring the design choices I was making in a step-by-step fashion.

But if you're actually looking to run the Alexandrian Remix (which I heartily recommend), you'd probably benefit from ripping it apart and putting it back together in a run-time organization. In many ways, this was always my intention: That GMs would take the Remix and then put in the work to finalize it into their own campaign.

HOW THE REMIX WORKS

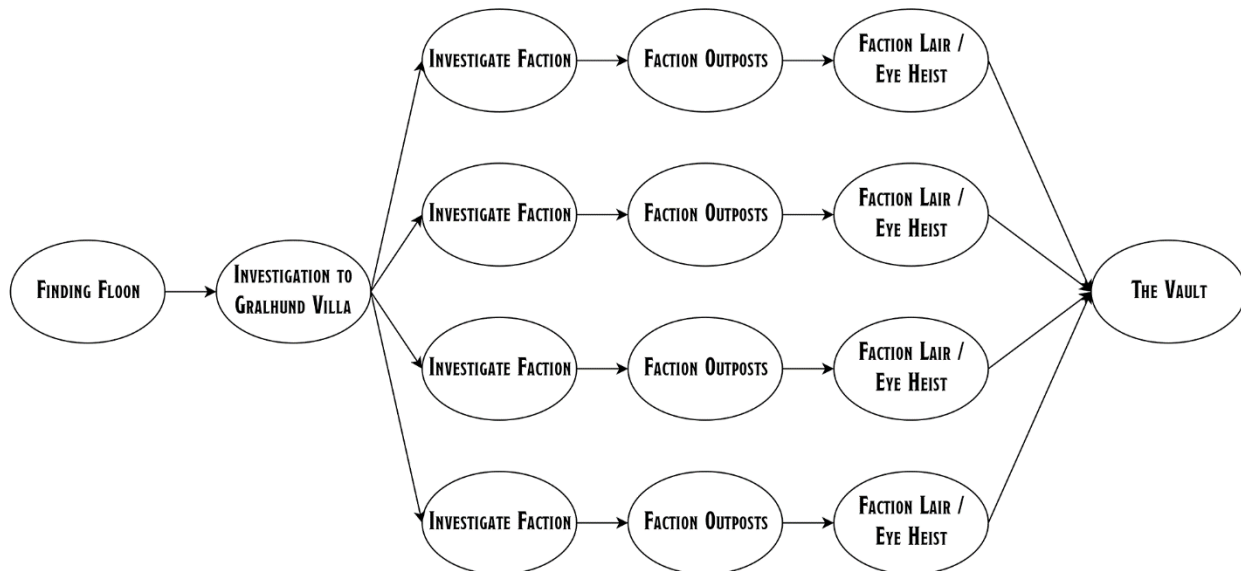
To that end, allow me to wrap things up with a concise summary of the structure of the *Dragon Heist* campaign.

If you're running *Dragon Heist* as it was published, the structure of the campaign looks like this:



This structure is lightly accented with contrapuntal **Faction Missions** unrelated to the core structure of the campaign, although the application of these missions is limited because the Nimblewright Investigation, Gralhund Villa, and subsequent chase sequence are likely compressed into a very limited span of time (probably 24-72 hours at most), which means that faction missions will largely occur between Finding Floon and the *fireball* explosion. (And, of course, the lairs are completely absent.)

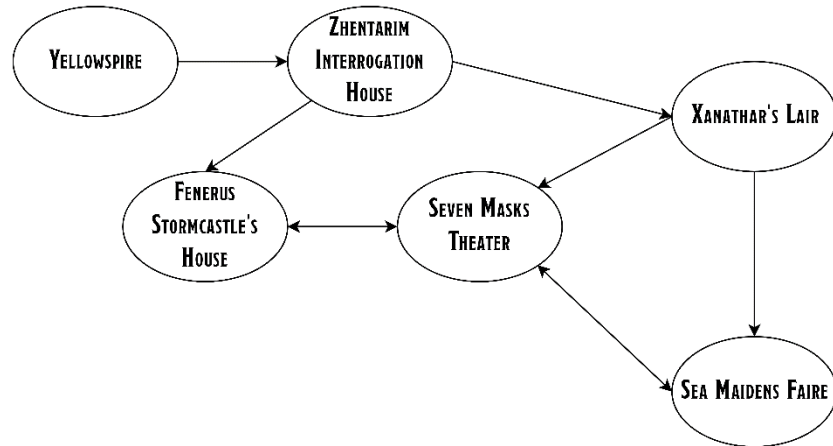
If you're using the Alexandrian Remix, on the other hand, then the macro-structure looks like this:



This macro-structure is accompanied by *two* strong contrapuntal elements: The **Faction Missions** and the **Faction Response Teams**. What is essentially the expansion of Act III of the campaign (the investigations culminating in the Eye Heists) also allows these contrapuntal elements to be more thoroughly interwoven with the core structure of the campaign. In other words, the PCs will be called upon to complete faction missions while continuing their ongoing investigation into Neverember's Enigma, thus complicating the action and possibly requiring them to make some tough choices.

(It can also be argued that the event timeline of [the Fleetswake & Waukeentide festivals](#) also constitutes a third weak contrapuntal element.)

It should be noted that the distribution of clues throughout the Alexandrian Remix will belie the straight, parallel lines of investigation implied by the diagram above. For example, here's what a tiny selection of possible investigatory paths looks like in detail:



But in terms of actually running the campaign, it's the macro-structure you need to pay attention to: The PCs investigate a villainous faction. You point them at an outpost. The outpost will contain clues that point them to a lair. Performing a heist at the lair will get them the Eye in the lair. Repeat to obtain the other Eyes.

If the players are struggling, use one of the proactive elements of the campaign (their faction allies or the faction response teams) to dump a lead in their lap.

Beyond that, just follow the players' lead and everything else will take care of itself.

A SIMPLE CHECKLIST

A number of GMs — particularly new GMs — have told me that the ideas of the Remix excite them, but they feel overwhelmed by its complexity. In practice, however, the Remix can all be boiled down into a very simple structure:

1. Are the PCs looking for a lead to one of the Eyes? If yes, pick a Faction Outpost and point them at it.
2. Did the PCs just piss off one of the Factions? If yes, pick a Faction Response Team and have them target the PCs.
3. 3. Are the PCs floundering and don't know what to do next? If yes, pick a Faction Response Team and have them target the PCs. (If you're not sure how they might target the PCs, just have them show up and try to kill them.)

Repeat until the campaign is done.

A GUIDED TOUR

With all of that in mind, let me just briefly walk you through the design-oriented posts on the website from a run-oriented perspective:

FIRST: “Finding Floon” is the beginning of the campaign. The revised “Finding Floon” investigation is [Part 5B](#). An enhanced opening scene for the campaign is presented in [Addendum: First Impressions](#).

SECOND: The PCs are rewarded with Trollskull Manor and are recruited into one or more factions. Spend some time allowing them to fix up their new home/business and run perhaps 1-3 faction missions. This is discussed briefly in [Part 1C](#).

THIRD: The explosion happens. The Nimblewright Investigation which follows is covered in [Part 5C](#) and [Part 5D](#).

FOURTH: The investigation leads them to Gralhund Villa. This scenario is given an adversary roster and other tweaks in [Part 2](#).

FIFTH: After Gralhund Villa the PCs will either have the *Stone of Golorr* and need to find the Eyes (leading to the Eye Heists), or one of the factions will have obtained the *Stone of Golorr* and the PCs will need to find that (as an “Eye” Heist) and find the Eyes.

This is the core investigation loop: Point them at Faction Outposts ([Part 3](#) and [Part 3B](#)) which will lead them to the Faction Lairs ([Part 4](#)).

SIXTH: With the *Stone* reconstituted, the PCs will be able to go to the Brandath Crypts ([Part 6B](#)) and access the Vault ([Part 6C](#)).

PROACTIVE ELEMENTS: In addition to the faction missions from the *Dragon Heist* book, use the Faction Response Teams ([Part 3C](#) and [Part 3D](#)) to actively bring the Grand Game to the PCs.

REFERENCE:

- [Part 1: The Villains](#) and [Part 1B: Other Factions](#) provide a high-level overview of the major players in *Dragon Heist*.
- [Part 5: Clues and Timelines](#) has a reference timeline and revelations pertaining to the macro-mysteries of the campaign.
- [Part 5E: Outpost and Lair Revelation List](#) has revelation lists you can use to track the primary investigation paths in detail.
- [Part 6: Golorr Artifacts](#) provides an overview of how the *Stone of Golorr* operates and how it can be used / has been used.

LEVELING UP

This is alluded to in various places through the Remix, but I recommend leveling up:

- After Chapter 1 (when they rescue Floon).
- After the Gralhund raid.
- After each of the heists.

There are four available heists, although the PCs may only need to do two or three of them. So the PCs will either be somewhere between 5th and 7th level going into the Vault. (In the case of my campaign, the

PCs did all four heists, but we were on a race to the end and I forgot to have them level up. So they were 6th level heading into the Vault.)

This means that heists done later will be easier. This seems to either provide a satisfying experience (“we’re getting better at this!”) or allows players to kick a heist they find particularly daunting or difficult down the road until they’re more powerful.

Check out [Addendum: The Dragon of Dragon Heist](#) for a detailed look at how the Vault itself can be handled.

A FOND FAREWELL

And so we come to the end of the Alexandrian Remix of *Dragon Heist*.

If the Remix has brought you to the Alexandrian for the first time, I hope you’ll stick around. Not only for more *Dragon Heist* material (as I mentioned above, there are several addendums and Running the Campaign columns that are likely to still appear over the next few weeks), but for all the other cool stuff we do here. If you haven’t checked out [Gamemastery 101](#), it’s a great place to take a deep dive into a lot of the material that underlies the work I’ve been doing on *Dragon Heist*.

If you liked what I did with this remix, you can check out a very different one with [the Alexandrian Remix of Eternal Lies](#) for the *Trail of Cthulhu* RPG. The *Eternal Lies* remix is much less about fixing the structure of the campaign and much more about enhancing it – adding 300+ props, 150+ diorama elements, 450+ pages and 130,000+ words (including two completely new scenarios) to an already amazing campaign by Will Hindmarch, Jeff Tidball, and Jeremy Keller.

As you get your *Dragon Heist* remix campaigns to the table, I hope you’ll also come back here and share your own stories, tips, and modifications. Not only because I love hearing stories like that, but because I’m a big believer in GMs sharing their lore. It benefits the community and it encourages you to think deeply about your own campaigns, which is the first step towards improving your craft as a Game Master.

Good gaming, my friends!

ADDENDUM: FIRST IMPRESSIONS

by [Justin Alexander](#) – February 26th, 2019



In [Part 5B: Finding Floon](#), I focused on restructuring the investigation into Floon's disappearance starting with Volo hiring the PCs to find his missing friend. But that actually picks up the thread just *after* the [Dragon Heist](#) campaign begins. The action actually kicks off with a short sequence in which the PCs witness some Xanatharian NPCs pick a fight with a Zhentarim and then, three rounds into that altercation, a troll erupts out of the portal in the Yawning Portal with a nest of stirges clinging to its back.

It's a good moment. Nothing wrong with that scene.

But when, thanks to the ingenuity of the wider *Dragon Heist* DM community, I was able to find a minor restructuring and enhancement of the sequence that, when I launched my own run of the campaign, worked really, really, really well. So I'm offering it as an addendum to the *Dragon Heist* remix.

STEP ONE – FIRST STEPS: During character creation, let your players know that they're aiming to create characters who are already working together as a group. (They may have *just* come together for the first time, but they have, in fact, decided to work together.) You might even tell them that the first moment of the campaign will be as they step through the doors of the Yawning Portal looking to meet with their contact: They need to figure out how to weave their backgrounds together to reach that point.

In my campaign this took the form of Pashar, whose mother had been captured by pirates, and Kittisoht, a tiefling pirate who was a part of that crew, but became friends with Pashar while he was in captivity. Pashar had been released to bring back a 30,000 gp ransom for their mother and Kittisoht accompanied him. On

their way to Waterdeep, they had run into Theron, a wild elf in the Ardeep Forest, who was touched by their plight and agreed to help them.

(Slight wrinkle here: Pashar been told that the ransom was “600 harvest moons.” Failing to realize that a harvest moon is worth 50 gp, he was under the impression he was seeking a 600 gp ransom... not a 30,000 gp ransom. Those who agreed to help him before the truth came out were somewhat nonplussed.)

Upon reaching Waterdeep, Kittisoth decided that a great way to make money would be to compete in the seeding brackets for Xanathar’s underground fighting tournaments. She sought out Edana, the fourth PC, who set her up with a fight, but she was then badly injured during the fight. Edana was able to make introductions to the fifth and final PC, Kora Marwood, who was both a cleric of Mystra (and could heal the injured would-be fighter) and a Harper agent who had been looking to form a crew of her own. She told them that, if they were looking for fast coin, she had a job they could all attempt together, and they headed for the Yawning Portal.

STEP TWO – FRIENDLY FACES: Show them the “Friendly Faces” handout on p. 221 of *Dragon Heist* and ask them to choose one of the characters pictured there. That’s the contact they’re coming to meet. You can chat a little bit about how they know them, or just jump into it.

There’s also some [alternative art](#) that was created by FitzChivalry for these characters.

STEP THREE – GANG TROUBLE: Before they have a chance to really start talking with their contact, however, the conflict between Yagra Stonefist and the Xanatharians begins at the table next to theirs. (Unless they picked Yagra Stonefist, in which case the trouble comes straight at them.) This is detailed on p. 21 of *Dragon Heist*.

Add a black flying serpent tattoo to the back of Yagra’s neck. (*Note:* She isn’t a Manshoonian Zhentarim; she’s with the Doom Raiders.)

Note: If they’ve selected Bonnie or Threestrings as their contact, then they’re working. Perfect excuse for them to say, “Get a table and I’ll come see you in a minute.”

STEP FOUR – A BRIEF DISCUSSION: The bar brawl resolved, the PCs have a chance to briefly talk with their contact. Turns out they’re just brokering a meeting with someone who needs the PCs’ services, and *their* contact hasn’t shown up. They buy the PCs a round of drinks while they wait, and that’s when—

STEP FIVE – DIP! DIP! DIP! DIP! DIP!: A chant of, “Dip! Dip Dip!” starts up in one corner of the bar and quickly spreads through the whole crowd. A young man stands up, goes to the bar, and slaps down a gold piece. Durnan nods, slides the coin off the bar, and then gives him a wooden cup and a silver bell.

The young man strips down to his underwear as the dipping song begins:

THE DIPPING SONG

*Deep and dark down below,
where only fools and braggarts go,
where monster roam and dangers mortal,
few survive the Yawning Portal,
stand your ground or ring the bell,
and hope you make it up the well!*

Then the young man goes over to the portal. At the edge of the portal he quaffs a beer, throws the cup down the portal, and grabs the rope. His friends begin lowering him.

Betting: Instantaneously the betting strats. (“Two silver he stays down for three minutes!” and “A copper he comes up with the cup!” That sort of thing.)

Return: After one minute, people start grumbling unhappily and others cheer; coins are exchanged as bets begin getting resolved. Two minutes pass; maybe there’s a chance for the PCs and their contact to exchange a few more words. (“So that is this all about?” “I’m not sure. But it might have something to do with this Zhent-Xanathar gang war that’s been flaring up.”)

At almost three minutes, the sound of the bell echoes up from the hole. There are groans from those who *almost* won their 3 minute bets. The rope is pulled up.

Troll: The young man appears over the lip of the portal – one hand holding the rope, the other triumphantly holding the cup above his head. He alights on the side of the portal and begins walking away.

He’s ten feet away from the portal when the troll clammers up from below. The PCs can see that there’s something wrong with the troll’s back; the flesh there seems to writhe. Roll initiative!

1st Round:

- The troll attacks the dipper.
- Durnan pulls a greatsword from below the bar, vaults over the bar, and charges forward.
- The Zhents who attacked Yagra (if they’re still around) make a break for the door (along with many others).

2nd Round:

- The flock of 12 stirges on the troll’s back explode into a frenzied flight.
- If the PCs are involved, Durnan shouts, “You focus on the stirges! The troll is mine!”
- Yagra (if she’s still around) joins Durnan in fighting the troll.

Wrapping Up the Fight: As the PCs finish mopping up the stirges, Durnan will ram his shoulder into the troll, causing it to plunge backwards into the Yawning Portal and vanish from sight. Durnan shouts, “A round of drinks on the house! Troll special!” Cheers from those who braved it out erupt!

STEP SIX – VOLO: That’s when Volo comes over. He’s the colleague the PCs’ contact was waiting for. If the PCs interceded with the trolls/stirges, Volo saw the whole thing and he’s very impressed.

If they didn’t, it doesn’t matter. (It might even be funny to have him come in and say something like, “What did I miss?” or “Just another boring day at the Yawning Portal.”) He was already planning to hire them for the job based on their contact’s recommendation, right?

And you can pick up straight from there with [Part 5B: Finding Floon](#).

CREDIT

On reddit, Busboy80 came up with the basic concept of the Dip and RVAtrowaway38 created the Dipping Song. I may have refined the sequencing, but this is a fantastically clever idea and my players loved it. Chants of, "Dip! Dip! Dip! Dip!" have become a running joke.

And thanks to my players: Heather, Peter, Chris, Sarah, and Erik.

ADDENDUM: THE TWIN PARADES

by Justin Alexander – February 28th, 2019



CHES 21 - SELUNE SASHELAS: A celebration of Selûne, goddess of the moon and navigation, and Deep Sashelas of the Seldarine, elven god of the sea. It is supposedly based on a mangled legend dating back to the time when the elven city of Aelinthaldaar stood where Waterdeep does today and telling of a time when the elves of the sea said farewell to their brethren upon the land and moved into the deep ocean. The elves largely declare this to be a bunch of hogwash, but nevertheless the “historical event” is commemorated by the Twin Parades: A huge line of ships (varying greatly in size) proceeds from the harbor, loops up the coast, and returns. Simultaneously, a land-based parade proceeds from the Docks and through the streets of Waterdeep.

As described in [Part 4](#) of the remix, I’m setting [Dragon Heist](#) during the back-to-back festivals of Fleetswake and Waukeentide. This prolonged festival season more or less kicks off with Selûne Sashelas, a holiday most notable in Waterdeep for the Twin Parades. (Although there’s also the Fey Day celebration of the Spring Equinox on Ches 19th.)

I used the parade to more or less signal the end of Chapter 2: On the 22nd, the *fireball* explodes and the [Nimblewright Investigation](#) beings. As noted in the remix of that investigation, the Temple of Gond's nimblewright can be seen performing during the Twin Parades. Furthermore, rather than simply having some NPC say, "Hey! I remember seeing an automaton like that at the parade yesterday!" it can be much more effective if the PCs actually attend the parade themselves.

One simple way of doing that: Route the parade past Trollskull Manor. The PCs (and their neighbors) can simply watch the parade literally pass them by.

Unfortunately, it's rather difficult to justify why the parade route would go past Trollskull Manor. So it may make more sense to bring the PCs to the parade rather than vice versa.

THE FACTION MISSION

The solution is to simply set a faction mission to take place during the parade. For this I selected the 2nd level Bregan D'Aerthe mission (*Dragon Heist*, p. 34): The PCs need to steal a perfumed handkerchief from Maester Roderick Bartlethorpe in the audience at the parade and deliver it to a tiefling girl who lives in a crate at the corner of Net Street and Dock Street.

My players weren't members of Bregan D'Aerthe, but the mission was easily reassigned to the Harpers: In this context, rather than being a test of loyalty, the mission became simply an opaque inexplicability. Whatever higher purpose is being served by this odd mission is completely obscured by the compartmentalization and secrecy of the Harpers.

The mission itself is not particularly laborious: The PCs' contact can even tell them roughly where on the parade route it is expected that Maester Roderick will be standing. All they need to do is zero in and pick his pocket.

PARADE ROUTE

The parade starts at the docks and then goes:

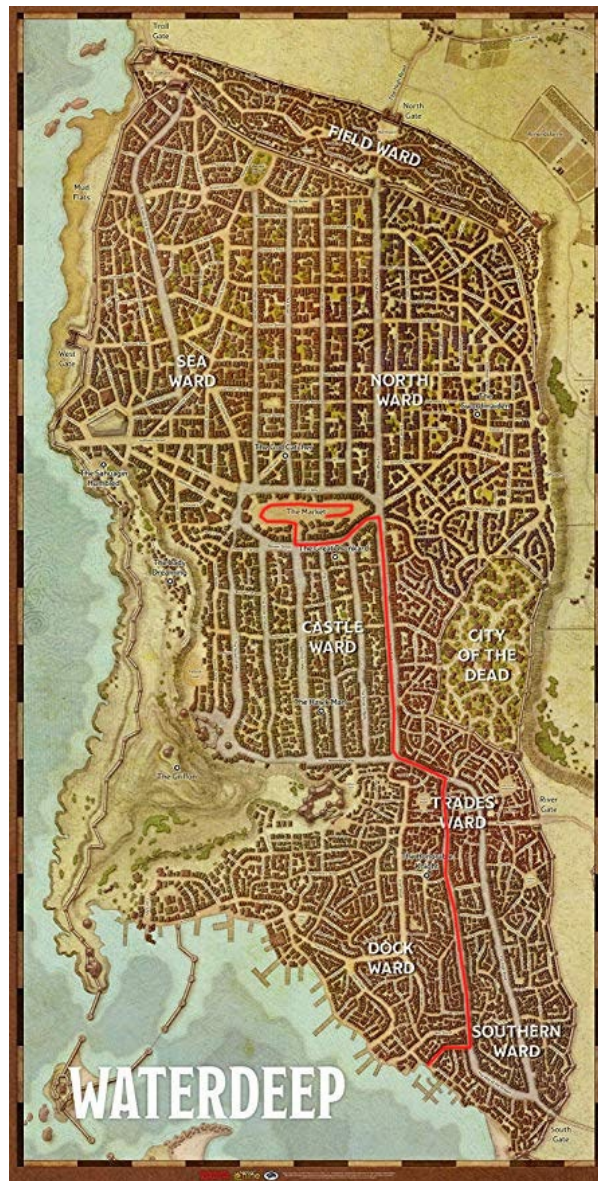
- Up Spices Street.
- Turns left on The Way of the Dragon.
- Heads north to the High Road.
- Turns left on Bazaar Street.
- Enters the Market and circles in a grand promenade before coming to rest.

I placed Maester Roderick on Bazaar Street in the "shadow of the Great Drunkard." It's a location that gives the PCs a variety of options: The market. A wide street. Tall, tightly packed buildings on the south side of the street. Mostly single-storey structures on the north side (lining the Market). The courtyard surrounding the Great Drunkard. The Great Drunkard itself. This gives the PCs a lot of options coming up with a plan for their op: How is the surveillance going to work? How will they make their approach? How will they escape after the handkerchief has been taken?

(If you're thinking: Hey! That makes it sound like a heist in miniature! You're correct. For a new group that hasn't played together before, beats like this also let them get a feel for how they're going to

collaborate, plan, and take action before the big, complicated heists with the extremely high stakes start happening.)

This location also requires the PCs to journey back down towards the wharfs in order to deliver the handkerchief. As they do so (or shortly thereafter), they'll be able to see the ships of the other half of the Twin Parades circle back into the docks, providing a nice button on the mini-scenario.



SEEN AT THE PARADE

Okay, this is the meat of the scenario: The displays and pageantry of the parade openly serves as the backdrop for the faction mission, but also lays two important pieces of pipe (cleverly disguised amidst other moments of beauty or wonder without additional significance).

The March of the City Watch: Marching eight abreast and fifteen ranks deep in their green-and-gold uniforms, the parade is led by an impressive phalanx of the City Watch.

Sea Maidens Faire: Marshalled by the swashbuckling Captain Zardoz Zord, who leads from the back of a rainbow-feathered diatryma, the Sea Maidens Faire:

- Leads with a procession of exotic animals — a caged owlbear, a unicorn stamping its feet proudly, a woman with three legs leading leucrotta doing tricks.
- Jugglers and stilt-walkers. The latter lean out far over the crowd, handing out advertising bills for a carnival on the “Pier of Wonders” in the Dock Ward.
- They roll up a cannon, which shoots a dwarf forwards to be caught by two of the stiltwalkers holding a net.

A Pageant Wagon: Performing *The Pirate Lovers*. This popular musical tells of a human woman who is, improbably, the daughter of a dwarf-king and, even more improbably, falls in love with a dark elf. Various ballads are sung from the “deck” of the ship which the pageant wagon opens to reveal.

The Mechanical Beholder: It hovers over the crowd and glares about menacingly.

A Joint Presentation of Temple Gond and the House of Wonders: Members of the Academy at the House of Wonders have summoned huge ribbons of water and are moving them down the street. Within the ribbons of water swim giant, clockwork fish of bronze. The fish appear to be controlled by a mechanical man made of both burnished copper and wood; its clockwork mechanisms visible constantly whirring and pistoning under its rune-etched skin-plating as it “commands” the fish to perform tricks – flipping from one stream to another. Eventually the mechanical man leaps up, perches atop the snout of one of the fish, and is launched high into the air, where he does a double-flip before splashing back down through one of the water ribbons.

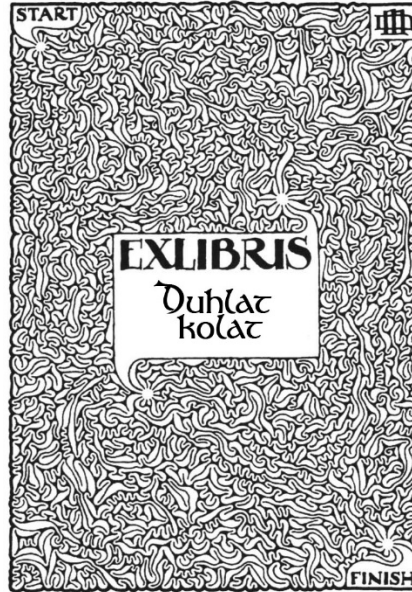
Prancing Pegasi: An aerial dance troop composed of avariels (winged elves) and pegasus riders.

If the PCs have moved away from the parade (having seized the handkerchief and wanting to leave the scene), they might see the Prancing Pegasi twirling above the roofs of the buildings behind them as they make their way south to make the rendezvous.

When I ran this mini-scenario in my campaign, the PCs ended up leaving before the nimblewright’s display actually reached them. C’est la vie. They enjoyed the parade nevertheless, and smacked themselves in the head later when they learned what they’d missed by ducking out early.

ADDENDUM: FANCY PROPS

[by Justin Alexander](#) – March 24th, 2019



This [PDF](#) contains “fancy” versions of the props from the Alexandrian Remix of [Dragon Heist](#). Some of these may be useful for *Dragon Heist* campaigns that aren’t using the Alexandrian Remix, but probably not many of them. (Most of the props take the form of clues added in the process of making the campaign more robust and interconnected.)

*Note: Patrons will find a copy of this PDF in the Justin’s Running Files archive.
A copy can also be downloaded from the website.*

These props are all designed to be simply printed out on letter-sized white paper. Many of them, however, could benefit from being printed out on alternative/more evocative paper stocks with their headings removed.

HANDWRITING REFERENCE

Each NPC has a distinct “handwriting” used in their props. Writers do not always identify themselves in their writing. This reference can be used by the GM as needed.

Kalain - *Waters*

Orond Gralhund - *Murders*

Jarlaxle - *confusing*

Cassalanter - *hiding*

Ahmaergo - *Aiken*

Manshoon - *Galass*

Krebbyg - *eyes*

N'arl Xibrindas - *Xibrindas*

Avareen - *you*

Seffia Naelryke - *followed*

Rostrum Feilcook - *alacrity*

Chirada - *Ward*

SUGGESTED PROPS

In addition to the props found in the PDF, there are additional props which I prepared for my own campaign but which I can't duplicate here without stepping over the bounds of fair use. These additional props, primarily featuring cool visual references, are listed here. In creating these props for your own table, you may find the Fantasy Grounds package for *Dragon Heist* useful. (It gives you raw image files that you can either use directly or modify using Photoshop/GIMP with greater ease than trying to scan material from the printed book.) In other cases, the images are not specific to the campaign and you may be able to find suitable images through a Google Image search.

In some cases, this includes a link to an online piece of art that I used that you may find similarly useful.

1.0 FINDING FLOON

- Visual: Renaer Neverember
- [Visual: Kenku](#)
- [Visual: Floon Blagmaar](#)
- [Visual: Mourning Locket](#)

2.0 TROLLSKULL

- Trollskull Alley Map (Blank)
- Map of Trollskull Manor
- Visual: Trollskull Manor
- Visual: The Twin Parades

3.0 NIMBLEWRIGHT INVESTIGATION

n/a

3.1 GRALHUND VILLA

- Visual: Nimblewright
- Visual: Gazer
- Visual: Drow Gunslinger
- Visual: Gralhunds

4.1 FACTION RESPONSE TEAMS

n/a

4.2 FACTION OUTPOSTS

n/a

5.0 HEIST OVERVIEW

n/a

5.1 BREGAN D' AERTHE – SEA MAIDENS FAIRE

- Heist Map: Upper Decks
- Heist Map: Orlop Deck (Porthole Surveillance)
- Visual: Jarlaxle Baenre
- Visual: Drow Gunslinger
- Visual: The Eyecatcher

5.2 CASSALANTER ESTATE

- [Visual: Victoro Cassalanter](#)
- Visual: Ammalia Cassalanter
- Visual: Cassalanter Children
- Heist Map: Complete Blueprints of Cassalanter Villa
- Heist Map: Cassalanter Villa – Stonecutters' Plans
- Heist Map: Cassalanter Villa – Roofers' Guild
- Heist Map: Cassalanter Villa – Cellarers' Guild

5.3 XANATHAR'S LAIR

n/a

5.4 ZHENTARIM – KOLAT TOWERS

- Heist Map: Kolat Towers Blueprints

6.0 BRANDATH CRYPTS

n/a

6.1 THE VAULT

n/a

ADDENDUM: OTHER COLLABORATORS

by [Justin Alexander](#) - April 16th, 2019



One of the first elements I established for the Alexandrian Remix of [Dragon Heist](#) was to have the Cassalanter approach the PCs and attempt to recruit them as their agents in the Grand Game: I found the story of their children's plight very compelling, and the entire situation rife with incredibly tough and emotional decisions that I felt would really elevate the campaign if they were put center stage. (Whereas in a traditional run, even with the Cassalanter as the DM's chosen villain, it's very likely that the PCs will never even discover what the Cassalanter's true motives are.)

But what if we went a different way?

There are four rival factions in *Dragon Heist*, of which the Cassalanter are only one. If it's interesting to swap the Cassalanter's approach from open antagonism to would-be collaborators, what might happen if one of the *other* factions took the same approach?

Of course, none of the other rivals have innocent children for the PCs to be called upon to save. So their approach to collaboration will look a little different.

MANSHOON'S ULTIMATUM

The timing of Manshoon's approach can be identical to the Cassalanter (he discovers the PCs are investigating the *fireball* that killed several of his agents and decides they would be useful pawns), but it might be better to wait until the fallout from the Gralhund Villa raids. Assuming that the PCs end up with the *Stone of Golorr*, Manshoon would be highly motivated to get them onboard.

His method for doing so, however, is far less discrete than the Cassalanter: He takes a hostage.

Circumstance will determine whether it will work best to find someone in a PC's backstory or to target someone they've built a relationship with during the campaign, but either way the kidnapping takes place offscreen. Perhaps the PC becomes aware of it when they find their loved ones' ransacked quarters, but more likely it takes the form of a simple letter arriving at Trollskull Manor.

The letter explains the situation simply: They have something he wants. And now he has something they want. A meeting will be arranged (to which Manshoon will send his simulacrum rather than appearing himself), and the following proposal will be made:

- Their loved one will not be harmed. Quite the contrary. They are enjoying luxurious accommodations (If only the PCs could be so lucky.) Manshoon is personally seeing to it that their every need (except freedom) is being met.
- The PCs will seek to restore the *Stone of Golorr* and use it to claim Neverember's Enigma – the 500,000 golden dragons he embezzled from the city.
- Manshoon is not an unreasonable man, of course, and if the PCs fulfill their end of the bargain, not only will he free their loved one, they will also be free to keep fully 20% of the treasure.
- The Zhentarim will also make available to the PCs the full resources of their intelligence-gathering and mercenary networks.



IF THE PCs JOIN MANSHOON: The Zhentarim response teams and safe houses are put at their disposal, with more and more resources being made available as they prove themselves more trustworthy. All of Manshoon's lieutenants can be played as allies, and this extra muscle will certainly free the PCs up to try more daring (or, at least, direct) heists to obtain the missing eyes.

IF THE PCs REFUSE: Manshoon shakes his head sadly. Then he leaves, has their loved one murdered, and dumps the corpse on the front step of Trollskull Manor.

IF THE PCs SEEK TO RESCUE THE HOSTAGE: A heist! I love heists. The hostage is being held in Area E11 of Manshoon's Extradimensional Sanctum. The Zhents who made their quarters there have been turned out for the moment; consider spreading them out between Kolat Towers and the Zhentarim faction outposts.

JARLAXLE'S ALLIANCE



For Jarlaxle, we'll move in the opposite direction: When [running the opening scene of the campaign at the Yawning Portal](#), instead of using Step 2: Friendly Faces (in which the PCs pick one of the NPCs on p. 221 of *Dragon Heist* to be the contact they've come to meet), the contact they're meeting with is, in fact, Jarlaxle.

Depending on the approach you want to take, they might think they're meeting with "Captain Zord" or they might know the true identity of who they're meeting. Either way, Jarlaxle does, in fact, connect them with Volo.

This means, of course, that the PCs are members of Bregan D'Aerthe from the very beginning. Refer to the general information on p. 14-15 of *Dragon Heist* and the faction missions on p. 34-35.

INVERTED NIMBLEWRIGHT INVESTIGATION: If you want to radically shift Chapter 2 of the campaign, then have one of the PCs' jobs be to *sell the nimblewrights* for Jarlaxle. One of the reasons Jarlaxle wanted to get on Volo's good side was so that Volo could help make introductions to various guilds, nobles, and other highly-placed and influential people. Refer to the list of owners in [Part 5C: The Nimblewright Investigation](#) as a resource for the prospective clients Volo refers them to.

Whether the PCs are selling nimblewrights or not, they still have Trollskull Manor as a reward from Volo. Jarlaxle will help bankroll the renovation costs and is eager to develop it as a safehouse for Bregan D'Aerthe operatives.

The *fireball* explosion also still happens on schedule: When the PCs discover that a nimblewright is involved, they can either go to Jarlaxle and clue their whole organization into the Grand Game. Or it's possible that they were literally the ones who sold the nimblewright to the Gralhunds. (Small world, eh?)

THE GRAND GAME: Tracking forward, slot in the PCs everywhere that the campaign refers to Jarlaxle's agents.

At Gralhund Villa they're able to review nimblewright footage in Jarlaxle's *crystal ball* and are then ordered to set up a surveillance post. (Maybe they even end up in Artheyn Manor, just like Fel'Rekt would in a 'normal' campaign.)

I recommend *not* having Jarlaxle accompany them on the other heists (he has a lot of other projects and [a busy social calendar](#) to attend to), but they can certainly tap Bregan D'Aerthe resources (in the form of a response team). And Jarlaxle may be able to directly feed them information (and access) to Xanathar's Lair.

XANATHAR'S GANGSTERS



For this final collaboration we're going to *radically* invert the campaign: Rather than starting the campaign at the Yawning Portal, the PCs will be gangsters working for Xanathar. Their first job? Raiding a warehouse where the Zhentarim are holding Renaer Neverember, capture Renaer themselves, and bring him to a sewer hideout where they'll be met by Nihiloor.

Of course, they discover too late that they've kidnapped some fuckin' mook named Floon Blagmaar. A total disaster. Maybe they try to double back to the warehouse, but by the time they get there, Renaer is gone and the place is swarming with watchmen. (Their first inklings that a Grand Game is happening will come from the questions Nihiloor asks 'Renaer.')

CHAPTER 2 - WORKING FOR THE BOSS: You need some time to pass here and, in this scenario, the PCs don't get Trollskull Manor. Run a few faction missions that introduce them to the [Xanatharian faction outposts](#) (they get outfitted by Grinda Garloth; they struggle to figure out how to get the mechanical flying beholder working before the Twin Parades; they're charged with running security at Terasse Estate and escorting gamblers through the dangerous tunnels to the gladiator tournaments).

Their contact person for these faction missions? Dalakhar.

CHAPTER 3 – THE TRAITOR: Then comes the day when Dalakhar vanishes. Turns out he’s betrayed the Boss and stolen something. Boss won’t say what, but it’s clearly important. The PCs need to find him.

They track him to the [Inn of the Dripping Dagger](#). The timeline is slightly different in this version of reality, and they end up finding the letter from Kalain. They track Dalakhar to Kalain’s place, and she tells them he’s headed to some place called Trollskull Manor. (You’ll want to buff this up a bit to fully satisfy the Three Clue Rule.)

The PCs head over to Trollskull Manor. As they’re heading through the alley, a huge explosion goes off just around the corner up ahead: Rushing forward, they discover Dalakhar and a bunch of other people dead!

THE TROLLSKULL MANOR TEAM: From this point forward, the campaign more-or-less follows the normal track. Investigations will lead the PCs to Gralhund Villa; they’ll find the Zhentarim and Jarlaxle’s team watching the place.

But here’s the twist: There *is* a group of heroes who rescued Renaer Neverember and moved into the Trollskull Manor. And they’re doing what the PCs in a ‘normal’ *Dragon Heist* campaign would have been doing: The PCs likely first spot the Trollskull Manor Team at Gralhund Villa, but they’ll keep turning up:

- They raid one of Xanathar’s sewer hideouts.
- They perform a heist at Xanathar’s Lair. (Maybe the PCs can foil it. Or maybe the PCs foil their attempt, only to have Jarlaxle simultaneously steal the Eye. Guess it’s time to pursue them back to the *Eyecatcher* for a heist-in-kind.)
- While the PCs are trying to perform a heist at Kolat Tower, the Trollskull Manor Team is simultaneously active onsite.

And so forth. Play the heroes actively, and figure out what faction(s) they belong to and bring those into play, too.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The cool thing here is that, once you’ve restructured the campaign components into [scenarios instead of plots](#), you can use those components in myriad ways. These examples push that to an extreme, but it demonstrates how much flexibility this approach has and how easy it is to take material prepped in this way and actively play it in order to respond to player choice.

Compare this to the approach taken by the published campaign, which attempts to give you flexibility and ‘reusability’ by, for example, giving you three different versions of an Old Tower. But the truth is that you don’t need multiple versions of a tower in order to get different utility out of it during actual play.

The other thing I’ll point out is that in all of these collaborator scenarios – including the original remixed version with the Cassalanters – we have *no idea* what’s going to happen. Do they take the Cassalanters offers or refuse it? Do the Xanatharian gangsters take the money and use it to take over the organization, launching a bloody gang war in and below the streets of Waterdeep? When Jarlaxle’s agents tweak to his true identity, do they remain loyal or turn on him?

Just as the flexibility of the material allows us to reframe the presentation of the campaign, it also provides infinite variability in the actual running of the campaign, providing you (and your players) with a constant stream of surprise and wonder.

ADDENDUM: A NIGHT IN TROLLSKULL MANOR

[by Justin Alexander – May 25th, 2019](#)



In Chapter 2 of the [Dragon Heist](#) campaign, the PCs are rewarded with the deed to an abandoned inn named Trollskull Manor. The expectation is that they will rehabilitate the abandoned building and re-open the tavern, integrating themselves in Waterdhavian society and laying down the sort of roots that can really make an urban campaign meaningful.

For Trollskull Manor to truly become the centerpiece of your campaign, however, you'll need to make the tavern truly *come alive*. Part of that will be letting your players take the lead in designing and decorating the manor just the way that they want it, so that it truly becomes *their* place. A place that they can call home. But once the tavern opens, your job is to make the tavern truly *come alive*; to make it more than just a place where they can take a long rest.

That's where *A Night in Trollskull Manor* comes into play. Using the Tavern Time™ system, it provides a selection of flexible tools and the simple structure you can use with those tools to bring the tavern's common room to life each and every night. Those tools include:

- Patron Tables
- Events
- Topics/Agendas

- Patron Roleplaying Templates

To get maximum use out of *A Night in Trollskull Manor*, you'll want to familiarize yourself with the [Universal NPC Roleplaying Template](#).

TAVERN TIME

For each night at the tavern:

1. There is a 1 in 1d6 chance that an *Event* will occur that night.
2. Roll 1d6 to determine the number of significant patrons in the tavern that night, then use the *Patron Table* to randomly determine which patrons are present. If a result of "Renaer's Friends" is rolled, roll on the *Patrons – Renaer's Friends* table to determine the final result.
3. Look at the Topics/Agendas for the patrons who are present. Generally speaking, you can use one per patron or just select one from among the patrons. When in doubt, default to the first unused bullet point. Supplement or replace these topics with other major events occurring in your campaign.

Using this material is as much art as it is science. The random tables serve as an improv prompt, thrusting different elements together in unexpected ways in order to prompt the frisson of your own creativity as a GM. Once the players start interacting with the patrons and the emerging situation, things will develop in even more unexpected ways. Roll with the punches and see where it all takes you. Don't be afraid to make bold, strong choices that can completely disrupt the status quo.

USING PATRONS: Note that the significant patrons present on a particular night may all clump together in a single interaction, or they may be separate interactions happening simultaneously or spread out over the course of the evening. Even if various patron interactions *do* start out separate from each other, don't be afraid to have them crossover and collide with each other as the events of the evening continue to play out.

Pay attention to which NPCs resonate with the players: Who do they find interesting? Who do they like? Who do they enjoy interacting with? Find ways to keep bringing those characters back. Reincorporate them into other facets of the campaign (and vice versa).

USING TOPICS/AGENDAS: These are conversational gambits, interpersonal developments, or needs that a particular patron has. Think about what reactions the other patrons present in the tavern that night will have to the topic or agenda as it occurs.

You should be able to very quickly reference this material and then rapidly generate a 5-10 minute roleplaying interaction any time the PCs choose to engage with the common room. (In some cases, of course, these interactions will also expand to the players' level of interest and take more time to fully resolve.)

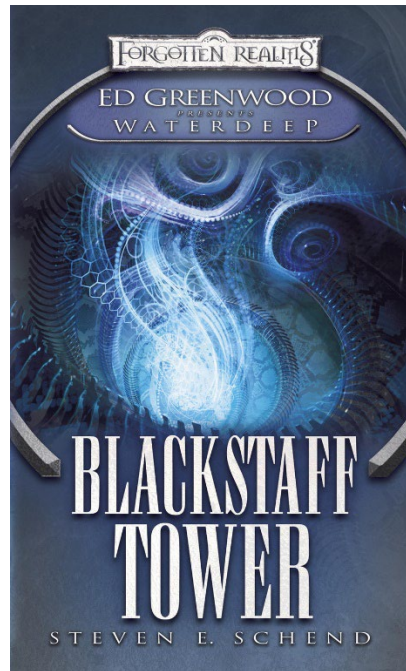
DESIGN NOTES

The patrons used for *A Night in Trollskull Manor* draw heavily from the *Dragon Heist* campaign itself. This is intentional, deliberately reincorporating NPCs so that the life of Trollskull Manor's common room is intertwined with the rest of the campaign.

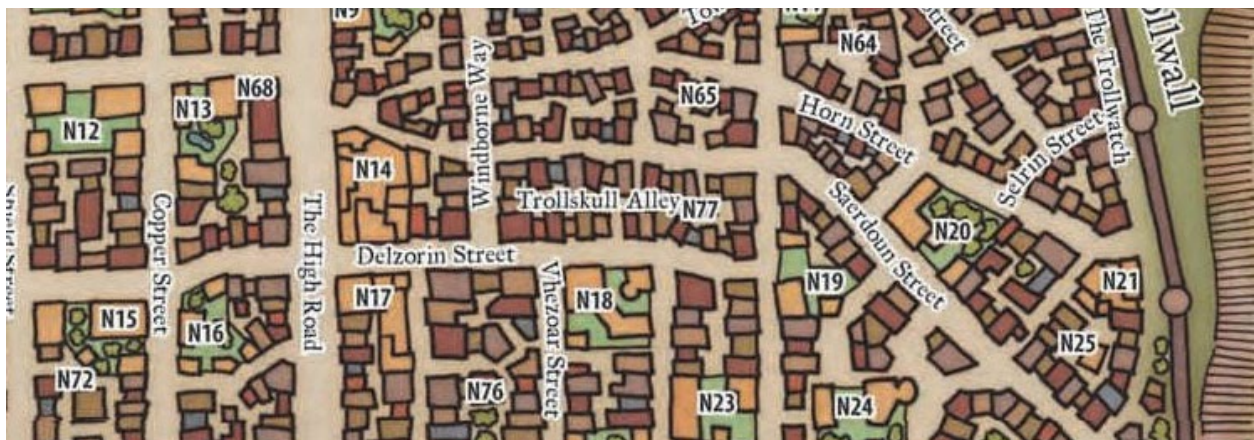
Many other patrons, particularly Renaer's friends, are drawn from Steven E. Schend's [Blackstaff Tower](#). This novel — which is a delightful romp of pulp fiction — was the first introduction of characters like

Vajra, Renaer, and Meloon who would return in *Dragon Heist*. Schend's other creations — like Osco, Lord Toryln Wands, and Elra Harsard — were so much fun that I wanted to find a way to bring them into the campaign, too. (Reading the novel, however, is not required to make use of this material.)

On that note, it should be mentioned that *A Night in Trollskull Manor* will work particularly well with the [Alexandrian Remix of Dragon Heist](#), but the remix is also not required and you should get great results even if you're just running the base version of the campaign.



SETTING UP TROLLSKULL MANOR



As described in Chapter 2 of *Dragon Heist*, before the PCs can reopen Trollskull Manor they first have to first get it fixed up and ready for business again. The following events should be intermixed with the PCs' first faction missions and similar activities. Adding one or two additional urban adventures into this time frame can also be an effective way of pacing this material.

A CONSOLIDATED REFERENCE OF THE MANOR'S HISTORY

- Owned by Ulkoria Stonemarrow. She sold the tavern to go adventuring.
- Sold to a family of shield dwarves. They fell on hard times and sold it to a woman named Arissa Mirthkettle.
- Mirthkettle converted the building into an orphanage. She turned out to be a hag who was cooking and eating the children.
- The building was then abandoned for several years, haunted by its horrible reputation.
- A half-elf named Lif took over the building and converted it back into a tavern.
- Lif was killed in a terrible accident 40 years ago when one of the support beams on his ale casks broke and collapsed on top of him.
- A couple named the Morleys bought the property and attempted to reopen it, but the haunting of the property combined with the economic recession which preceded Lord Dagult becoming Open Lord saw them go bankrupt.
- The property changed hands several times, but with no serious efforts to occupy it.
- A small halfling clan named the Curlbottoms bought the property around 1476 DR. They didn't reopen the tavern, using the property exclusively as a residence for until 1484 DR when they moved to Neverwinter, caught in Lord Dagult's dream of rebuilding the city.
- Most recently, Emmek Frewn attempted to purchase the property at public auction, only to be outbid by Volothamp Geddarm (who was interested in researching its "haunted history" for his next book).

FIRST TIME AT TROLLSKULL

The first time the PCs show up Trollskull Manor, the **Three Urchins** are playing inside.

- **Nat** is a lanky, 10-year-old deaf Illuskan girl with a wooden toy sword. She is the leader of the group and communicates using a sign language that she invented and taught her friends.
- **Jenks** is a portly 9-year-old Turami boy with a cloak, a toy wand, and a stuffed owlbear "familiar". He's shy around strangers but brave when it comes to helping his friends.
- **Squiddly** is a slim 9-year-old tiefling boy with an eye patch, a small bow, and a quiver of toy arrows. He rarely thinks before he talks or acts.

They're rampaging around, playing some sort of fencing/tag game with swords.

TALE OF THE TROLL SKULL: They claim the mansion is haunted by the ghost of a troll skull.

DURING RECONSTRUCTION:

- **If friendly**, the urchins will help sweep up. Holler on street corners to attract customers. And so forth.
- **If hostile**, they'll break windows (20 gp each) and cause other mischief.

THE POLTERGEIST

LIF: Half-elf, former bartender. Haunts the building now.

- Objects levitating or thrown
- Disappearing objects
- Knocks, rappings, footsteps
- Message written in the dust: "CLOSING TIME", "LAST CALL"
- Physical attacks

APPEASING: Fixing the building up to become a tavern slowly wins Lif over. (Eventually starts helping out.) If not, Lif becomes increasingly hostile.

GUILD VISITS

In place of the one-time expenses found on p. 41 of *Dragon Heist*, the PCs will be approached by an endless array of guild representatives. Roleplay out as many of these encounters as seems entertaining. Not all of these guild services are required, and others can be negotiated.

REPAIRS

Carpenters', Roofers' and Plasterer's Guild (Soukaev, repair roof and walls)	250 gp
Cellarers' and Plumbers' Guild	100 gp
Guild of Glassblowers, Glaziers, and Spectacle-Makers (Colera)	250 gp
Guild of Fine Carvers (make a new sign)	50 gp

SERVICE DEPOSITS

Lauderer's Guild	100 gp
Dungswepers' Guild (Gassan; clean up dung on the streets)	25 gp
Loyal Order of Street Laborers (clean up everything else)	50 gp
Stablemasters' and Farriers' Guild	10 gp

SUPPLIERS (BRIBES)

Fellowship of Innkeepers (Broxley Fairkettle, p. 41)	25-100 gp
Vintners', Distillers', and Brewers' (Hammond Kraddoc, p. 41)	50-1000 gp
Guild of Butchers (Justyn Rassk, p. 41 - threatens them without bribe)	3 gp per delivery
Bakers' Guild	25-100 gp

During this time, also mix in the first visits from Emmek Frewn (*Dragon Heist*, p. 42) as he begins plotting against the PCs.

STAFFING

The PCs will also need to hire staff: A bartender, barmaids, and cooks. How many of each will depend on how many shifts they want to remain open each day. (PCs may also be tempted to fulfill some of these roles themselves, but they'll quickly learn that balancing a regular day job with adventuring is probably an impossible task.)

BARTENDERS

Lif: If the spirit of Lif can be pacified and befriended, he makes an excellent bartender.

- The "Lif" is a custom drink special with some form of liquor (which varies each night) on the bottom and ale on top. It's not entirely clear how the ghost is achieving this perfect separation.

Mosp: A blue-and-green-scaled kobold. Mosp has a reptilian palette and his drinks don't always sit quite right in mammalian mouths. If he's the bartender, however, Trollskull Manor will attract a large reptilian and draconic crowd.

Lillian Haekin: A Zakharan woman, Lillian has a modest command of liqueurs, but her true mastery is in teas. She will arrange with Fala Lefaliir of Corellon's Crown to supply the Manor with a dizzying variety of foreign teas.

BARMAIDS

Ryba: Ryba is a wererat and a member of the Shard Shunners (see "Emmek Frewn" below). She tries to get hired as a halving waitress so that she can work mischief.

Althaea, Elthaea, Ulthaea: These mysterious star elf triplets float through the air while sitting in a perfect lotus position. Their silver hair stands upright in a halo around their heads. Likely interview questions include:

- Can you walk on your legs? "We have not in a very long time."
- Can you serve drinks from that position? [They use *telekinesis* to deliver a drink to the questioner.]
- Why are they interested in working as barmaids in Trollskull Manor? "We have received a divinatory vision that we are needed here. We shall work for you for a period of twelve months. So it is written. Also, tips are important."

Patric Nivka: Patric, an Illuskan lad, was kicked out of his parents' house last week when his parents discovered he was dating a half-elf named Tanya Pav. He needs a job and a place to stay. (Letting him stay in a room upstairs or giving him an advance on his paycheck will help solve the latter problem.)

COOKS

Isgrigg & Dupere: Just ordinary humans. They left their last gig because the bar transformed into a tinker gnome hotspot. "And if you've ever seen thirty-five tinker gnomes all working on the same project while *drunk*... well, I like my jobs to be a bit less *explosive* if you know what I mean."

Turgattan Thornhammer: A dwarf chef and former adventurer. He lost his former adventuring companions in the Serpent Hills. He lacks references, but assures the PCs that he handled the cooking for his companions every night for three years, even when that meant boiling things best left unboiled. And if he could do that, then he can certainly handle a night's shift in a kitchen with a well-supplied larder! If the PCs actually taste his cooking, they may quickly conclude that his former adventuring companions were the ones to lose *him*. (This is a bad hire.)

Reynardo Greenleaf: A half-elf mage who uses various cantrips to create truly remarkable concoctions. His dishes are marvels to behold; often with their components performing intricate dances across the intricately carved plates and platters and stranger dishware they're delivered upon. His ministrations earn the Trollskull Manor an *artiste* reputation, but the problem is that Reynardo "does not work to a clock." Service is slow, and becomes a serious problem if/when the Manor's popularity grows.

GRAND OPENING

If you're using the Alexandrian Remix, I recommend timing the Trollskull's grand opening for Ches 19th, the Spring Equinox/Fey Day. Taking advantage of the Fey Day celebrations will help propel a large launch, and it will also allow a couple days of normal operation before [the Twin Parades on Ches 21st](#) and [the fireball on Ches 22nd](#).

The details of the Grand Opening are heavily dependent on the specific plans made by the PCs, of course. In addition to any specific invitations they may extend, you can randomize other significant guests normally. Or you might want to spend some time customizing a list based on which NPCs the PCs have had good rapport with so far. I recommend that the guest list should include:

- Renaer and Floon, assuming the PCs have not alienated them in some way
- One or two representatives from the other residents of Trollskull Alley, particularly if the PCs have made a point of introducing themselves
- The Three Urchins, whether they're friendly or not

Give some thought to whether or not Emmek Frewn is in a position to disrupt the Grand Opening. If the PCs have taken precautions, it's probably better to let the Grand Opening succeed... and then have Emmek Frewn's bastardy complicate matters on their second night.

PATRON TABLES & EVENTS

PATRONS

1	Tally Fellbranch (Bent Nail)	20	Response Team (or reroll)
2	Embric & Avi (Steam and Steel)		
3	Fala Lefaliir (Corellon's Crown)		
4	Vincent Trench (Tiger's Eye)		
5	Rishaal the Page-Turner (Book Wyrms)		
6	Renaer Neverember		
7	Renaer's Friends		
8	Renaer's Friends		
9	Meloon Wardragon		
10	Floon Blagmaar		
11	Hammond Kraddoc (Vintners' Guild)		
12	Broxley Fairkettle (Innkeepers)		
13	Ulkoria Stonemarrow		
14	Mattrim "Threestrings" Mereg		
15	Jalester Silvermane		
16	Yagra Stonefist		
17	[Faction Contact]		
18	[Other NPC or Faction Contact]		
19	Jarlaxle (or reroll)		

FACTION CONTACT: This result should be keyed to the PCs' contact for whatever faction they end up doing faction missions for. (If they become members of multiple factions, randomly determine or choose one.)

CAMPAIGN NPC: This slot is left open for adding an NPC that the players like from other parts of the campaign. (I'm currently using this slot for Valetta & Nim.) This can include characters from the *Renaer's Friends* table below if the PCs seem to have forged a strong relationship with them and you'd like to increase the likelihood of them showing up. (Of course, you can always arbitrarily decide that so-and-so will be dropping by the tavern that night.)

OTHER MODIFICATIONS: Swap out other characters that aren't resonating with your players and add NPCs who they've formed relationships with.

PATRONS - RENAER'S FRIENDS

1-6	Renaer Neverember + Roll Again
7-8	Vajra Safahr (the Blackstaff)
9-10	Laraelra "Elra" Harsard
11-12	Oscos Salibuck
13-14	Lord Torlyn Wands
15	Eiruk Weskur
16	Harug Shieldsunder
17	Parlek Lateriff
18	Meloon Wardragon
19	Floon Blagmaar
20	Faction Spy Watching Renaer

FACTION SPY: Determine faction randomly or choose appropriately based on the events in the campaign so far.

EVENTS

- A spontaneous arm-wrestling competition breaks out.
- A local kenku street gang comes into the tavern. They try to sell traveler's dust to the patrons. (Traveler's Dust: Tiny roseate crystals. A single grain is usually dropped into the eye, where it dissolves. Those using it are said to be *walking the crimson road*. Those using traveler's dust often have trembling hands, slurred speech, and eyes the color of blood. Creates a euphoric feeling paired to a sensation of the world slowing down around you.)
- PCs walk in to find a horse standing in the middle of the common room. No one can explain how it got there or who owns it.
- A patron slips a drug into a drink before returning to their own table.
- A 12-year-old pickpocket named Stannis is working the crowd. His handler, a half-orc named Sabeen, is waiting outside.

- A portal opens in the middle of the tavern. An elven wizard named Kyser Tameno walks out, orders a drink, and goes back through the portal. (He might become a regular.)
- The City Watch makes an arrest on the premises.
- Volo shows up and would like to make arrangements for a signing of *Volo's Guide to Monsters*. Also has a number of questions regarding the haunting of Trollskull Manor for *Volo's Guide to Spirits and Specters*.
- Staff Event (e.g., the star elf triplets float up to the ceiling and a spontaneous light show erupts; after a few minutes they float back down and resume service as if nothing happened)

PATRON TOPICS & AGENDAS

TALLY FELLBRANCH

- Introduces PCs to his brother, Melannor Fellbranch (representative of the Emerald Enclave).
- Offers his services to sculpt a wooden troll's skull that could be displayed on the wall.
- She's been commissioned to craft 8-foot-tall chess pieces for the Cragmere Estate. It's a major commission and she buys a round of drinks for everyone in the tavern to celebrate.

EMBRIC & AVI

- One of the Three Urchins has been shoplifting small metal trinkets from Steam and Steel.
- Ask for an introduction to Renaer Neverember. (Turns out Embric and Avi were stout supporters of Lord Dagult and expect his son to feel the same.)
- They've been hired to build a number of weapons of strange designs; serrated edges on odd surfaces, superfluous spikes, and the like. (Investigating this reveals that the commission can be tracked back to Grinda Garloth.)

FALA LEFALIIR

- Offers the PCs a sampler of foreign teas, in the interest of having them added to the menu.
- Introduces the PCs to Ziraj the Hunter, a member of the Zhentarim Doom Raiders (DH p. 201).
- Is interested in using the large oak tree outside Trollskull Manor as a place to grow silverbark, a valuable alchemical that they have otherwise been harvesting from the City of the Dead.

VINCENT TRENCH

- Meeting a client. (Either a simple member of the public, or possibly one of the other notable patrons in the tavern.)
- Looking to hire the PCs to contribute to one of his investigations: He needs a foppish young noble (Adric Thongolir, a half-steel dragon and youngest son of Lady Adiira Thongolir) followed.
- Vincent has been hired to investigate a series of petty thefts in Thundercross Alley (running perpendicular to Thunderstaff Way just north of Sashtar Street). A man named Irbyth Authamaun has had a particularly valuable gray jade statuette of a stone giant stolen from his house (which lies at the eastern end of the alley). (The culprit is a small, floating, magical skull

named Mortaunto. The curious undead rapsallion has created a small nest of his magpie-like thefts in the Thunderstaff Villa, which lies just north of Thundercross Alley.)

RISHAAL THE PAGE-TURNER

- Sits quietly in one corner, sipping tea and reading an oddly titled book: *Duke Avanice's Vile Poems, Cults of Ancient Netheril, Umbral Reflections on the Kingdom of Man, The Journal of Captain Arienthil's Journeys in the Moonshae Isles, Memories of Kara-Tur, The Seventh Codex of the Numinous Ascendants of Kaal, The Atlas of Forgotten Cartographies.*
- If Lif has been pacified and is now part of the tavern's culture, Rishaal will stop by with a copy of *Richelle's Poems*, a book of elvish poetry which was once one of Lif's favorites.
- His hands are bandaged. He came into possession of a cursed book that, when he touched it, caused his hands to burst out into boils.

HAMMOND KRADDOC (Vintners')

- Dropping by to let the owners know about new spirits his guild has to offer: Blackberry seawine from the Nasaqh Estates on Mount Sar. Berg Brew, an alchemically frozen slurry that has ten times the alcoholic content of other beers. Entsap, brewed from the sap of treants. Storm Giant Ale, which is not actually bewed by storm giants but does have an electrical "tingle."
- Chastises the owners for their current selection of beverages (even if he was the one who sold them).
- Discovers that Lif knew his father, Barbaros Kraddoc. Barbaros would actually stay at Trollskull Manor when he would come into Waterdeep to sell wines from the Elysium Fields. (Lif is saddened to learn that the Elysium Fields were destroyed.)

BROXLEY FAIRKETTLE (Innkeepers')

- Asks the PCs to host the guild's Leiruin Feast. (Extrapolate event from DH p. 162.)
- Offers to sell them a signatory license to the Fellowship of Innkeepers' indemnification insurance for 20 gp per month: It covers the costs of any lawsuits held against them or their tavern due to injuries incurred during a stay. (He relates how the previous year a spice merchant nearly bankrupted an inn who didn't have insurance when a magister held them liable for not only the magical healing of his injuries, but also for his lost wages during a period of physical and emotional recovery.)
- Dues for the Fellowship of Innkeepers are increasing by 5 gp per month starting on the first of next month.

ULKORIA STONEMARROW

- Relates the history of Trollskull Tavern, starting from the time of her ownership.
- She comes in hauling the carcass of a rust monster.
- Shield guardian shows up, but Ulkoria isn't with it.

MATTREM "THREEESTRINGS" MEREG

- Looking for employment; or just permission to play for tips if that fails. (Yawning Portal is a little too intense for him this week.)

- He brings Bonnie the Doppelganger here to have a date. It turns into a complete disaster. (He might beg one of the PCs to help him salvage the night.)
- Sings “The Ballad of the River Chionthar,” an incredibly beautiful piece of his own composition telling of a young girl who slipped into the river and drowned. Each verse tells of some scene her body passes along the river, until the last verse speaks of how she passed through Baldur’s Gate and out into the sea.

JALESTER SILVERMANE

- Jalester is here to spy on the adventurers’ who made a rep for themselves rescuing Renaer. Once he’s assessed whether they (a) can be trusted or (b) pose a threat to Waterdeep, he’ll issue a report to the Open Lord.

YAGRA STONEFIST

- Challenging any burly-looking patrons to an arm wrestling competition, which she’s turned into a drinking game by taking a drink each time she wins.
- She claims a table in the corner and over the course of the evening she meets with a string of people – many of them sporting Zhentarim tattoos. She speaks quietly with them or slips them a piece of paper, and then they leave.
- She gets a crush on one of the male patrons tonight and does her best to take him home (or upstairs).

[FACTION CONTACT]

- Trigger the next faction mission.
- They’re here to meet with a different contact.

JARLAXLE

- If appearing as Captain Zord, he may bring along a number of Sea Maidens Faire carnies. They’ll bring strange creatures with them, perform a juggling act, do strange acrobatic tricks using the features of the tavern, and so forth.
- If appearing as a different fake identity, it’s more likely he’ll just quietly ensconce himself somewhere and observe the PCs, trying to get a measure of them.
- If appearing as himself, he’s here to negotiate: He wants something from the PCs in the Grand Game (information, a service), and he’s willing to bargain.

FACTION RESPONSE TEAM

- Keeping the tavern under observation from outside.
- Delivering a message from their faction (most likely to arrange a meeting).
- Staging a hit on the PCs, most likely in retaliation for their actions.
- Staging a heist, most likely targeting the *Stone of Golorr* and/or the Eyes.

PATRON TOPICS & AGENDAS – RENAER & FRIENDS

RENAER NEVEREMBER

- Requests an update on their investigation into Dalakhar’s murder (and the reasons behind it).
- Introduces them to some of his friends (roll on the “Renaer’s Friends” table).
- Invites the PCs to a party at Brandarthall.

VAJRA SAFAHR, THE BLACKSTAFF

- Lights have been seen in Kolat Towers, an old abandoned wizard’s tower in the Southern Ward. Despite everything that’s happening, she’s going to have to find time to check it out: Reoccupied wizard’s haunts are trouble more often than not.
- She knows uncomfortably too much about whatever the PCs’ last op was, although she doesn’t actually use their names.
- Tries to recruit the PCs into Force Grey. (Or, if the PCs actions have not distinguished them in this way, she sets a Force Grey member to keep watch on them.)

LARAE LRA “ELRA” HARSARD

- She’s come to check out the “fiery-tempered temptress” who’s playing fast and loose with Renaer’s heart.
- Debriefing a Force Grey agent whose mission went disastrously. (Could be used to hook the PCs into doing a Force Grey faction mission – completing the failed mission – even if they aren’t members of Force Grey.)
- Her old friend Meloon Wardragon seems to be avoiding her lately and she’s worried about it. She doesn’t know what she could have done to alienate him.

OSCO SALIBUCK

- Has just returned from an expedition to the Tomb of Galari, an Archmage of Ancient Netheril. Young Harchan Roaringhorn led the expedition, clearly seeking something of import. (Osco does not know what; and it’s clear that Harchan was unsuccessful in whatever his aim was.)
- He has ordered one of every single liquor in the tavern, lined them up on the bar, and is working his way through them one by one. He is offering his (increasingly incoherent) critiques of each one at the top of his lungs.
- Lord Tylandar Roaringhorn is celebrating his seventieth birthday on the Roaringhorn estates in Amphail. Osco will be leaving Waterdeep for a couple of weeks (probably closer to a month), and he wants to have one last big party before he goes.

LORD TORLYN WANDS

- Lord Terras, who has had a feud with the Wands ever since Torlyn’s sister turned down his proposal of marriage, has filed yet another civil suit claiming that guests staying at the Wands’ ancestral hunting lodge have crossed over onto his property. He filed the suit in the Court of Amphail, just to make it more of a headache for Torlyn to defend it.

- Recently acquired an alchemical concoction that was supposed to counteract the effects of strong drink... and got himself into rather a spot of trouble at the Grinning Lion (a tavern in the North Ward). He drank far too much zzar (a fortified sherry with an orange color and an almondy scent), ate far too many fried eels, and woke up in an alley in the South Ward next to a snoring troll.
- Quietly reading *The Salt of the Abyss* by Ableworth Dirkley while sipping tea in the corner.

EIRUK WESKUR

- One of the journeyman under his watch had a *teleport* spell go awry. If anyone happens to visit an interdimensional pocket and happens to see the poor fellow, please let him know.
- Looking for Vajra: She was supposed to be here tonight and he's concerned that she isn't keeping the appointment.
- He's gained a nasty scar across one cheek: One of the apprentices of the Order of Magists let a spell get out of control.

HARUG SHIELDSUNDER

- Has brought half a dozen dwarven tunnel workers from the Cellarers' & Plumbers' Guild to check out the new tavern.
- Malaerigo Harsard, Guild Master of the Cellarers' & Plumbers' Guild, has announced a steep rate hike in the guild's dues. There's a great deal of discontent in the rank-and-file, particularly among the dwarves.
- It's the anniversary of his nephew's death: He orders six dwarven ales (one for each year since Dorn's death) and drinks them one by one. (Others who knew Dorn – like Laraelra, for example – may join in.)

PARLEK LATERIFF

- Recently acquired *Sister Argutara's Telestic Tome of the Draconic Tribes*. Waxes rhapsodic about it.
- Comparing recent acquisitions with Lord Torlyn Wands.
- Arguing with Rishaal over the inconsistencies between *Arturo's Moonsea Atlas* and *Arienthil's Journeys in the Moonshae Isles*. (Parlek is convinced that Arienthil edited her accounts in order to gloss over or conceal various sites of importance she had encountered. He has an elaborate conspiracy theory suggesting, for example, that she was aware of a huge vein of black gold, a rare Feydark ore which is found in deposits throughout the Moonshae Isles and sparks intermittent "black gold rushes" when they turn up.)

MELOON WARDRAGON

- Challenges patrons to an arm-wrestling contest.
- Under the influence of the intellect devourer, asks probing questions regarding the Grand Game hoping to glean actionable intelligence from the PCs or their associates.
- PCs might notice he has a little purple fluid leaking out of his nose. (Potentially revealing the presence of the intellect devourer.)

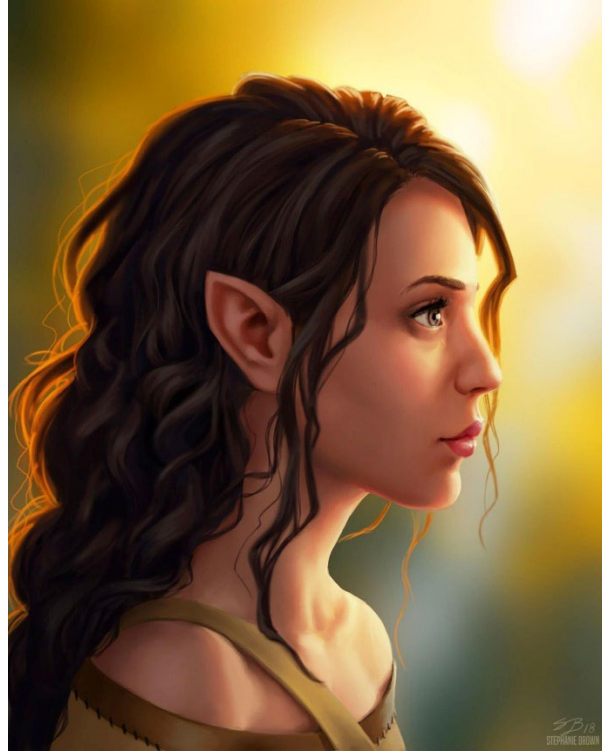
- Speaks of how his hometown, Loudwater, has come under the control of the Zhentarim. The current High Lord, Telbor Zazrek, is a well-paid puppet of the Zhentarim and, through him, the Black Network maintains a stranglehold on the town. Any supplies not provided by the Zhentarim are punitively taxed and the cost of living in the town has skyrocketed.

FLOON BLAGMAAR

- He came here to meet with a pair of lovely brunettes, but now he needs help: They're sitting over there in the corner – don't look! I'm supposed to just be ordering drink, but I recognize one of them as being the wife of Lord Elamyr Belabranta. If Lord Elamyr finds out, he'll send a griffon to eat Floon. (The Belabratas breed griffons for the City Watch.)
- His friend Bruzmyr Seerambra can offer a much better deal on the cost of liquor and ale than the Vintners' Guild.
- His friend Riklyn Harvester has been transformed into an orange tabby cat by an irate sorcerer who was upset that Riklyn was trying to pick up a girl at the Old Skull Tavern. He's got Riklyn with him (meow!) and he's hoping the PCs can help turn him back. (Floon is mistaken: The cat is just a cat.)

PATRONS

TALISOLVANAR “TALLY” FELLBRANCH



Appearance: Half-elf with short brown hair in a simple bowl-cut. Large blue eyes. Wears a leather vest with small tools in its many pockets.

Roleplaying:

- Strong handshake.
- Very sarcastic.
- Rubs the tops of his ears as a nervous habit.

Background:

- Owner and chief artisan of the Bent Nail, located at the eastern end of Trollskull Alley (DH p. 32).
- Brother to Mellannor Fellbranch, the groundskeeper of the Phaulkonmere and representative of the Emerald Enclave (DH p. 35).

Stats: Commoner (MM p. 345)

- Chaotic Good
- *Racial Traits:* Advantage vs. charmed. Immune to magical sleep. Darkvision to 60 ft.
- *Languages:* Common, Elvish.

EMBRIC

Appearance: Flaming red skin with fiery red hair that writhes under extreme emotion. Eyes flare red when angry.

Roleplaying:

- Prone to extreme mood swings.
- Hair does a twirling dance (often intermingling with Avi's) when drunk.
- Voice sounds like crackling flames.
- A faint scent of brimstone when he burps.

Background:

- Married to Avi. Co-owner of Steam and Steel, located at the eastern end of Trollskull Alley (DH p. 32). Tends the forge and is an expert weaponsmith.
- Belongs to the Most Careful Order of Skilled Smiths and Metalforgers.
- Claims descent from the efreet of Calimshan.

Stats: Bandit Captain (MM p. 344)

- Neutral Good
- *Racial Traits:* Cast *produce flame* at will (Constitution spellcasting ability, +4 bonus to hit with spells). Darkvision 60 ft. Resistance to fire.
- *Languages:* Common, Primordial

AVI

Appearance: Blue skin with beads of moisture twinkling upon it, with large, blue-black eyes. Smells of fresh rain. His blue hair floats freely, swaying and waving as if underwater. Wears miniature, animate waterfall (holy symbol of Eldath).

Roleplaying:

- Big, beaming smile.
- Rests his hand gently on Embric's arm to help him control his emotions.
- When drunk, speaks like a whale.

Background:

- Married to Embric. Co-owner of Steam and Steel, located at the eastern end of Trollskull Alley (DH p. 32). Uses his magic to quench hot steel.
- Belongs to the Splendid Order of Armorers, Locksmiths, and Finesmiths.
- Worships Eldath, god of peace.

Stats: Priest (MM p. 348)

- Neutral Good
- *Racial Traits:* At will, control 5 ft. cube of water or freeze water for 1 hour. Swim 30 ft. Breathe air and water. Resistance to acid.

Languages: Common, Primordial

FALA LEFALIIR

Appearance: Wood elf with long, braided, coppery hair. A sprig of mistletoe woven into their hair above the right ear.

Roleplaying:

- If referred to as “he” or “she,” politely asks to be addressed as “they.”
- Offers up various herbal remedies to any problems (physical, social, etc.) people may be suffering from.

Background:

- Owns Corellon’s Crown, across Trollskull Alley from Trollskull Manor (DH p. 32).
- Member of the Guild of Apothecaries and Physicians.
- Friends with Ziraj, a Zhentarim who saved their life. (He visits Fala from time to time and Fala has set aside a room for him on the second floor of the Corellon’s Crown. See faction mission, DH p. 38.)

Stats: Druid (MM p. 346)

- Chaotic Good
- *Racial Traits:* Advantage vs. charmed. Immune to magical sleep. Speed 35 ft. Darkvision 60 ft.
- *Languages:* Common, Druidic, Elvish

VINCENT TRENCH



Appearance: Dresses in a sharp suit and smokes a slim pipe. Black hair with a streak of silver that hangs foppishly over his brow.

Roleplaying:

- Speaks concisely.
- Arches an eyebrow inquisitively.
- Puffs on his pipe thoughtfully.

Background:

- Private eye who runs the Tiger's Eye, located towards the western end of Trollskull Alley (DH p. 32).
- Actually a rakshasa named Valantajar; uses *disguise self* before speaking to visitors or emerging into public (DC 18 on Intelligence (Investigation) check to detect). The spells lasts for 1 hour, so he notably excuses himself at such intervals.
- *Investigations:* 50 gp sufficient for most investigations, but if it's a significant task (investigating major factions, for example), Trench might require a service in payment, such as slaying enemies that are hunting it, posting advertisements for its business in their tavern, or keeping tabs on someone he's been hired to spy on.

Stats: Rakshasa (MM p. 257)

RISHAAL THE PAGE-TURNER



Appearance: Gold dragonborn. Pince-nez glasses at the end of his snout.

Roleplaying:

- Bookish, but with a deep, gravelly voice.
- Taps fingers of his hands together nervously.
- Small curls of smoke emerge from his nostrils when happy.

Background:

- Owns the Book Wyrms' Treasure at the western end of Trollskull Alley (DH p. 33).
- Knew Lif, the former owner of Trollskull Manor, and arranged for the sale of his modest library after he passed.

Stats: Mage (MM p. 347)

- Neutral
- *Racial Traits:* Exhale 15-ft. cone of fire once per rest (2d6 fire damage; DC 10 Dexterity save for half damage). Resistance to fire.
- *Languages:* Common, Draconic, Dwarvish, Elvish

HAMMOND KRADDOC

Appearance: A rather portly gentleman dressed in a fine silk doublet with a fashionable dress coat of displacer beast fur. He has a thin moustache that angles down sharply, only to gently curl back up by the slightest of degrees.

- Always accompanied by Jinny (NG female tiefling **commoner**) who wears spectacles and silently records notes and conversations in a small book as Hammond speaks.

Roleplaying Notes:

- Sniffs at a perfumed handkerchief.
- Doesn't like adventurers, but does like their coin.
- Warms up considerably (dropping most of his effete affectations) if engaged knowledgably by a fellow aficionado of wine and liqueurs.

Background:

- He was once the owner of the Elysium Fields, a vineyard south of Waterdeep. The Elysium Fields were destroyed when a group of adventurers ended up fighting a black dragon in the middle of them. Even if he could have rebuilt, the dragon's acidic breath had permanently altered the Ph balance of the soil.
- He came to Waterdeep and joined the Vintners', Distillers', and Brewers' Guild, using his vast knowledge of viticulture and personal connections to "improve the general fare of consumption in the city of splendors."
- Gave Lord Dagult large bribes to cover up a scandal involving contaminated liquor in the Dock Ward (see [Lord Dagult's Papers](#)).

Key Info:

- Representative of the Vintners', Distillers', and Brewers' Guild.
- His guild offers a wide range of plans for a new establishment's base selection of liquor and beer (ranging from 50 gp for a few very common selections all the way to 1,000 gp or more for a truly exotic selection).

Stats: N male Illuskan human **commoner** (MM p. 345)

BROXLEY FAIRKETTLE

Appearance: A laid-back halfling with mutton chops and bushy eyebrows.

Roleplaying Notes:

- Strongly urges membership in the Fellowship of Innkeepers' to "avoid further harassment."
- Relates everything back to the lamentable burdens of being a father of nine.
- Scratches his cheek thoughtfully.

Background:

- Broxley came to Waterdeep as a refugee when he was just a wee young hin. His father and mother had fled Secomber when it was overrun by the Urshani hobgoblins in the 1470's.
- Broxley started as a scuttle-boy for the local taverns. He eventually worked his way up through the kitchens until he finally came to own a tavern of his own, the Barefoot Boards (which is scaled for and caters almost exclusively to halflings).
- Broxley often supported other tavern owners in the area (many of whom he had worked with or for over the years), and he was elected as the new North Ward representative of the Fellowship of Innkeepers' a few years back.

Key Info:

- North Ward representative of the Fellowship of Innkeepers'. (Inns and taverns are few and far between in the North Ward, so he makes frequent visits.)
- Has long believed Trollskull Manor to be haunted.

Stats: LG male strongheart halfling **commoner** (MM p. 345)

ULKORIA STONEMARROW

Appearance: A female dwarf whose face has been frozen in a terrible, almost horrifying rictus.

- Never seen without her **shield guardian** (MM p. 271) nearby.

Roleplaying Notes:

- A permanent scowl inflicted by some unknown cause.
- But incredibly friendly and personable; like everyone's favorite grandmother.
- Occasionally gets a distant look in her eyes, waggles her fingers, and will murmur something like, "That's better." under her breath. (It's unclear if she's pulling people's legs with this routine.)

Background:

- Nicknamed the "Gargoyle" due to the horrible scowl frozen on her face. Frightens children and adults alike.
- No one knows where she lives, but it's believed to be underground, possibly a cellar or a dungeon under one of the city's oldest estates. (She uses *teleport* spells to enter and leave her home.)
- Once owned Trollskull Manor. She sold it to a family of shield dwarves who fell on hard times and sold it to a woman who made it into an orphanage. The woman, Arissa Mirthkettle, turned out to be a hag who was cooking and eating the children. It was then abandoned for many years before being acquired by a half-elf named Lif. Lif, for his part, was killed in a terrible accident when one of the support beams on his ale casks broke and collapsed on top of him.

Key Info:

- Used to own Trollskull Manor. Hopes the new owners make something good of it.
- Charges 300 gp for castings of *glyphs of warding*.

Stats: NG female shield dwarf **archmage** (MM p. 342)

MATTRIM “THREESTRINGS” MEREK



Appearance: Lanky brown hair hangs down around a face more plain than handsome. He wears gaudy clothes of purple and green, and carries a badly scarred lute that only has three strings left to its name.

Roleplaying Notes:

- Talks about how difficult it is to play [insert song name] on just three strings!
- A goofy, lop-sided smile.
- Breaks into song (and it really is quite good).

Background:

- Plays a lute that only has three strings remaining.
- Hides his true musical skills to maintain a low profile.

Key Info:

- A Harper spy who uses his busking gigs to cover his intelligence-gathering operations.
- Works with Cal'al Claddani, a half-drow Harper agent who works in the Flagon and the Dragon in Skullport.
- Knows about a Harper hideout called Dalagor's Fortress, overseen by a dragonborn mage named Felrax, in the uppermost level of Skullport.
- Has befriended Bonnie the Doppelganger and wants to help her and her gang settle into the city.

Stats: LG male Illuskan human **bard** (DH p. 195)

JALESTER SILVERMANE



Appearance: A middle-aged man with thinning brown hair. Wears a loose doublet and pants of dark silver-grey. A lean, gaunt strength.

Roleplaying Notes:

- Lonely (after the death of his boyfriend) and looking for love.

Background:

- Hails from Cormyr, where he was a member of the Steel Shadows mercenary company.
- Left the Dales with several members of the company, including his boyfriend, Faerrel Dunblade, and came to Waterdeep.
- Faerral and Jalester befriended Elminster, who brought them to the attention of Laeral Silverhand.
- Faerral Dunblade, was killed in a street fight last year.

Key Info:

- Captain of the City Watch.
- Secret agent of the Lords' Alliance who reports directly to Open Lord Laeral Silverhand.
- Charged with spying on adventurers to determine whether they can aid or will imperil the city.
- Can get the location of Xanathar's Lair from Laeral Silverhand.

Stats: DH p. 205

YAGRA STONEFIST



Appearance: Seven-foot-tall half-orc with purplish-gray skin, a tousled mop of black hair, and shapely tusks to either side of her mouth. She wears well-kept leather armor and has a simple sword strapped to her side. She wears a large pendant of red jade, seared with the winged-serpent sigil of the Zhentarim.

Roleplaying Notes:

- Likes challenging adventurers to arm wrestle.
- Cracks her knuckles.
- Incredibly hostile towards slavers and Xanatharians.

Background:

- Yagra was rescued from slavers by the Doom Raiders. She and Ziraj the Hunter dated briefly, but it didn't really work out. By the time they broke up, however, the Doom Raiders had joined the Black Network and moved to Waterdeep to take over the local Zhentarim.

Key Info:

- Zhentarim mercenary working for the Doom Raiders.
- Intermittently works as Davil Starsong's bodyguard.
- Knows a "back door" into Xanathar's Lair.

Stats: N female half-orc **thug** (MM p. 390)

- 1/long rest, when reduced to 0 hit points, drops to 1 hit point instead.
- Darkvision 60 ft.
- *Languages:* Common, Orc

RENAER & FRIENDS

RENAER NEVEREMBER



Appearance: A tousel of shoulder-length red hair. Piercing, blue-green eyes. Slim, lithe muscles beneath clothes that are stylish but practical.

Roleplaying:

- A flair for diplomacy.
- A love for good drink.
- A share of his father's temper and as much of his mother's wits.

Background:

- Estranged son of Dagult Neverember, former Open Lord of Waterdeep and the current Lord of Neverwinter.
- Lives off the sizable inheritance left to him by his mother, Lady Alethea Brandath.
- Member of the Harpers.
- Renaer's great-great-granduncle was Kulzar Brandath, a pirate.
- When Samark Dhanzscul, the former Blackstaff, was assassinated by Khondar "Ten-Rings" Naomal, Renaer and several of his friends stumbled into the plot and rescued Vajra, the rightful heir of the Blackstaff. (See *Blackstaff Tower*.)

Brandarthall: Four-story residence in the Sea Ward. Formerly Neverember Manor, but Renaer restored its original name in his mother's honor.

- Friends have an open invitation to use the house as they please.
- *Madrak*: White-haired halfling butler. Knew Renaer's mother; promised her to keep an eye on Renaer. Madrak's son Bramal and his children oversee the Brandath estates.

- *Gate to Varadras*: Turning a stone rosebud outside the garderobe at the hallway past Renaer's office causes the garderobe to drop out of sight and a stone staircase to rotate down from the ceiling. Shoving a metal bench over the top of the stairwell causes it to reset from the top. The stairs lead to a hidden rooftop rose garden, where there is statue of a kneeling elf maid; for as long as water is poured into the statue's hands, a portal opens to Varadras.

Varadras: Built by Renaer's ancestor Varad Brandath. About 100 miles due west of Beliard, near the Stone Bridge northwest of Waterdeep. Various passwords ("Kamatar," "Palnethar," "Dorneathr") cause hearths and torches to flare to light.

- Varad was one of the last students of Khelben "Blackstaff" Arunsun, and later friends with him and also Pikar Salibuck (Madrak's father, Osco's great-grandfather).
- See Chapter 9 of *Blackstaff Tower* for additional details.

Black Tears: Founded shortly after Vajra became Blackstaff, the Black Tears were meant to "follow in the Blackstaff's wake" just as the Tears of Selune follow in the wake of the moon.

- *Members*: Lord Torlyn Wands, Osco Salibuck, Eiruk Weskur, Harug Shieldsunder, Laraelra Harsard, Meloon Wardragon, Parlek Lateriff, and Renaer.
- *Roarke House*: Meeting place of the Black Tears, in honor of the memory of Vhareem Kuthcutter and Faxhal Xoram, friends of the Black Tears' who fell in battle defending Vajra and the city. They are interred in sarcophagi bearing the crescent moon and star in catacombs beneath Roarke House, near the location where Faxhal died. Roarke House is decorated heavily with moons and star, as Volam Roarke was a devout worshiper of Selune (he also financed the restoration of the House of the Moon after the Spellplague). The Roarkes lost their fortune and the Brandaths acquired their properties around 1440 DR. Renaer also owns a neighboring warehouse and the Gildenfires festhall on the opposite side of the warehouse.
- *Rook's Hold*: The Rook was a thief of some repute in the 14th Roarke House connects to his hideout, which was located in the subterranean crypts after which Skulls Street was named. The Black Tears have resecured it.

Stats: Iluskan Swashbuckler (DH p. 216)

- Chaotic Good
- *Languages*: Common

VAJRA SAFAHR, THE BLACKSTAFF



Appearance: A surprisingly young woman, with an unruly tumble of black hair above piercing green eyes. She prefers practical clothes of a blackish-purplish hue, with a long coat covered in elven-inked designs.

Roleplaying:

- Eyes narrow when she's impatient.
- Drums her fingers on the shaft of her staff.
- Makes snap judgments about whether or not she can trust someone.

Background:

- Born in Tethyr to the paladin Tamik al Tamik al Safahr and Parama yr Manshaka.
- Grew up in Sheshyr House in Tethyr with several older siblings.
- Came to Waterdeep and briefly joined the Watchful Order of Magists and Protectors before becoming the apprentice of Samarck Dhanzscul, the former Blackstaff, in 1476 DR. They later became lovers.
- In 1479 DR, Samarck was assassinated by Khondar and Centiv Naomal. Vajra became the Blackstaff's heir, but was not yet fully prepared to assume the Blackstaff' mantle and was captured by Khondar.
- Vajra was rescued by Renaer Neverember, Laraelra Harsard, and their friends, who also helped her reach Blackstaff Tower so that she could fully integrate the personalities of the former Blackstaffs. (See *Blackstaff's Tower* for details.)
- She made Laraelra Harsard the new Blackstaff's Heir.

Key Info:

- Controls **Force Grey**, a corps of elite adventurers who work with Waterdeeps' Guard and Watch to deal with situations that require their expertise.

Stats: DH, p. 217

LARAE LRA “ELRA” HARSARD

Appearance: Sharp, strong cheekbones along with long black hair frame a pale face. She dresses practically, usually wearing a heavy woolen cloak covering an oiled leather tunic, pants, and sealskin boots.

Roleplaying:

- Assumes that anyone not belonging to the working class is a fool or a villain or both until proven otherwise. Often sniffs dismissively at their assertions, although she’s gotten better at controlling her hot tongue.
- Tries to blow away errant black hairs that fall in front of her face.
- Believes Renaer is too foolhardy and trusting. She will try to protect him from his own mistakes.
- Sighs heavily if anyone confuses her name with Laeral Silverhand and tells them to use her nickname.

Background:

- Daughter of Malaerigo Harsard, the guildmaster of the Cellarers’ & Plumbers’ Guild. Their relationship became strained as a result of Malaerigo’s dislike for Laraelra’s sorcery and Laraelra’s advocacy for workers’ rights in the guild (particularly when it came to tackling anti-dwarf racism in the ranks).
- In 1479 DR, she hired Meloon Wardragon to help her protect a dwarven team of cellarers repairing a damaged sewer tunnel. They heard the tortured cries of a woman in pain. Investigating, they discovered that the cellar they were hearing the cries coming from belonged to Renaer Neverember. (In reality, it had been secretly rented out by Renaer’s father.)
- She and Meloon confronted Renaer, who joined them in investigating the tortured woman’s cries and rescued Vajra Safahr, the Blackstaff’s Heir who had been kidnapped by Khondar. They, along with several of Renaer’s other friends, helped rescue Vajra and get her to Blackstaff Tower, where she assumed her rightful place as the new Blackstaff.
- Vajra made Laraelra Harsard her apprentice and named her the new Blackstaff’s Heir. (See *Blackstaff Tower* for details.)
- She briefly dated Renaer around 1482 DR. They both recognize that this was a huge mistake.

Key Info:

- Her friends call her Elra.
- Knows the sewers and other passages beneath the city like the back of her hand.
- The Blackstaff’s Heir. She can wield a Blackstaff and channel Vajra’s power through it.
- Vajra’s right-hand woman in running **Force Grey**.
- Member of the Black Tears.

Stats: Swashbuckler (DH p. 216)

OSCO SALIBUCK

Appearance: A halfling with curly, chestnut-brown hair and long sideburns. He wears silver rings in his left ear and nostril.

Roleplaying:

- A charming, boyish grin.
- A finely developed palate for fine wines and liquers.

Background:

- Grandson of Madrak Salibuck (Renaer's butler) and son of Ellial Salibuck. One of his aunts is named Delalar. Not to be confused with Osco Salibuck the Elder, who was his ancestor (and a former associate of Khelben "Blackstuf" Arunsun).
- In 1479 DR he snuck in the magical mansion of Varadras (see Renaer Neverember's character background) and was discovered there by Renaer and his companions raiding the wine cellars. He joined them in returning Vajra Safahr to Blackstaff Tower and seeing her securely ensconced as the Blackstaff. (See *Blackstaff Tower* for more details.)
- He was invited to become a founding member of the Black Tears.
- Osco has been employed for several years as the Chief of Household Security for the Roaringhorn family. (Note: This family is engaged with the Great Game, although their efforts are currently far astray. See the Cassalanter's Report on the Grand Game for details.) Be became close friends with Zelraun Roaringhorn after preventing his death as the result of an undead curse dating back seven generations. Lately he's had his hands full trying to keep up with the escapades of Harchan Roaringhorn, the young heir.
- Zelraun Roaringhorn (LN male Chondathan human **archmage**) is seventy-four years old, but has taken enough *potions of longevity* in his life that he still looks like he's in his forties. Zelraun's brother, Tylandar (LN male Chondathan human **noble**), is the younger brother at nearly seventy-years old, but actually looks his age.

Key Info:

- Member of the Black Tears.

Stats: Spy (MM p. 349)

- *Brave:* Advantage on saving throws vs. being frightened.
- *Halfling Nimbleness:* Move through the space of any creature that is a size larger than your own.
- *Lucky:* When rolling 1 on 1d20, reroll the result (once only).
- Small size
- Speed 25 ft.
- *Languages:* Common, Halfling
- Has a dagger named Osco's Luck. (A simple stone dagger with a red, cabochon-cut jasper stone in its pommel. Its name is engraved in Trade Common on the blade.)

LORD TORLYN WANDS



Appearance: Mahogany hair with a fully beard. He wears silk shirts unbuttoned to reveal the top tufts of his hairy chest. His stomach has just a little middle-aged padding about it. He has surrendered to the fashions of the court, but insists on wearing practical, waterproofed boots.

Roleplaying:

- An avid book collector, eager to discuss the most recent titles he's acquired and those he's looking to acquire.
- A booming voice, full of mirth.
- Although a happily married man, he still flirts shamelessly with men and women alike.

Backdrop:

- Married Natasha Phullbrinter in 1483 DR. His sister is Nhaeran Wands. He became the head of the Wands family in 1479 DR after his cousin, Hurnal Wands, was killed during the Khondar affair that led to Vajra becoming Blackstaff. (See *Blackstaff Tower* for details.)
- He's been friends with Renaer Neverember since childhood. His father was a dear friend of Lady Alethea Brandath before her death.
- Although initially reluctant to join the Black Tears, he secretly supported them for several years and helped Renaer fund their activities. Later, he officially became a Black Tear during the Codswallop Affair (although his participation is still largely one of support rather than active duty).

Key Info:

- Member of the Black Tears.

List of Rare Books: Lord Torlyn has either recently acquired or is currently seeking.

- *The Salt of the Abyss* by Ableworth Dirkley, being a collection of poems inspired by various demonic incursions on the material plane.
- *I Remember Him* by Piergeiron, a copy that was once owned by Renaer (who lost it in a bet).
- *Eladrin Friezes of the 11th Century as Collected by Lord Wendell of Cormyr*
- *The Day of Fire* by Tussaud
- *Essays on the Nature of Love* by Lord Fulgin Athara
- The three volumes titled *Truth*, *Beauty*, and *Love* by Alyssa of Athkatla
- *The Celestial Tower* and *Tower of the Infernal* by Alyssa of Neverwinter
- *Arienthil's Journeys in the Moonshae Isles*

Stats: Noble (MM p. 348)

EIRUK WESKUR

Appearance: A handsome hawknose juts out from between hollow cheeks. He has tightly curled black hair and wears black robes stitched with arcane patterns of silver thread.

Roleplaying:

- Holds his elbows out and up from his body, forming a kind of platform with his hands from which he gestures.
- An uncanny knack for spotting what people are seeking to hide or deny.
- Steadfastly loyal to those who have earned his friendship.

Background:

- Joined the Watchful Order of Magists and Protectors in 1473 DR.
- He became friends with Vajra Safahr during the brief period during which she was a member of the Watchful Order and before she was apprenticed to Samarck the Blackstaff.
- During the period in which Khondar was using the Watchful Order to hunt Vajra, Eiruk realized that Khondar had someone impersonating the Blackstaff. He defected to Vajra's cause and assisted Renaer and his companions in escorting her to the Blackstaff's Tower. (See *Blackstaff's Tower* for details.)
- His mother's name was Ainla.

Key Info:

- Founding member of the Black Tears, backup heir to the Blackstaff (after Laraelra), and current Maester of the Journeymen in the Watchful Order.
- Loves Vajra, but knows she only returns it as a dear friendship and has come to terms with that.
- Knows that Bowgentra Summertaen, Lady Master of the Watchful Order, has acquired a nimblewright.

Stats: Mage (MM p. 347)

HARUG SHIELDSUNDER



Appearance: Harug is old. His face is craggy even for a dwarf's. His features look like melted candlewax roughly hewn with a sharp stone.

Roleplaying:

- The most cantankerous dwarf in the city.
- His shoulders are sagged with a weary weight (although he can still shake it off when he puts his mind to it).
- If you demonstrate your solidarity with the dwarves, he still stand fast by your side through any trouble.
- "Sewyrm shit" is one of his favorite curses.

Background:

- Harug was a tunnel worker for the Cellarers' & Plumbers' Guild.
- In that work he became friends with Laraelra, who was the daughter of the guildmaster (Malaerigo) but also a steadfast advocate for workers' rights in the guild (particularly when it came to tackling anti-dwarf racism in the ranks).
- In 1479 DR, he became a founding member of the Black Tears and helped retrofit the basements of Roarke House.
- Harug is now the Dwarf Master of the guild; a position created in order to guarantee the rights of dwarf workers.
- His nephew, Dorn Strongcroft, was also a member of the guild. He was killed in a collapse in 1486 DR.

Key Info:

- Friends with Laraelra Harsard.
- Founding member of the Black Tears.

Stats: Commoner Dwarf (MM p. 345)

- *Dwarven Resistance:* Advantage vs. poison saving throws. Resistance to poison damage.
- *Stonecunning:* Add double proficiency bonus to Intelligence (history) checks related to the origin of stonework.
- Speed 25 ft.
- Darkvision 60 ft.
- *Languages:* Common, Dwarvish

PARLEK LATERIFF

Appearance: Older man with a close-cropped gray beard, wearing spectacles near the end of his long nose.

Roleplaying:

- Adjusts his spectacles.
- Will frame his conversation by either referring to obscure tomes or by revealing a canny understanding of Waterdeep's street-lore – the separation of what's being gossiped on the street from *why* it's being gossiped about.
- Likes to show off a cantrip he has that sorts "like with like" (useful for components or spilled jewelry supplies); he learned it from Laraelra and think it's incredibly clever.

Background:

- Sage, smith, and sorcerer.
- Makes replica and counterfeit jewelry for nobles.
- Lives up on Mountainside.

Key Info:

- Founding member of the Black Tears.

List of Rare Books: Parlek has either recently acquired or is currently seeking.

- *Arturo's Moonsea Atlas*
- *Arienthil's Journeys in the Moonshae Isles*
- *Grimoire of the Dukes of Fey*
- *Duke Nary's History of 14th Century Teshendale* (primarily detailing the fall of Teshendale to Zhentarim slavers out of Zhentil Keep)
- *The Idylls of Menzoberranzan* by Krenaste Baenre (largely believed to be a forgery)
- *Eldarin Friezes of the 11th Century as Collected by Lord Wendell of Cormyr*
- *Onymatical Analyses of Clockworks* by Belgos Glannath
- *Memories of Kara-Tur*

Stats: Mage (MM p. 347)

- Advantage on History checks.

MELOON WARDRAGON



Appearance: Meloon was once a northern barbarian in all his glory – tousled blond locks, glistening muscles. Now closer to forty than thirty, he cuts his hair short and has a beard that tends more toward scruff than not. Strapped to his side is a battleaxe forged from silver, electrum, and steel, with a handle wrapped in blue dragon hide, and a star sapphire set into its pommel.

- Over his heart he has a tattoo of the family crest of the Wardragons of Loudwater: A serpentine dragon wrapping vertically around a sword resting point down on a green field.

Roleplaying Notes:

- Endlessly optimistic, regardless of how dire things appear.
- Has the wily cunning of a veteran of many battles.
- Is drawn to young adventurers, seeing himself as a younger man in their exploits.
- Squints with one eye.

Background:

- Grew up in Loudwater, a thriving community home to humans and half-elves.
- He used to play on the Flying Fish Bridge in Loudwater: Ancient wards on the bridge cause trout trying to swim under the bridge to instead fly over the top of it. It was a local custom to catch one of the fish and then throw it back into the river for good luck.
- His father used to say, “Never trust a man who’s not got a little stuff on his boots. If a man is worried about where he’s stepping, he’s not working hard enough.”
- In 1479 DR, he was a mercenary hired by Laraelra Harsard to help rescue Harug Shieldsunder and several other tunnel workers from a collapsed sewer tunnel under Waterdeep. They heard the tortured cries of a woman in pain. Investigating, they discovered that the cellar they were hearing the cries coming from belonged to Renaer Neverember. (In reality, it had been secretly rented out by Renaer’s father.)
- He and Laraelra confronted Renaer, who joined them in investigating the tortured woman’s cries and rescued Vajra Safahr, the Blackstaff’s Heir who had been kidnapped by Khondar. They, along with several of Renaer’s other friends, helped rescue Vajra and get her to Blackstaff Tower, where she assumed her rightful place as the new Blackstaff. (See *Blackstaff Tower* for details.)
- As a founding member of the Black Tears and, later, a member of Force Grey, Meloon spent years adventuring in the service of Waterdeep.

- Three weeks ago, he accompanied a fledgling band of adventurers on an expedition into Undermountain. While resting, the band was ambushed by a Xanatharian troupe. Meloon was overcome by an intellect devourer and became a slave to Nihiloor and Xanathar.

Key Info:

- Currently infested with an intellect devourer controlled by Nihiloor, a mind flayer working for Xanathar. (It requires a *wish* spell to restore Meloon's brain.)
- His magical axe, *Azureedge*, wants a new wielder due to the intellect devourer and Meloon must engage in a contest of wills each morning (see *Dragon Heist*, p. 36).
- Keeps a room at the Yawning Portal.
- Founding member of the Black Tears.
- Member of Force Grey who reports directly to Vajra.

Stats: *Dragon Heist*, p. 210

FLOON BLAGMAAR

Appearance: Dazzlingly handsome. Flowing locks of red hair pour down over his shoulders. Blue-green eyes that swim with the depths of the Sea of Swords. A square jaw framing an enchanting smile.

Roleplaying:

- More beauty than brains, he expects to be well-liked by everyone he meets.
- A dazzling smile.
- Flirts shamelessly with attractive men and women (but desists if they show no interest).

Background:

- Used to work as an escort in festhalls, but is currently unemployed.
- Several months ago, he came upon a married noble engaging in some indiscreet behavior, and now lives off the generous bribe he is being paid to keep quiet.

Key Info:

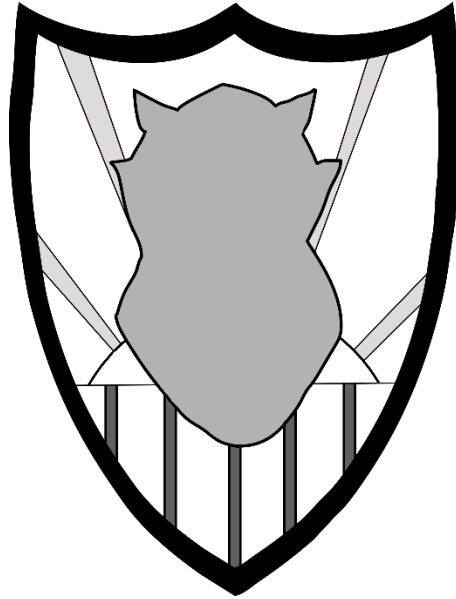
- Friends with both Renaer and Volo.
- Very well connected, with friends all over the city.

Stats: CG Illuskan human **commoner** (MM p. 345).

- *Ability Scores:* Intelligence 7 (-2), Charisma 13 (-1)
- *Languages:* Common

ADDENDUM: TROLLSKULL MANOR MENU

[by Justin Alexander – June 7th, 2019](#)



This is a special guest post from the players in my Dragon Heist campaign, as requested by the participants in the [Alexandrian Hangout Club](#). I've been running the campaign in a series of weekend intensives (generally playing Friday-Sunday), and when the Hangout Club members heard what the players had done for one of these weekends they demanded more details. I offer it here because I think it could be useful to other groups who have opened their own tavern.

A NOTE FROM EDANA'S PLAYER

We were now running a tavern and my character wanted it to feature really good food, to set it apart from the other tavern on the alley which had terrible food. I had the idea that each of the things on our menu could reflect our individual (and varied) backgrounds. I asked the other players what their characters' favorite meals were and we made that our menu. That's how we ended up with:

Pirate Stew – a shrimp and sausage gumbo served over rice

Sun Skewers – chicken, tomato, pepper and lemon skewers with lemon potatoes and pita bread

Ardeep Roast – wild boar barded with bacon, pears roasted with walnuts and bleu cheese and mashed potatoes

Il Timpano – delectable pasta pie served with fresh baked bread and greens

Soup du Jour – this was my inside joke about my character, who has a background of taking on new personas every couple of decades or so

The Il Timpano was something of a joke; since we are playing in weekend-long intensives I had cooked some simple meals that we could all share instead of ordering food all weekend. Beforehand I had sent out a poll for what meals people wanted, and left a write-in option. One of the players has been obsessed with Il Timpano ever since watching the episode of [Binging with the Babish](#) featuring the dish:

I think was just trolling me by writing it in. So when I asked him his characters favorite meal, of course that was it.

Since we were planning a second weekend, I secretly thought that maybe I could do a thing where I cooked our menu. It was a bit intimidating, but I've trying to take on cooking challenges, and this would for sure be one. I spent the month between sessions studying several versions of the recipes, picked the base recipes to follow (though there was certainly some improvisation as it went) and made my plan.

Friday dinner – Il Timpano

Saturday lunch – Shrimp gumbo

Saturday dinner – Kabobs and lemon potatoes

Sunday dinner – Roasted boar and pears

THE RECIPES

For the **Il Timpano** the [Binging with the Babish recipe](#) was used for the timpano dough and layering, and I used his [ragu recipe](#), too. I used storebought pasta for the inside, and our local butcher makes some excellent meatballs.

For the **Shrimp Gumbo** I used [this recipe](#) as the base, but for the okra I fried it in a pan for a few minutes and added it in close to the end, to try and keep it from getting slimy. I also probably used a lot less than the full pound.

For the **Kabobs**, I used [Mediterranean-style chicken kebabs](#) for the marinade, but I used cherry tomatoes and yellow bell peppers for the veggies. They'd have been better grilled, but oven-roasted was fine. The **lemon potatoes** were excellent, and I recommend the [recipe](#).

For the **Roast Boar**, there wasn't a recipe to follow, it was mostly about finding the boar and then using the right technique. I found several places online that sell wild boar, and ended up going with [D'Artagnan](#). I ordered two of these mini roasts, wrapped them in bacon and roasted them in the oven until they reached 145 degrees. Boar is a lean meat, so the bacon keeps them juicy as they cook. For the **pears**, all that is needed is to cut them in half, scoop out the core, sprinkle on bleu cheese and walnut pieces and roast for about 20 minutes. I had a recipe for them that was more involved, but by the end of the weekend I was running out of steam and this simple approach returned amazing results. The **mashed potatoes** were also pretty basic – boiled red potatoes with cream and butter.

THE MENU

Trollskull Manor



Menu

Il Timpano

Delectable pasta pie served with
fresh baked bread and salad

Pirate Stew

Shrimp and sausage gumbo
served over rice

Sun Skewers

Chicken, tomatoes, peppers and
lemon skewers with rice and pita

Ardeep Roast

Wild boar barded with bacon,
pears with walnuts and bleu
cheese and mashed potatoes

Special Thanks to Sarah, Peter, Heather, Chris, and Erik.

ADDENDUM: THE DRAGON OF DRAGON HEIST

[by Justin Alexander – February 23rd, 2020](#)



As I mentioned in [Part 6C: The Vault](#) of the Alexandrian Remix of [Dragon Heist](#), you can basically run the main vault at the end of the campaign unaltered: The PCs get the vault doors open, journey down to the lower level, find the golden dragon Aurinax hanging out down there disguised as a dwarf with the *dragonstaff of Alghairon*, and then somehow get the gold from him.

In practice, there are a few problems with this:

- Aurinax and his relationship with Lord Neverember is not previously established in the campaign. So at the very end of your epic story, the big conclusion hinges around this dude you've never heard of before. It's very confusing and probably anticlimactic.
- If the scene ends in a fight, the low level PCs will almost certainly be brutally murdered by the CR 17 dragon.
- So the scene seems pretty heavily weighted towards social negotiation, but the way it's designed makes this incredibly unlikely to succeed. (Multiple checks, with the designers actually telling the DM to ignore the rules to make failure more likely with stuff like "if even one character loses the contest, Aurinax senses that the group is lying to him.")

So what you have is a confusing encounter which likely ends with the PCs either being forced to leave without the gold or being brutally murdered.

NEVEREMBER'S DRAGON

Spoilers: This is not how I ended my *Dragon Heist* campaign.

First, let's identify what's actually cool about this encounter:

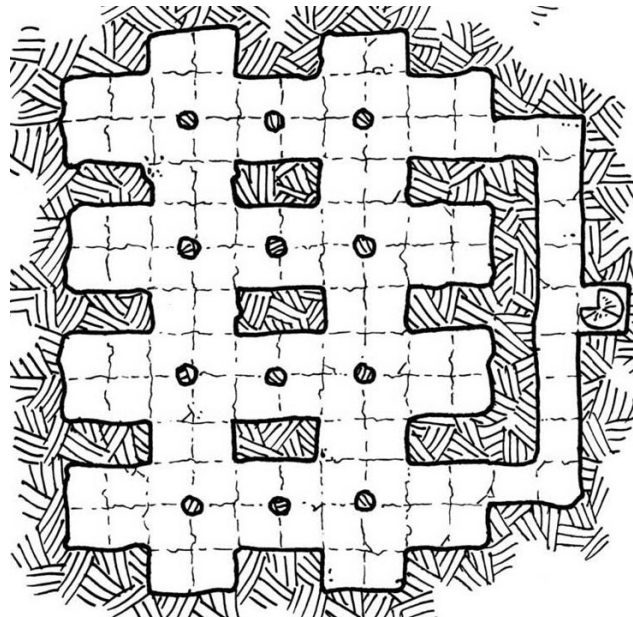
- A huge pile of gold. Not only are these inherently awesome, but this huge pile of gold has been literally the goal of the entire campaign.
- Dragon fight. Dragons on top of golden hoards? Awesome. Dragon slaying? Epic.

This is largely all you need: Epic dragon fight. If you win, you claim the dragon's hoard. Perfect note to end the campaign on.

What do we need for this to happen?

First, it shouldn't be a gold dragon. Gold dragons are Lawful Good and explaining why one is down here guarding stolen gold inevitably leads to some sort of weird, convoluted continuity that the players aren't going to care about at this point. (It's the end of the adventure; it's the time to be wrapping stuff up, not adding more back story.) It's really easy to simplify this: There's a red dragon. Neverember put the dragon here to guard his gold. How? I dunno. Dragon owed him a favor. He enslaved him with an artifact. It was a young dragon who just really wanted to sleep on a big pile of gold, and Neverember's offer was irresistible.

Second, emphasize the big pile of gold. In the adventure as published, this is what the vault looks like:



Sort of a weird, complicated space with the gold tucked away in the back corner. Compare that to the epic painting of the dragon perched atop the hoard above! We don't need all this distraction. Want a nice, simple dynamic here: Big pile of gold. Dragon.

So what I did was just have a large staircase leading down to the arched entrance of the lower vault. The vault itself was one big chamber with four pillars in the shape of dwarven hammers in the middle of the room (matching the architecture above). In the square space between these pillars was heaped the huge pile of gold.

When the PCs arrived, I had the dragon *behind* the pile of gold. This gives you TWO big moments:

- Players see the gold and have a moment to really focus on and process that image.
- Dragon crawls up over the top of the pile! Oh shit!

Third, it will probably be rewarding to reduce the chance of horrible death by not having the dragon pursue the PCs if they flee. If Neverember enslaved the dragon and bound it to the vault, then this takes care of itself. Smart PCs who feel overwhelmed by the dragon will now be able to retreat, regroup, and potentially call on the powerful allies they've made throughout the campaign (which would make this big finale fit thematically with the rest of the campaign).

(Tangent: If you wanted to, you could hypothesize that this is a modified *orb of dragonkind* or a similar artifact which is suspended from the roof the vault and keeps the dragon from leaving. PCs who intuit what's happening could use that to find an alternative solution to the dragon problem. But it's probably an unnecessary complication.)

REALITY CHECK - HOW BIG IS THAT PILE?! If you do the math, it turns out that 500,000 coins don't actually make for that big a pile. If you're being generous in your assumptions, it's probably about the size of a big pile of leaves. And why is it all in one big pile in the first place?! Wouldn't Neverember have his stolen hoard conveniently stored in coffers or bags or something? Why would he bring it all down here and then just pour it out on the floor?

First: Honestly, this is probably a place where you just need to care a little less. If the players do the math later and hit a fridge logic moment where they're like, "Hey! That pile of gold shouldn't have been that big!" it's fine. It's not going to detract from this big, awesome moment you had or the dragon fight that ensued.

Second: They're in a big pile because dragons like sleeping on big piles of treasure. Stop kink-shaming. (If you want to add a bunch of leather satchels or coin coffers that have been ripped open by dragon claws and tossed in the back corner of the vault, that could be a cool touch, though.)

Third: Okay, you still care. Maybe the players have already done the math because they've been trying to figure out how they're going to get all those gold coins out of the vault, so they're already expecting a leaf pile of gold. Fair enough. Two things you can do:

- Who said the whole hoard was made up strictly of gold coins? Add a bunch of silver and even more copper to bulk things up. The gold is a thin layer on top, because dragons like the feel of gold on their scales.
- Look at that picture again. Notice the stone plinths sticking out from the corner of the hoard pile? Yup. Middle of the vault is actually a big stone pyramid and the dragon has piled all the gold and silver and copper on top of it, greatly increasing the perceived size of the pile. (Why? Dragons like big hoard piles. Again: Stop kink-shaming!)

Oh! Better yet, it's actually a stone replica of Mt. Waterdeep. (If the PCs have been paying attention to the Dumathoin imagery throughout the rest of the vault, they might realize the Melairkyn dwarves have placed a huge sapphire worth 25,000 gold pieces in the center of this replica to echo the Heart of the Mountain. Up to them whether they desecrate the ancient holy place to dig it out. This can be a nice

reward for groups that have ethically agreed to return the money to the city, however, because the sapphire wasn't stolen from Waterdeep and the city has no claim to it.)

(Damn. That's really cool. Wish I'd thought of this last night when I ran that final encounter.)

DESIGNING THE DRAGON

A brief digression on encounter design in 5th Edition.

With the remix of *Dragon Heist* I was worried, coming to 5th Edition for basically the first time, that the heists built around the villains' lairs would be too fragile/difficult. This concern was primarily based on the number of times the book says any of the PCs going to these lairs will almost certainly die.

Not only was I taking stuff that was supposed to be too hard, I was also writing them up with [adversary rosters](#) so that the NPCs would dynamically respond to the PCs if the PCs were detected. Using this technique with encounters that are already extremely difficult can easily lead to TPKs, as I discussed long ago in [Revisiting Encounter Design](#). (You can also read an example of this happening in actual play in my [Playtest Report on Gamma World](#).) In actual practice, though, there was nothing to worry about for *Dragon Heist*: The NPCs rarely get a chance to respond dynamically because they're generally dead before they can raise any sort of alarm.

For example, the books says that, "Lord and Lady Cassalanter are formidable spellcasters and devoted to one another. If one is assailed (...) the other arrives as quickly as possible. A direct confrontation with the Cassalanters will likely result in defeat for the characters..." But in practice the PCs can dish out so much damage that the "formidable" spellcasters will be dead before they can cast more than one spell.

In my game, for example, the PCs snuck up on Victoro, got a surprise round, and then all beat his initiative check. Two full rounds of unleashing damage on him and he was dead before he was able to take a single action.

This was not an isolated incident.

My experience with 5th Edition is still mostly limited to this single group, so it's possible that my players are just really good. But the fact that I'm routinely seeing "Deadly" encounters (or stuff that's even more difficult) getting curb-stomped by the PCs does leave me scratching my head on what effective encounter design actually looks like in this game. Because the point where the curb-stompings by PCs become mechanically unlikely seems to ALSO be the point where the bad guys have such outsized offensive capability that if the PC's DON'T successfully curb-stomp them, they're going to one-shot kill the PCs.

So right now it seems to have a real "choose your glass cannon" problem going on.

With that being said, my experience is still limited to a very specific campaign and I can already see that there are a number of other play dynamics that I need to actually run at the table. This notably includes:

1. Really huge mobs of bad guys. (These are comparatively rare in urban adventures like *Dragon Heist*.)
2. Long dungeon crawls or similar scenarios where long-term strategic play has a potential impact. (Also not really part of the *Dragon Heist* experience.)
3. Higher level adventuring. (With the remix, *Dragon Heist* tops out at 7th level.)

In any case, this influenced my design of the final encounter: I knew the dragon would be alone down there. But I wanted the encounter to be meaningful and challenging. It was, after all, the big finale of the campaign.

TARGET LEVEL: One other thing to discuss here is the expected level of the PCs for this finale. This is discussed elsewhere in my notes for my remix, but basically I have the PCs level up:

- After Chapter 1 (when they rescue Floon).
- After the Gralhund raid.
- After each of the heists.

There are four available heists, although the PCs may only need to do three of them. So the PCs will either be 6th or 7th level going into the Vault. (In the case of my campaign, the PCs did all four heists, but we were on a race to the end and I forgot to have them level up. So they were 6th level heading into the Vault.)

THE DRAGON: The first thing I did was to just pull up the list of available dragons. I'd decided a classic, fire-breathing red was the way to go, so:

- Ancient Red Dragon (CR 24)
- Adult Red Dragon (CR 17)
- Young Red Dragon (CR 10)
- Red Dragon Wyrmling (CR 4)

The Ancient and Adult Red Dragons are obviously too deadly. If you want to build an encounter strictly by the book, then I might suggest throwing a pair of Red Dragon Wyrmlings in there. A double dragon fight sounds cool. (You might even bump it up to a triad of wyrmlings for larger 7th level parties.)

But what I really wanted was that really iconic dragon-on-its-hoard encounter. So I decided to grab the Young Red Dragon at CR 10.

However, I'd already seen my PCs mop the floor with "deadly" CR 10 encounters. (Victoro Cassalanter, for example, is a CR 10 opponent and they'd rolled right over the top of him.) Having the dragon go, "ROAR!" and then do nothing while they turned it into a thin, red paste felt like an anti-climactic way to wrap things up.

(If it happens, that's fine. Awesome even. The players will probably love telling the story of how they blew a dragon away. I'm just not going to deliberately design it that way, since that would be the opposite of awesome.)

What I concluded was that the plausible solution to this problem was to give the dragon some legendary actions. Generally only much more powerful monsters are given legendary actions, but they almost instantly solve the problem of the bad guy not getting to do very much before being wiped out.

Long story short, this is the dragon I designed. Feel free to plug it into your *Dragon Heist* finales:

YOUNG RED DRAGON

Large dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 178 (17d10+85)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR 23 (+6), **DEX** 10 (+0), **CON** 21 (+5), **INT** 14 (+2), **WIS** 11 (+0), **CHA** 19 (+4)

Saving Throws Dex +4, Con +9, Wis +4, Cha +8

Skills Perception +8, Stealth +4

Damage Immunities fire

Senses blindsight 30 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 18

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Multiattack. The dragon makes three attacks: one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (2d10+6) piercing damage plus 3 (1d6) fire damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d6+6) slashing damage.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5-6). The dragon exhales fire in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw, taking 56 (16d6) fire damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The dragon gets 3 legendary actions. These actions can only be taken at the end of an opponent's turn. They refresh at the end of the dragon's turn.

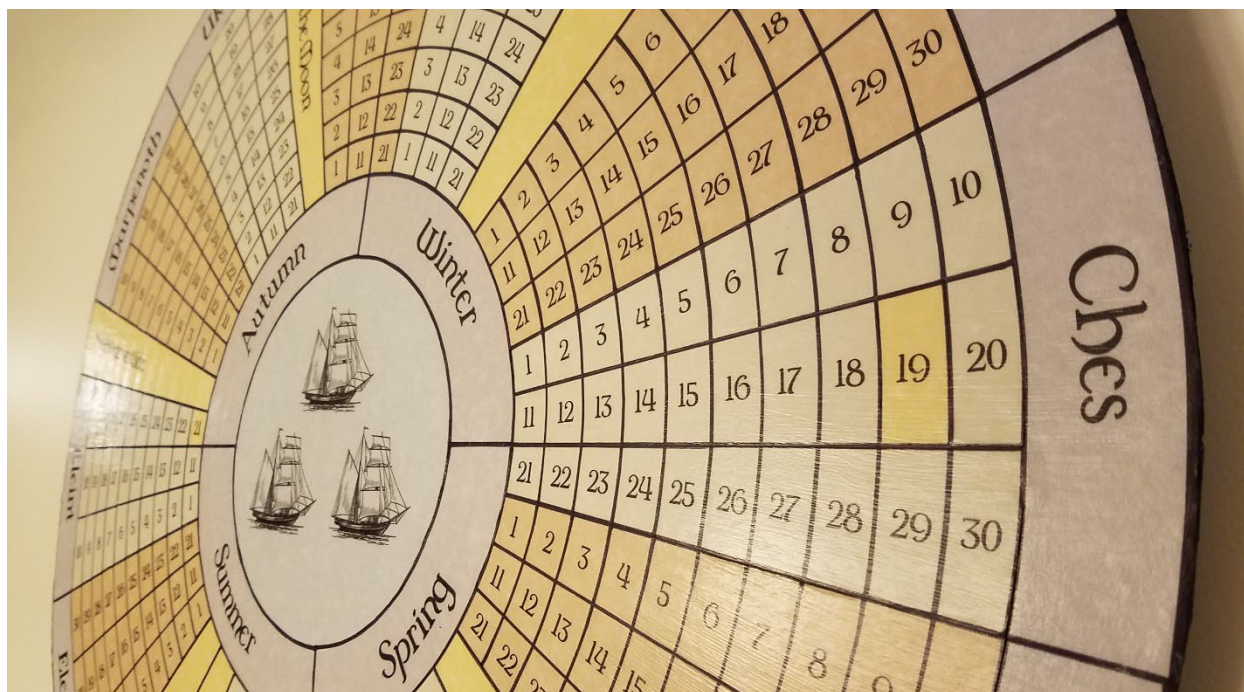
Detect. Make a Wisdom (Perception) test.

Bite Attack. Make a bite attack.

Wing Attack (2 actions). Creatures within 10 ft. make DC 18 Dexterity saving throw or take 2d6+8 bludgeoning damage and are knocked prone. The dragon can then fly up to half its flying speed.

ADDENDUM: TIMELINES & STARTING THE CAMPAIGN

[by Justin Alexander – April 1st, 2020](#)



A question I've been not infrequently asked is what starting date I used when running [Dragon Heist](#) using the Alexandrian Remix. A quick summary:

- PCs arrive in the Yawning Portal on Ches 1st.
- Grand Opening of Trollskull Manor on Ches 20th.
- Fireball on Ches 22nd.
- Cassalanter kids get their souls sucked to Hell on Tarsakh 11th.

Some of this timeline, particularly as it pertains to the dual festival weeks of Fleetswake and Waukeentide (with the sacrificial feast thrown by the Cassalanters being a Feast of Leiruin on Tarsakh 10th), is laid out in [Part 4](#) of the Remix. Other dates are given on the master timeline in [Part 5](#). But I apparently never clearly laid out how these dates related to the events in Chapter 1 (rescuing Floon) and Chapter 2 (opening Trollskull Manor and joining factions).

Basically, there are four considerations here:

First, you want to give the PCs plenty of time to resolve the situation before the Cassalanter kids get their souls sucked, but not so much that they don't feel any pressure. It's not quite the *illusion* of pressure, but

it's close: You want the players to look at the calendar and think, "We could run out of time!" without that just kind of accidentally happening despite their best efforts.

Second, you want the Grand Game stuff to play out across the full length of the festival season to give maximum opportunities for onsite surveillance. (Jarlaxle, Xanathar, and the Cassalanter all have opportunities tied to the festivals.)

For both of these reasons, you neither want the *fireball* (which triggers the PCs' meaningful involvement in the Grand Game) arriving too early (no time pressure; the onsite surveillance opportunities aren't available yet) nor too late (no time to save the kids, fewer surveillance opportunities).

However, the third consideration is that the section of the campaign you simultaneously have the least AND most control over is the refurbishing of Trollskull Manor (and simultaneous faction missions): Least because the players can theoretically fritter away a ton of time here in unpredictable ways. Most because once they're done frittering you can ultimately say, "Okay, and then it takes you [arbitrary amount of time] for the last of the repairs to be finished. Looks like you can open the joint on [arbitrary date]!"

This allows you almost infinite control over the date that the Grand Opening happens AS LONG AS the players don't run past your desired date. Starting the campaign on Ches 1st gives you a nearly three week lead time. In other words, you'll have plenty of time with a healthy margin of error.

But why do we want the Grand Opening on Ches 20th?

First, it allows the Grand Opening to be its own distinct day.

Second, you get a "normal" operating day on the 21st (which you can also use to cleanly establish the beginning of the back-to-back festival weeks; see [Addendum: The Twin Parades](#)) before you blow the windows out with a *fireball* on the 22nd.

You're letting the Grand Opening be a legitimate payoff for all the hard work the players have been doing and then you're establishing something at least vaguely resembling the new status quo before you literally blow it up.

The picture at the top of this post depicts an amazing Faerunian calendar that was made by Erik Malm, one of the players in my Dragon Heist campaign. Thanks to Ero Walter, the [Patreon](#) patron who prompted me to write up this post!

ADDENDUM: THE BLINDED STONE

[by Justin Alexander - July 24th, 2020](#)



I've been asked for this enough times that I finally just bit the bullet and did it: Here are versions of the Stone of Golorr with one, two, and none of its eyes.





I ended up commissioning a physical prop of the Stone of Golorr when I ran *Dragon Heist*, so this wasn't a high priority for me. But, as I say, it's been heavily requested. I am by no means a master of Photoshop, but I thought this turned out well enough that others might find value in it.

RUNNING THE CAMPAIGN – DRAGON HEIST: A PARTY AT SHIPWRIGHTS’ HALL

[by Justin Alexander – March 28th, 2019](#)



Back in 2015, I shared [Game Structure: Party Planning](#). This is an incredibly flexible scenario structure that GMs can use to design and run large, dynamic social events without being overwhelmed by their complexity.

In getting ready to run one of these social events — whether it’s a bounty hunter trade conference, a political fundraiser, the Ilvermorny debutante ball, or a pleasure cruise to the center of a Hollow Earth on a flying ship — a GM can certainly pour a lot of prep into them. And the scenario structure is a powerful one which will reward that prep.

But I also included a quick ‘n dirty version of the structure that GMs can use with about 5 minutes of prep when they don’t have a lot of time to pour into it: If a big social soirée crops up in the middle of a session, you can call for a quick break and rapidly get your social event set up.

That’s the situation I found myself in while running [Dragon Heist](#) last weekend, and I thought it might be illuminating to walk through how it played out at the table.

(This post will contain copious spoilers for *Dragon Heist*. I will do my best to make it comprehensible to those not familiar with the campaign, but check out the [Alexandrian Remix](#) if you’re feeling lost. Part 1 alone should give you enough context to fully grok the proceedings.)

PROLOGUE TO THE OMEN COMING ON

Before we dive in, let’s take a moment to briefly establish the given circumstances of the situation.

The PCs – Kittisothe, Pashar, Kora, Edana, and Theren – had aggressively pursued their investigations into the nimblewrights which were being sold throughout Waterdeep. As such, they had (a) identified Captain Zord, the leader of a small fleet of carnival vessels based out of Luskan, as the person selling them and (b) discovered that Zord, or the Luskans he was working for, had implanted *clairvoyant crystals* into the nimblewrights and were using them to spy on various noble families and organizations throughout the city. They'd also made contact with a young dragon, Zellifarn, who had also been spying on Captain Zord, and could tell them that the *crystal ball* the *clairvoyant crystals* were bound to was located in a submersible underneath Zord's flagship.

The group had also recently become invested as agents of the Harpers, and therefore felt honor bound to shut down Zord's operation. As such, they began planning a heist to seize the *crystal ball* from Zord.

Largely by chance, the night they chose for their operation was Ches 25th. As noted [here](#), this is also the night of the Shipwrights' Ball, an event that was once a guild celebration, but which has now turned into one of the biggest social events of the Fleetswake festival season.

This is important because, elsewhere in the campaign, Kittisothe had been relentlessly flirting with Renaer Neverember (the young noble that the PCs had saved several weeks earlier). And I had decided that Renaer was going to ask Kittisothe to attend the Shipwrights' Ball with him.

This was [a great complication for the planning of their heist](#), so I fully embraced it.

All of which leads us up to the current situation:

Theren and Edana, using a stockpile of *invisibility* and *waterbreathing* potions that the group had used all their resources to acquire, would infiltrate Captain Zord's ship and steal the *crystal ball*.

Pashar and Kora would provide what support they could from the shore (and be ready to step in if the shit hit the fan).

Kittisothe would simultaneously go on a date with Renaer to the Shipwrights' Ball.

Only problem? At least in part because I was running the campaign in big, marathon sessions, all of this had developed over the course of a single session. I didn't have the Shipwrights' Ball fully prepped, and I knew that – particularly with it playing out simultaneously with the *Eyecatcher* heist – I needed a strong structure for everything to play out to best effect.

So that's when I called a 10 minute break, grabbed a sheet of paper, and quickly sketched out the Shipwrights' Ball.

SET UP

The quick 'n dirty version of party planning looks like this:

- Make a list of 3-5 places people can congregate
- Make a list of 10 characters
- Make a list of 5 events
- Make a list of 5 topics of conversation
- And I basically ran straight down this list.

LOCATIONS: The Shipwrights' Ball takes place at Shipwrights' House. I took a few minutes to dig through the existing lore for the Shipwrights' House hoping there would be some material to pilfer, but there wasn't much. The House had been briefly described, a century earlier, in the [City of Splendors](#) boxed set as:

D19 Guild Hall: Shipwright's House

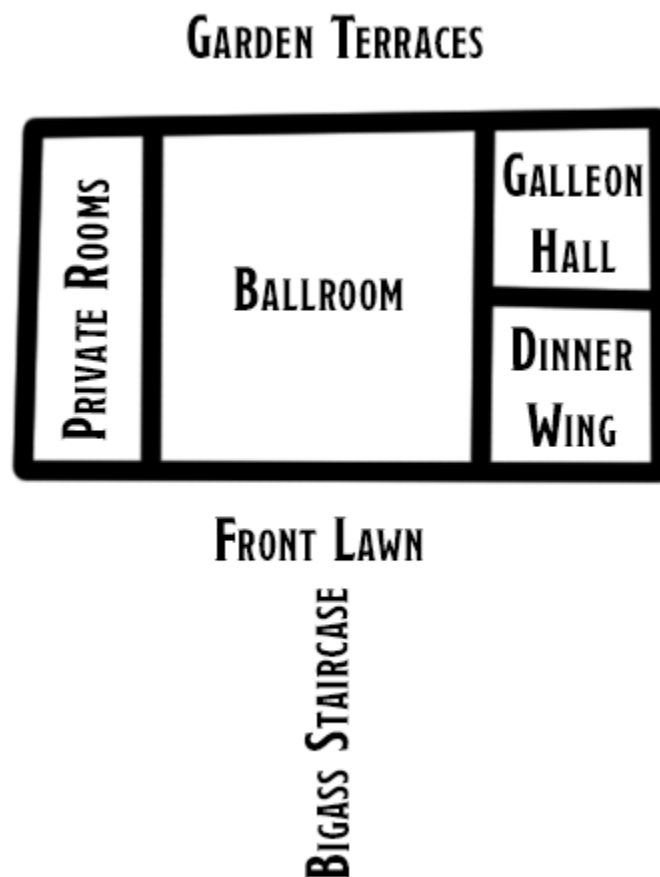
2-story Class B building

HQ: Order of Master Shipwrights

As a Class B building, it's a "larger, more successful and elaborate building," and most likely freestanding. Briefly looking into the Order of Master Shipwrights, I discovered that in the 14th century they had been rivals with the Master Mariners' Guild. I decided that, at some point in the last century, the Master Mariners' Guild had been wiped out, and the Order of Master Shipwrights had grown rich indeed with a near-monopoly of shipbuilding in Waterdeep.

I stuck some [Post-It flags](#) to mark the appropriate pages in case I needed to reference this scant reference material and moved on.

On my single prep sheet, I quickly sketched out a "map" that basically looked like this:



Except, of course, sketched in pencil and with my sloppy handwriting scrawled across it.

I knew that the **Bigass Staircase** went down to Dock Street near Asteril's Way (based on the 2nd Edition and 3rd Edition maps), which it turned out was surprisingly near to where I had placed the *Eyecatcher* (Zord's flagship) in the previous session.



The **Ballroom** and **Dinner Wing** kind of speak for themselves. (The latter were a “wing” because I knew there would be lots of small, private dining areas and bars jutting off from the main dining hall, just in case that would be useful.) **Galleon Hall** was so called because it had about a half-dozen full-sized ships inside it as installation pieces. (You know that scene in [Moana](#) with all the ships in the cave? That was my visual touchstone. Except in a giant room of marble-encrusted wealth instead of a cave.) **Private Rooms** off to one side of the ballroom because it would give me smaller spaces for conversations to move into as necessary. And the **Garden Terraces** were 4-5 huge terraces jutting off the back of the building with winding paths leading through them; bioluminescent plants would give the terraces a “Pandora from [Avatar](#)” kind of feel, and the whole complex would be hemmed in from the rest of the city by a “wall” of huge, dark, old-growth pine trees.

I didn’t write any of that down: Too time-consuming. A quick sketch-map for reference and the rough images that had been conjured up in my head were all that I needed. I had the 3-5 locations.

CHARACTERS: As I mentioned in *Party Planning*, “If the social event is growing organically out of game play, then you’ve probably already got the NPCs...” And that was definitely true here. Basically I just flipped through *Dragon Heist* and wrote down this list:

- Rubino Caswell - Guildmaster
- Renaer
- Laeral (207)
- Vajra (216)
- Jalester Silvermane (20)
- Obaya Uday (20)
- Cassalanters
- Mirt (211)
- Remalia Haventree (215)

The numbers in parentheses were page references to their write-ups. Several of these characters had already appeared in the campaign (Renaer, Jalester, Mirt) and several others I had already planned on introducing in the near future (Vajra, the Cassalanters). The only new character was the guildmaster.

As the party progressed, I would simply place a check mark next to each name as Kittisoth had an interaction with them. (It's not that she wouldn't be able to continue having additional interactions with them, but this helped me keep an eye on which characters I hadn't used yet so that I could make sure that everyone got brought "onstage" at some point during the evening.)

EVENTS: At this point in the campaign, I knew that the Cassalanters needed to make contact with the PCs and invite them to a meeting at their villa. I decided this was as good a time as any for that to happen, and I quickly included that in a list that largely consisted of the Ball's social agenda:

- Grand Promenade
- Rubino's Speech
- Cassalanter's Approach
- Zero-G Dancing (Vajra & Laeral)
- Dinner

I'd indicated Vajra & Laeral in parentheses because I had an image of those characters being introduced to Kittisoth while she was dancing with Renaer. (The zero-g dancing is exactly what it sounded like: A cool magical effect where everyone could literally dance their partners off their feet.) As it turned out, this is it NOT how Kittisoth ended up meeting Vajra the Blackstaff and Laeral the Open Lord of Waterdeep.

Now, honest to god, while I was planning all of this, I *completely forgot* that Captain Zord's carnival [was scheduled to perform a parade from their ships to the Shipwrights' Ball!](#) It was only after returning to the table and beginning to review my notes for the *heist* portion of the evening that I realized that the two events were going to feature this dramatic and unexpected crossover event.

This is one of those incredible moments of serendipity that can only really happen when you have a truly robust scenario prepared and you're actively playing it hard for all its worth. You keep setting things in motion, and the billiard balls inevitably start colliding in amazing patterns that you never anticipated and had no way of planning.

In any case, I reached back over to my list and added "Sea Maidens Faire Parade" as the first entry.

TOPICS OF CONVERSATION: "If the social event is growing organically out of game play, then you've probably already got the NPCs *and the topics of conversation...*" This was also basically true. I quickly jotted down:

- Embezzlement [meaning Lord Dagult's embezzlement of 500,000 dragons]
- Explosion [meaning the *fireball* that the PCs were investigating]
- Black Viper robberies [this had not yet come up in the campaign, but was [part of my prep](#)]

This wasn't quite enough, though. You really want to have a range of topics that you can cycle through to keep a party alive. Also, it would be more interesting to have more topics that the PCs weren't already aware of. AND it would be good to have some topics that weren't directly related to the plot of the campaign. So I added two more kind of out of left field:



- Misra Tesper eloped to Daggerford (with a half-orc) [this whole thing, including Misra Tesper, was made up out of whole cloth; I pulled her last name from a list of Waterdeep noble families and I pulled her first name from [the list of fantasy names](#) that I keep on hand as a GM tool]
- Black Gold in Moonshae (extrusion of the Feydark) [meaning that a new Black Gold rush had begun in the Moonshae Isles; I'd previously pulled this really obscure reference to *MOON1-3: Black Gold*, a 4th Edition Living Forgotten Realms scenario, as an explanation for why a house was abandoned in [Part 2: Gralhund Villa](#), and here I was simply flipping through the binder containing my prep notes for inspiration, saw the reference and decided to foreshadow the later development if it ever came up... which it probably wouldn't, but it doesn't really matter]

And that was it. I now had everything I needed to run the Shipwrights' Ball on a single sheet of paper. As I mentioned, the whole thing took me less than 10 minutes. In fact, I've spent far more time explaining the whole process here than I did actually jotting down my lists at the time.

RUNNING THE SHIPWRIGHT'S BALL

[by Justin Alexander - April 10th, 2019](#)



Edana, Theren, Kora, and Pashar leave Trollskull Manor – the inn that they own – and head down to the Docks to get into position for their heist to steal Captain Zord’s crystal ball from the submersible attached to the bottom of the Eyecatcher.

They leave behind Kittisothe Ka’iter, the winged tiefling pirate who has been asked by Renaer Neverember to accompany him to the Shipwrights’ Ball. Renaer arrives in a personal carriage, dressed in practical finery and with his scarlet hair pulled back in a long plait down his back.

As Kitti steps up into the carriage, the rest of the group arrives dockside. Their plan is for Edan and Theren – one an elf of the city; the other an elf of the wilds – to go under the waves and infiltrate the Eyecatcher while Kora and Pashar provide whatever oversight they can from Dock Street.

As they’re making their final preparations, off to their right they can see there’s a lot of activity around the pier where the Sea Maidens Faire has set up. They see the carnival’s griffon take flight, signaling the start of a parade which marches off the end the pier. They’re worried for a moment that the parade will turn towards them, but instead it heads straight into the city towards Fish Street.

The dragon Zellifarn arrives, thrusting his head up out of the dock waters and plopping it down on top of the Dock Street retaining wall. “Are you ready?”

Swallowing their potions of invisibility and water breathing, Edana and Theren leapt down and grabbed on the wing-joints of the dragon. As they disappeared into the dark waters –

CUT TO: Renaer and Kitti's carriage pulling up in front of Shipwright's House.

Splitting the party is great. Swapping back and forth between simultaneous scenes is the easy mode for effective RPG pacing. This technique is described in more detail in [The Art of Pacing](#), but generally speaking I'm looking to cut frequently from one set of action to the other.

You may see people express ideas similar to this as trying to "avoid players become bored" or something like that. If you've got a good game going, though, that generally won't be true: The really good tables are entertaining not merely in participation but ALSO in the role of audience. In other words, if things are going well, players enjoy watching what happens in the game regardless of whether or not they're in the current scene.

A good cut, in fact, is often about targeting that audience stance: The appeal of the cut for players not in the current scene is not primarily about them getting to act again; it's in the suspense of wondering *what happens next*. When you've got a group firing on all cylinders and you pull it off right, you can get players wanting their scene to end because they *have to know* what happens next in the other scene.

And when it *really* works, you can get everyone at the table feeling that way *all the time* – not only engaged in their current scene, but driving the action forward and constantly looking forward to the next.

You can get that effect without cutting between simultaneous scenes, too. But, like I say, doing it with simultaneous scenes is the easy mode.

The carriage pulls up. Kitti looks up the long stairs toward's Shipwright's House: The stairs cut between the buildings facing Dock Street, leading up to the strange opulence of Shipwrights' House where it's nestled between the more typical dockside businesses and tenements.

Renaer took her arm and, as they began walking up the stairs, Kittisoth saw the griffon in the air off to her left. She reflected on her own encounter with one of the city's griffon-riders a few days earlier.

The griffon is a **crossover**. As noted in *The Art of Pacing*, you want to enrich the experience of simultaneous scenes by including elements from one scene into the other. This is a very simple crossover: The PCs in Group A see the griffon leave the Docks. The PC in Group B sees the griffon flying into the city.

At this point I'm also triggering the **Arrival**. This is kind of a universal first beat in the party planning structure: It's a chance to establish the geography of the event so that the players can orient themselves for the action that follows. I'll often have the Arrival marked by some sort of big event or announcement, but in this case I don't. This gives Kittisoth and Renaer a chance to chat with each other as they head up the stairs. Which they do, dropping a number of references to past events and in-jokes. And then...

Kittisoth had been watching the flight of the griffon. It seemed to have almost circled Shipwrights' House and was now off to her right. "What's with that griffon?"

Renaer looked up. "I think it's part of the parade."

And we CUT BACK TO Edana and Theren.



This was an effective place to cut because the players had earlier, out of character, joked that the Sea Maidens Faire parade might be going to Shipwrights' House. So when Renaer announced that the griffon (which the group, although not Kittisoht, knew was part of the Sea Maidens Faire) was "part of the parade," the entire group immediately realized that the crossover wasn't just incidental; the two scenes that they had thought were going to be wholly separate affairs were, in fact, on a much more significant collision course.

So we move away from that revelation and give the audience/players a chance to really process the implications.

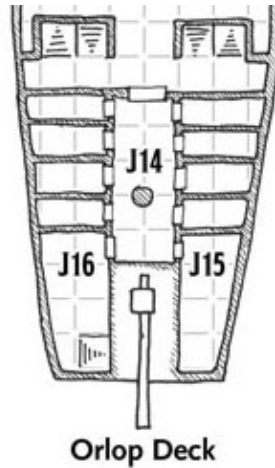
Meanwhile, under the Eyecatcher, Edana and Theren could now see the submersible that Zellifarn had told them about. Unfortunately, they couldn't see any direct means of access, so they were going to have to figure out some way to infiltrate the submersible from the Eyecatcher.

Following a suggestion that Kittisoht had made, they decided to climb the anchor chain and enter the chain house. Invisible as they were, this was easily accomplished. The chain house had no immediately obvious egress, but a little exploration quickly revealed a concealed access hatch that let them out into a narrow passageway on the lower deck.

If you look at the maps of the *Eyecatcher*, there is no chain house. But there should be, right?

I already knew going into *Dragon Heist* that I was going to have to improvise around certain shortcomings from the maps. (They don't include any windows. Windows are very important to a heist.) I had not thought about this particular absence, but this is just good advice in any case: The map is not necessarily the territory. If your players ask where the privy is, you didn't put one on the map, but logically a privy should exist... figure out where the privy goes!

This is somewhat similar to what I discussed in "[Whoops, Forgot the Wolf,](#)" but the gist is that you'll want to figure out how to integrate your errant chain house seamlessly. In this case I saw the compartment included for the whipstaff steerage and decided that the chain house would basically piggyback in that space.



As you can see, there's no door there. Easy enough to add one (as it wouldn't contradict any previous onscreen continuity), but as easy to hypothesize that it's actually a concealed access panel since this compartment would rarely need to be accessed.

Meanwhile, upon Dock Street, Pashar had also been watching the griffon circle towards Shipwrights' House. He got a very bad premonition that something terrible was going to happen at the Ball, and there was little he could truly do to help here if anything went wrong on the Eyecatcher in any case. So he and Archimedes, his owl familiar, peeled off and headed towards the party to put eyes on Kitti's date.

The other thing about cutting between scenes is that your players will often start playing through moments that don't require your attention as the GM: While I was running the scouting and infiltration of the *Eyecatcher* with Edana and Theren, Pashar and Kora, who were sitting at the far end of the table, played through a detailed discussion of Pashar's fears regarding the party and his decision to leave Kora alone.

Once again, this is great for pacing and also opens up opportunities for interactions that I, as the GM, might have otherwise skipped over. Great stuff.

The Further Adventures of Pashar and Archimedes won't enter into the chunk of the campaign I'm discussing here, but this did put them in position for some very funny play-by-play commentary on Kittiso's date with Renaer later on.

Back at Shipwrights' House, Kitti and Renaer had circled off to one side of the large lawn that lay in front of the mansion. As they continued discussing Kitti's recent history with griffons, a Chultan woman approached them. Renaer introduced her as Obaya Uday.



At this point, I'm letting the party begin to play itself. As I describe in [Party Planning](#), most of this process boils down to:

- Which NPCs are talking to each other? (Consult your guest list.)
- Who might come over and join a conversation that the PCs are having? (Again, guest list.)
- What are they talking about? (Look at your topics of conversation.)

In this case I'm just looking at the **guest list** and pulling Obaya Uday out more or less at random. I put a checkmark next to her name, and then I look at her character write-up:

Obaya, a priest of Waukeen, has traveled from Chult to sponsor expeditions into Undermountain, with the goal of bringing its magical treasures back to her employer, the merchant prince Wakanga O'tamu of Port Nyanzaru.

(Normally I'd use the [Universal NPC Roleplaying Template](#), but in this case I was running the party on-the-fly and so I'm just using Obaya's write-up from the *Dragon Heist* book.)

What would Obaya talk about? Expeditions to Undermountain. Who's present? Renaer. So **contextualize** the topic she'll talk about to the characters who are present and...

"Have you given any thought to my proposal?" Obaya asked.

"I have," Renaer said. "But I don't think an expedition to Undermountain is something that my current schedule will allow for."

And then **relate it to the PCs**, bringing them into the conversation (if they haven't already injected themselves):

"You know who you should talk to?" Renaer added. "My friend here. She and her companions rescued me from Zhentarim, and they could do very well in Undermountain."

Kitti blushed at the compliment.

Now I look at my guest list again and plan my next move while continuing to play through the current conversation. This sets me up to introduce the next element *before the conversation ends*. You don't always have to do this, but it's often more effective in a party to add a new element to an interaction rather than allowing the conversation to run its course to awkward silence.

(By the same token, you don't want to *never* have a social interaction end so that the entire party just happens in one big conversation. Have NPCs excuse themselves. Give the PCs prompts to leave and engage action somewhere else. Cut away and, when you cut back, simply move past the end of the conversation and ask who they want to talk to next. But I digress.)

As Kitti and Obaya began discussing the details of Obaya's proposal, Mirt the Moneylender circled in. Kittisothe's friend Kora had recruited all of them into the ranks of the Harpers, and she had met Mirt as a Harper agent. It was partly on his behalf that they were attempting to shut down Captain Zord's nimblewright operation.

Since there was no way that Kittisothe should know any of that, she wisely acted as if she had no idea who this lecherous man was and allowed herself to be introduced to him.

"I am so glad, Renaer," Mirt declared, "that you've stopped chasing those thing waifs and found yourself a woman with... wings."

Before anyone could respond to that, a trumpet sounded. Turning, Kitti saw that Captain Zord had just ridden up onto the lawn atop a polar bear. The griffon circled above. The Sea Maidens Faire had arrived.

Kitti pulled Renaer urgently off to one side and whispered fiercely. "That's the guy with the automatons!"

CUT TO: Edana and Theren making their way through the Eyecatcher.

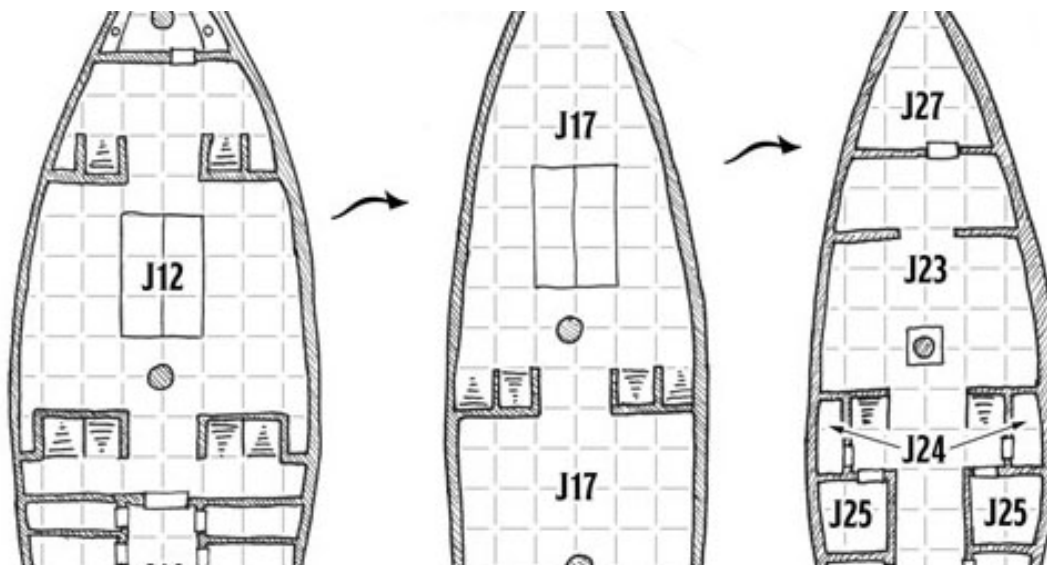
This is both a dramatically appropriate cliffhanger (everyone wants to know what will happen next), but also a great moment to cut away because I, as the GM, need a moment to figure out what Renaer's response to this information is going to be.

I had, in no way, anticipated that this might be Kittisothe's reaction to Captain Zord's arrival. And I had no way of imagining what was about to happen as a result.

I love roleplaying games so much.

RUNNING THE SHIPWRIGHT'S BALL – PART 2

by Justin Alexander - April 12th, 2019



Edana and Theren took the stairs down from the orlop deck to the upper hold of the Eyecatcher. As they rounded the corner to head down to the lower hold where they knew Captain Zord's quarters were, however, a giant spider dropped down from the ceiling and landed directly on top of Theren's invisible back.

I didn't see this one coming, either. Running the *Eyecatcher* from an [adversary roster](#), I saw that there were four giant spiders in Area J17. Flipping open the *Monster Manual* to the giant spider stat block, I was surprised to discover that 5th Edition had replaced the spider's tremorsense from previous editions with blindsight.

Cutting here, with the spider on Theren and their stealthy infiltration of the *Eyecatcher* at risk, is a solid cliffhanger cut. But it also gives me a chance to regroup slightly and quickly review some rules while multitasking the other scene.

Captain Zord rode his polar bear into the midst of the crowd. "The Sea Maiden Faire has arrived!" He twirled a baton high into the air and had the bear catch in his mouth. Behind him, a giant dragon float began a low swoop over the gathered crowd.

"The baton is a little much, don't you think?" Kittisoht said with scorn.

"What do you mean he's behind the automatons?" Renaer asked.

And then the whole story poured out: How Captain Zord was selling nimblewrights constructed by the technomancers of Luskan and that the nimblewrights had been outfitted with clairvoyant crystals which would allow

Zord to spy on anyone who owned a nimblewright using a specially attuned crystal ball.

Renaer grabbed her hand and began pulling her through the crowd. "Come on!"

Kittisoth grinned. "I'll bet you knew something like this would happen when you asked me here tonight."

"It's always exciting with you, my dear!"

Meanwhile, back on the Eyecatcher, Theren and Edana had managed to fight the spiders off long enough to run down the stairs and into Zord's cabin, slamming the door shut behind them. The heavy scent of lavender hung thick in the air as the spiders slammed into the door behind them.

The lavender here is a very clever bit of keyed foreshadowing that's built into *Dragon Heist*. You'll see how it pays off in a little bit, and it's one of the many places in the campaign where Perkins, Haeck, Introcaso, Lee, and Sernett show an excellent attention to detail that truly elevates the material.

Leaving the fair behind them (as Zord, with another wave of his baton, sent a volley of fireworks into the sky), Renaer led Kitti up to a staff-wielding woman in the crowd.

"Kitti, this is Vajra. Vajra, Kitti. Tell her what you told me."

And the story spilled out again.

This event is being driven from character action, but it's still taking place within the party planning structure: Vajra is on the guest list. A PC has had an interaction with her. So I put a checkmark next to her name.

As Kitti finished, Vajra furrowed her brow with thought. "If they're keyed to a crystal ball, do you know where the crystal ball is located?"

"On their ship."

At this point Edana's player says, "Dammit, Kitti."

"Well, I'm already this far in, right?" Kitti's player says.

When the other players at the table not only start commenting on the action, but having sharp emotional reactions to it, you know things are working well. It may not be immediately obvious, but this is also the payoff from establishing crossovers between the scenes: Edana's player can immediately see how this thing Kitti is doing is going to eventually snapback and impact her.

"And do you know who currently owns nimblewrights?"

"Oh," Kittisoth said. "So many people." And she began to list them: Nobles. Major guilds. Prominent citizens. Vajra's eyes narrowed.

But before they could continue, a man with greased-back hair that tufts up around his ears mounted the stairs of the mansion. As the final volley of fireworks died



away, he threw up his hands and announced loudly, "The carnival shall remain here throughout the evening! But for now, it is time for the Grand Promenade to begin!"

Once I'm again I'm actively playing the party structure: I'm looking at my **main event list** and triggering the next even in sequence.

How do I know the time has come for this to happen? Mostly it's just dramatic instinct. It felt like enough stuff had happened on the front lawn of the mansion and that it was time for a shift in scenery. From a practical standpoint, it also allowed Vajra to say:

"All right. I need to take my place in this. You get back on Renaer's arm – " Renaer took Kitti's arm. "We'll meet up inside. I need to figure out the damage of... whatever this is."

Following rules of social etiquette that Kitti didn't understand, guests began going up the stairs and into the mansion in order of precedence. One of the first was a silver-haired elf in a scintillating blue dress that sparkled with living starlight. Kitti gave a low whistle.

"That's Laeral Silverhand," Renaer said. "Open Lord of Waterdeep."

"Why didn't you ask her?" Kitti asked.

"She intimidates me."

"Oh. I get that," Kitti said. "Yeah."

And then, surprisingly early in the proceedings, Renaer was pulling her forward, up the grand stairs, and into the cavernous grand ballroom beyond, where the Grand Promenade was circling like a whirlpool into an endless spiral.

At this point I already know what Vajra is going to do, so I'm taking the opportunity of the Grand Promenade to establish who Laeral Silverhand is. That lets the next beat land in the arc that Kittisoth has abruptly transcribed more effectively than if I had waited to introduce Laeral. You can actually see that a bit with the introduction of Vajra: The player doesn't know she's the Blackstaff, so her introduction by Renaer doesn't carry that weight of identity. But now I've set it up so that when Kitti actually meets Laeral, both player *and* character will get the full impact of it.

One thing to note here is that I have NOT put checkmarks next to Laeral's name. Although Kittisoth has seen her, she hasn't actually had a meaningful social interaction with her. So she's still on my To Do list.

While Theren moved a heavy dresser in front of the door to stop the spiders – and anyone else the spiders attracted – from getting in, Edana started looting Zord's cabin of its valuables.

As she transitioned to scooping up any paperwork that looked useful, Theren whipped back the fur rug on the floor and revealed a hatch they had suspected lay there. Ripping it open, they looked down a short airlock towards a second hatch.

They'd found their entrance to the submersible.

Back at Shipwright's House, the portly man with the greased hair had mounted a stage at the far end of the room. It turned out that he was Rubino Caswell, the guildmaster. He began giving an. Incredibly. Boring. Speech.

"You have to do this every year?" Kittisoth asked.

As Rubino spoke, however, an incredibly beautiful woman in a dress of yellow silk glided over to Kittisoth and leaned down to whisper in her ear. "Is this a good place to talk about an 'explosive' matter?"

Kittisoth glanced at her. "No. I don't think so."

"Then come with your comrades – your other comrades – to our villa tomorrow morning for a more... discrete discussion."

And the woman glided away.

Renaer leaned in. "What was that all about?"

"She seems to know something about our investigation into the explosion that killed Dalakhar," Kitti said.

Renaer frowned. "Be careful around the Cassalanterers," he warned her. That was useful. Kittisoth wouldn't have had a clue who the woman was otherwise.

This is somewhat unusual: With Rubino's Speech and the Cassalanterers' Approach, I am very rapidly triggering events from the main event track. Must more rapidly than I normally would. (Generally speaking, you'll trigger an event and then let all kinds of social eddies and currents spin out from that before shaking up the status quo again with the next event.)

Why?

Because Kitti has initiated a sequence of actions here which I know is going to yank her completely off the main event track I had designed for the evening. I wasn't entirely certain how the next scene would end, but it was quite possible it would derail the party entirely. The Cassalanterers' Approach was included as an essential hook that would come one way or another (even if Kitti had skipped the party entirely, the Cassalanterers would have sought the group out through some other channel), so I wanted to drop that invitation now before the next scene took place.

Meanwhile, Theren and Edana clambered down through the airlock and into the submersible. Passing by the engine room carried them out to a main passageway: At the far end of it they could see that the front of the ship opened up into a sort of bulbous, multi-level control room. The walls of the control room were large, globular windows looking out into the blackwaters of Waterdeep Harbor.

CUT TO: Rubino was finally finishing his speech and the crowd was beginning to form little social clusters that either drifted through the ballroom or made their way back out towards the carnival displays that the Sea Maidens Faire had rapidly erected. Renaer and Kittisoth made their way through a bramble of social introductions, trying to figure out where Vajra had gotten to. They eventually spotted her opening the door to a small, private room off to one side of the ball room.

Nothing too fancy here: The same way that we've been looking at our guest list and main event list, I'm now looking at the **zones** I've sketched out on my location map and picking one for the next scene.

They rushed over to Vajra and through the door. Kitti was looking back over her shoulder, scanning the crowd as she entered. As Vajra shut the door behind them, she turned around and–

Standing right in front of her was Laeral Silverhand.

Oh no.

The, "Oh no," of course, was actually spoken out loud by Kitti's player at the table. A character's inner monologue becoming manifest through a player's meta-commentary on what's happening can be really great.

"All right," Laeral said. "What is this all about?"

And Kitti's player said, "I tell her the thing about the thing that I've been telling everybody all night with my big fucking mouth."

As she finished, Laeral said, "Bring me Captain Zord. Right. Now." And her eyes sparked with tiny shards of blue lightning.

"Oh. Oh no," Kittisothe babbled. "I don't think that's such a good idea right now, is it?"

Laeral smiled as her guard hurried out of the room. "I promise you we will not make too much of a scene."

CUT TO: Theren and Edana cautiously made their way down the passageway and looked down into the lower level of the control room. Several gnome tinkers were at work there, apparently overseen in their work by... a dark elf. That was no good. They cautiously backed up.

The motivation for the cut to Theren and Edana here is probably pretty obvious: The appearance of Laeral had cranked the stakes *way* up. Reading the room, it was clear that everyone was completely on tenterhooks waiting to see what would happen. So you cut away. You let them live in that moment for a bit.

Laeral took a seat on the far side of the room. "So who is this, Renae?"

"I'm not really anybody," Kittisothe demurred.

"I doubt that's true," Laeral said with a smirk, looking at the way Renae's hand was resting on Kitti's arm.

"I'm sorry," Kitti said. "I don't know what to say. You're very intimidating."

Laeral smiled and took Kitti's hand. "It's all right. Everything is going to be fine. We appreciate all the hard work you've been doing on behalf of Waterdeep. Please, step over here for just a moment." She reached out into midair and her hand disappeared into some sort of dimensional pocket; a moment later she drew back a decanter of brandy.

"What's our play here?" Vajra asked while Laeral poured.

"I like shock and awe," Laeral said. "We're going to talk to 'Captain Zord' and find out exactly what game he's playing here."

The handle turned and the door began to open—

CUT TO:

The table literally shrieked in frustration here. Yeah. That's when you're doing it right. You can't force this sort of thing and you don't want to overplay your hand, but when the anticipation is building sharp, quick cuts will heighten it even further, so that when the moment arrives it lands with even more power.

Faced with several doors, Theren and Edana picked one at random.

At this point I asked, "Exactly how do you open the door?" This prompted them to detail with great care and specificity exactly what precautions they were taking.

This was actually irrelevant for this particular door, but it *would* have been relevant for any other door they had picked in that passageway. (They got very lucky with their random pick. It would be the last luck they would have for awhile.) By asking them the question regardless I (a) remove metagame anticipation if I need to ask the question for future doors ("he already asked and it wasn't relevant, so we know this is just a routine question he asks") and (b) build a moment of suspense that pays off even if there isn't an ambush on the other side of the door.

As they very gently eased open the door... the scene of lavender washed over them.

And here's the lavender scent pay-off. The players take a great deal of satisfaction in the simple act of concluding that this room must *also* belong to Zord.

The crystal ball was sitting on a padded cushion of black velvet on a pedestal in the middle of the cabin. They scooped it up and dropped it into their sack.

CUT BACK TO: The door opened.

Captain Zord, flanked by the two watchmen, entered the room. The watchmen remained outside, closing the door behind him.

Zord swept the hat from his head and bowed deep. "Milady Silverhand, how may I be of assistance to you?"

Laeral gave a silent hand signal to Vajra. Vajra pointed her staff at him. There was a brief purple pulse from the end of the staff and Zord's disguise spell melted away, revealing a dark elf.



At this point, my plan was to dramatically reveal Jarlaxle's picture. But I actually fumbled retrieving the picture and wasn't able to cleanly display it.

That was all right, though, because the lore-steeped players at my table had gotten ahead of me and did the work for me: "It's Jarlaxle," says one of them. "Oh no!" cries another. A third has dim memories of the Drizzt novels she read in her youth stirred up at the name.

This is pure RPG as an audience: None of the characters know who Jarlaxle is, so this is all firewalled away. But as *players*, they are all on the edge of their seats and completely engaged and BAM one last amazing revelation has them amped up about as high as they can possibly go.

Laeral spoke. "Jarlaxle. What do you think you're doing?"

Jarlaxle's eyes widened in mock innocence. "Milady, whatever do you mean?"

"Crystal balls. Nimblewrights. Explain yourself."

"I see." Jarlaxle was taken aback. He clearly wasn't used to it. His eyes darted around the room, quickly taking in who was standing there. "Well... milady... as I have written to you often – and I am so glad that you have granted me an audience this evening! – my interests are simply to gain your support in seeing Luskan given its proper place in the Lords' Alliance."

"Do you really think that spying on me and –"

"Ah! I never spied on you! You did not receive an invitation to purchase a nimblewright, and I have taken special efforts to keep them away from you," Jarlaxle said. "They were merely employed as an information-gathering service. And I can assure you that if any information I had obtained were to indicate a threat to Waterdeep, I would have surely –"

Laeral raised her hand to cut him off. "Jarlaxle, your tongue is as nimble and sweet as I remember. But I am not to be gulled."

"I was attempting to gain blackmail material to further my cause the Lord of Luskan," Jarlaxle said plainly. "As any Lord of a City-State of the Sword Coast has an obligation to do. You yourself, I believe, employed similar tactics with your husband Khelben Arunsun on many an occasion."

Talking to yourself as the GM is really hard to do, but having distinct characters with clear, conflicting objectives helps a lot. And when you can pull it off well it's worth it. This moment got an audible, "Ooooo..." from the table as Jarlaxle scored a palpable hit, which was a good indication that it was time to...

CUT TO: Theren and Edana weren't certain they could make it back through the Eyecatcher and escape. There was no telling what sort of alarm had been raised by the giant spiders they'd left behind.

They decided that their best option was to disconnect the submersible from the Eyecatcher and then swim out of the airlock. They decided that they might as well try to sink the submersible, as well, having no idea what mischief Captain Zord and the Luskans meant to use it for.

But when they opened the hatches, they discovered there was an energy field preventing the ship from flooding. "The only way this is going to work," Theren said, "is to disable this field from the control room."

So they snuck back down the hall together. Edana used a mage hand to reach out, grasp the lever, and –

CUT TO:

"Do you know what we do with traitorous captains in the Pirate Isles?" Kittisothe asked the room.

"I don't," Laeral said. "What do you do in the Pirate Isles?"

"We tie 'em to the main mast and wait for the vultures to feast," Kitti said.

Jarlaxle glowered at her.

"There's interesting," Laersal said. "I think he owns a vulture."

"He owns a lot of sad animals," Kittisothe said. "Just like himself. I'm sorry. I'm just sharing information. I know you've got this well in hand, milady."

"I like this one, Renaer," Laeral said. "You should keep her."

"You can't call me a traitor!" Jarlaxle protested. "I am not a citizen of Waterdeep. I'm a Luskan patriot."

"I'm sorry," Kittisothe said. "The women are talking."

Another cool thing about this kind of scene-juggling is that it doesn't just give you, as the GM, a chance to gather your thoughts: It also gives your *players* a chance to think about what their next course of action (or clever turn of phrase) will be.

Jarlaxle opened his mouth to respond, but then got a distracted look. "What are you doing, Laeral? My ships are under attack!"

Note here that Jarlaxle is basically anticipating something that hasn't actually happened yet to the other group: He's responding to the events that play out after Edana pulls that lever. This is a more advanced crossover technique, where you effectively foreshadow what's going to happen to the other scene before they actually see it for themselves.

Edana pulled the lever.

Water came gushing down the passage behind them. Edana and Theren both grabbed handholds on the walls. As the water ripped into them, Edana kept her grip, but Theren couldn't. The deluge swept him down the hall, over the railing, and slammed him down onto the deck of the control room, amidst the gnomes and the drow.

With the water still pouring down from above, Theren tried to swim out. But one of the gnomes either heard him or saw his invisible outline in the water. "Someone's here!"

The drow waved his hand and everything in the control room was suddenly limned with the dancing green flames of faerie fire... including Theren. He surged to his feet to make a run for it, but one of the gnomes lowered his hand and –

After rolling so well all evening, the dice really turned on Theren here. After failing multiple checks to not get gushed into the control room, he now rolled a natural 1 on his saving throw vs. the *burning hands* spell and then I rolled max damage on 3d6. He only had 16 hit points left and so –

– the flames washed over his chest, blasting him off his feet. Blackness gripped his vision as he splashed back into the water, unconscious and at the mercy of the drow.

RUNNING THE CAMPAIGN – DRAGON HEIST: THE MANSHOON HEISTS

[by Justin Alexander – October 23rd, 2019](#)



Something I've been asked several times since sharing the [Alexandrian Remix](#) of *Dragon Heist* is, "How are the PCs supposed to pull off [the heist at Kolat Towers](#)?"

The perception is that the opposition at Kolat Towers is so deadly that, if the PCs choose to engage it, they'll get wiped out.

The first thing to understand is that, to a large extent, *that's what makes this such a great heist*. The fact that the PCs can't just bull rush their way through the opposition is both why they need to perform a heist (in order to avoid direct confrontation) and why the heist will be so utterly *satisfying* when they do pull it off.

With that being said, let's talk a little bit about how this heist works in actual practice.

BROAD TOPOGRAPHY

If you're not familiar with *Dragon Heist* or the Alexandrian Remix, here are a few key facts that should help you understand what follows.

- (1) Kolat Towers is the headquarters for a sect of the Zhentarim ruled by Manshoon.
- (2) There is a force field around Kolat Towers. Those wearing a pass-amulet can pass through the force field.

(3) You can also access Kolat Towers by means of teleportation circles that are located in various Zhentarim outposts around Waterdeep/Faerun. The Kolat Towers side of these teleportation circles are all located in a single hub at the top of one of the towers.

(4) This hub also contains a secured teleportation circle that leads to an interdimensional fortress that serves as Manshoon's Sanctum. Using this teleportation circle requires the use of a teleportation signet ring.

(5) The primary target of the heist is a magical Eye, which Manshoon keeps in an astral vault in his library. The library is located at the top of one of the three spires in the Sanctum.

(6) Manshoon spends most of his time in his quarters or laboratory, which are more or less located at the top of the other two spires.

So, broadly speaking, you need to get access to Kolat Towers, use a teleportation signet ring to get access to the Sanctum, and then steal the Eye out of the library.

KEY FACTORS

There are a couple major factors to keep in mind when running the Kolat Towers heist.

First, as noted in the remix:

...most of the Towers' inhabitants will simply assume that anyone who has bypassed the force field must have a pass-amulet and, therefore, must have legitimate business there. Their incredible security system has, ultimately, made them somewhat lax when it comes to actual security, and PCs who are smart enough to lean into that assumption can effectively seize a surveillance opportunity for themselves mid-heist.

This is really important. If you screw this up – by, for example, having the first NPC to see the PCs immediately scream bloody murder and call for help – then it's going to be much, much more difficult to pull off a successful heist.

(It's okay if the PCs screw it up, of course. That's their unique prerogative.)

Second, the remix also has a section on "Questioning the Zhentarim" which describes what the typical Zhentarim thugs, apprentice wizards, and lieutenants all know about the layout of Kolat Towers, the location of Manshoon, the Stone of Golorr, and the location of Manshoon's Eye.

The important thing to remember here is that all of these NPCs can (and likely will) be encountered *before they enter Kolat Towers*. That's by design: If the PCs stumble blindly into a direct confrontation with Manshoon, then they're probably screwed. To avoid that, they need to know where to go and, equally importantly, where NOT to go in the Sanctum.

Third, if things do go haywire and the heist fails, the original description of Manshoon from *Dragon Heist* (p. 160) should be kept in mind:

This version of Manshoon isn't spoiling for a fight. He commends the characters for making it this far and shows no concerns for the Zhents they defeated to each him, since he considers all his followers expendable. The characters' best chance

of survival is to convince Manshoon that they can be cowed or bribed into working for him. Weary of his conflict with the Xanathar Guild, Manshoon suggests that the players prove their usefulness to him by hunting down and killing Xanathar in its lair...

I'd tweak this slightly, for the purposes of the Remix, to suggest that Manshoon's top demand will be for the PCs to steal back the Eye that Xanathar stole from him. (Hopefully the PCs will do a better job of this new heist they've been pointed at.)

Regardless, at this point in the campaign it is very likely that the PCs have access to information (or people) that Manshoon dearly desires, and they should be able to trade that for their freedom and/or to form an alliance with Manshoon. This effectively gives them a mulligan on a failed heist at Kolat Towers.

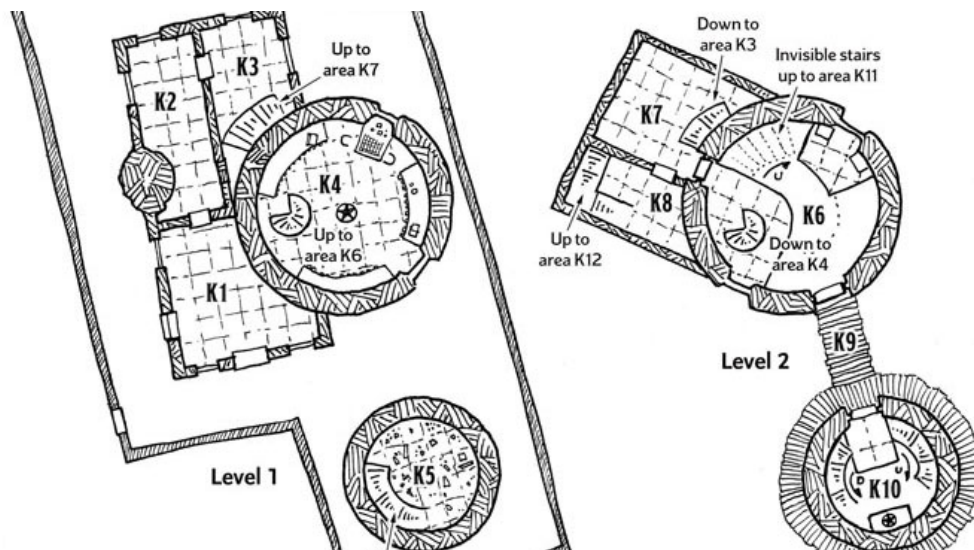
THE FIRST HEIST

Let's look at how this actually played out at my table.

One of the [Zhentarim faction outposts](#) is Yellowspire, a tower on the west side of Waterdeep used by Banite priests that contains one of the teleportation circles leading to Kolat Towers. The PCs learned of Yellowspire from their contacts in the Doom Raiders, a different sect of the Zhentarim who were opposed to Manshoon's control.

Long story short, the PCs cleared out Yellowspire and the teleportation circle would become their access point for Kolat Towers. They also had a pass-amulet that they had obtained from raiding a different Zhentarim faction outpost.

At this point, they didn't know much about what they would find on the other side of the teleportation circle. So they disguised themselves as Banite priests, using vestments and holy symbols gathered from Yellowspire, and went through.



Working their way down the tower from the teleportation hub, they encountered the statue of Duhlark Kolat in Area K10. They used the pass-amulet to get past the statue. (In reality, the statue simply floats

into the air, issues a *magic mouth* challenge, and then sinks back down a minute later. But their experience was being challenged, holding up the amulet, and then watching the statue sink back down.)

Crossing to the other tower they provoked an attack from gargoyle guards and the sound of their fight attracted the attention of Yorn the Terror, a half-orc who had been trying to enjoy a little piece and quiet in the adjacent reading room with his signed copy of *Volo's Guide to Monsters*.

Yorn saw their Banite robes and the pass-amulet they wore... and promptly ordered the gargoyles to stand down. "You have to show them the amulet," he explained. "Otherwise they're almost as big a terror as I am. Who are you here to see?"

The PCs thought quickly and offered up a basically random name that they knew to be associated with the Zhentarim: Agorn Fuoco.

I called for a Charisma (Deception) check at this point. It was a success.

"Agorn?" Yorn said. "I think you just missed him. He headed back through the portal to his quarters in the sanctum."

"Through one of the other portals, then?" Pashar frowned.

"You came from Yellowspire?" Yorn said. "Yes. You'll want the other teleportation circle. Do you have a signet ring?"

They did not. I could have called for a Charisma (Persuasion) test, but I decided to just let the result of the Charisma (deception) test [ride forward](#).

"All right," Yorn said, slipping a ring from his finger. "You can use mine. But make sure you have it back to me before dawn!"

"Pardon my ignorance," Kora said. "But what happens if we don't get it back before dawn?"

"I rip your arms off!" Yorn roared.

"Thank you! Much appreciated!"

Yorn gave them some brief instructions, telling them to ask Kaejva, on the other side of the teleportation circle, to give them directions to Agorn's quarters. "And tell Agorn he owes me one."

Yorn went back to his book, and the group rapidly backtracked to the teleportation hub.

At this point, of course, the PCs had everything they needed to smoothly access the Sanctum. And that's exactly what they did.

THE SECOND HEIST

Ultimately, however, the first heist was not successful in retrieving the Eye: They lacked the key information of where it was located. Instead, they poked around for a bit, got a general sense of the Sanctum's layout, and talked to a couple more Zhentarim who inadvertently told them where Manshoon's quarters were located. Then they withdrew.

(In the process of withdrawing, they actually lured Agorn Fuoco back to Yellowspire and murdered him, too, but that has only a minimal impact on subsequent events.)

The first heist effectively became what we refer to as a “surveillance opportunity” in the [heist scenario structure](#). They now knew a lot more information about their target, and they were going to use that to plan a second heist.

Their information, however, was incomplete. And, as a result, they drew an erroneous conclusion: They felt confident that Manshoon would be keeping the Eye on him. Thus, they believed that the target of the heist was Manshoon himself!

However, they also recognized that there was no way that they could go toe-to-toe with Manshoon, the Night King, Lord of Zhentil Keep, Master of the Black Network, and Scourge of Shadowdale.

Their solution was to go back to their contacts in the Doom Raiders – the other faction of Zhentarim in Waterdeep – and make a simple offer: “We know where Manshoon is. We have a way past his defenses. We’ll help you kill him, but you have to agree to let us take possession of a specific magical item in his possession.”



They didn’t even need to make a check for this: They’d already proven themselves to be reliable friends to the Doom Raiders, and given the circumstances there was no way that the Doom Raiders wouldn’t *leap* at the opportunity they were being given.

Independently I determined how long it would be before Zhentarim agents realized that Agorn Fuoco and the Yellowspire operation had been compromised. If that had happened, Manshoon’s Zhentarim would have cleared out Yellowspire, severed the teleportation circle, put Kolat Towers on high alert, and left the PCs high-and-dry. But the PCs moved quickly, and returned to Yellowspire before Manshoon’s Zhentarim realized anything was amiss.

They came with a Doom Raider strike force: Ziraj, Tashlyn, and Davil Starsong, all major leaders of the group, led a mixed force of four veterans and ten thugs. (The composition of the strike force was based on page 17 of *Dragon Heist*: “Tashlyn offers affordable mercenaries, either **thugs** costing 2 sp per day each or **veterans** costing 2 gp per day each.”) Yagra, the PCs’ primary contact with the Doom Raiders, also tagged along.

Their plan was simple: The PCs, once again dressed as Banite priests, would teleport through to the Sanctum. They knew from their previous visit that Kaejva, a wizard, stood watch over the arrival platform from an observation chamber off to one side. They would bluff their way past her, then circle around and kill her, before returning to usher the Doom Raider strike force through.

Here, however, their plan hit a snag: They flubbed their cover story with Kaejva and she, suspicious, prepared to cast a *sending* spell to summon Manshoon. One of the PCs were prepared for this however, and used *misty step* as a bonus action to pop into the observation chamber next to her, disrupt the casting of the spell, and throw the lever that would open the door for the other PCs.

Having killed Kaejva, they brought the Doom Raiders through.

From that point forward, their raid was basically clinical: Successful Stealth tests saw them systemically ambush and slaughter the Manshoonian zhents. (Several were sleeping. And the PCs knew where the others were likely to be congregating based on their prior surveillance.) It was overwhelming force applied to isolated, unprepared resistance.

The strike force did not, in fact, suffer a single injury before they burst into Manshoon's private quarters.

THE DEATH OF MANSHOON

Manshoon was not so easily overwhelmed.

But what Manshoon had coming through the door at him was a platoon of twenty-four hostile warriors (including the PCs), and because there had been no warning he wasn't prepared. He barely managed to get his *robe of the archmagi* wrapped around himself as the door burst open. He bought himself a few more seconds of time with a *misty step* followed by a *wall of force*, but he was pursued with *misty step* in kind and his concentration on the *wall of force* was broken. He managed to trap Davil Starsong in an *imprisonment* spell (the consequences of which are rather far-reaching and remain uncertain as of this writing), but then he was pretty much swallowed up by the Doom Raiders and PCs.

What's the fall out of all this?

Well, the PCs have Manshoon's Eye and are one step closer to restoring the Stone of Golorr. They also have his spellbook, *robe of the archmagi*, and *staff of power*. I made the decision to not limit the *robe* by alignment, so Pashar, the 5th level PC wizard, is *glutted* with power. The consequences of this, particularly with the PCs liberally spreading the word of their role in Manshoon's death to the Harpers and Force Grey, are still to be seen.

If Davil Starsong had been around, he probably would have made a claim to these items. But with him imprisoned, the other members of the Doom Raiders who were present lacked the knowledge to push the issue. They're fairly happy in any case: Not only did the PCs help them wipe out Manshoon, but with Manshoon dead they assisted in cleaning out the rest of Kolat Towers so that the Doom Raiders could move in. Even if/when Davil returns, he'll probably rank "private interdimensional fortress" as a fair trade for the *robe* and *staff*.

OTHER APPROACHES

I don't want to convey the sense that any of this is the One True Way™ for tackling Kolat Towers. Quite the opposite. The great thing about a well-designed heist scenario is that there ISN'T a One True Way™. The whole point is that the PCs are free to make their own plan and then we find out together whether or not that plan is going to work.

Honestly, even after the PCs made their alliance with the Doom Raiders I figured the most likely outcome of this plan would be that, at some point, the alarm would be raised and then Manshoon would arrive and lower the boom. It was exciting to see the plan come together and get pulled off in defiance of all expectations.

Other options that I've thought could work:

- Using *disguise self* spells to mimic the appearance of known Zhentarim agents and infiltrate the Towers.
- Actually pretend to join the Zhentarim in order to gain access to the Towers.
- Simply cut a deal with Manshoon.

What cool plan have you concocted? What have your players attempted? Did it work?

RUNNING THE CAMPAIGN – DRAGON HEIST: CREATING THE CHARACTERS

[by Justin Alexander – September 23rd, 2020](#)



This has been a highly requested series from [my patrons](#): a closer look at the player characters in my *Dragon Heist* campaign and how I (or, more accurately, *we*) integrated them into the game. I've resisted writing it, however, because I wasn't entirely sure how to make it high-value.

The key thing is that I already wrote a couple posts about creating characters for long-term campaigns – [Running the Campaign: Designing Character Backgrounds](#). The short summary is:

1. Establish the **campaign concept**.
2. Have the players pitch their **character concepts**.
3. Collaborate on a **public integration**, with the GM using their expertise in the setting to take generic archetypes of the character concept (e.g., northern barbarian) and make them specific (e.g., a member of the Tribe of the Red Elk).
4. Have the GM do a **private integration** of the character, tying them into the larger structure of the campaign (e.g., Is there a major villain? Make it the long-lost brother of one of the PCs).
5. **Bring the party together**. At least 95 times out of 100, you'll want to explain why the PCs are all going to generally hang out and do things together – specifically, the usually crazy things the

campaign concept is predicated on — before you start your first session. 4 times out of the remaining 5, you'll probably want to have things pre-arranged so that they all fall in together within the first few scenes.

There are other ways to handle character creation, but this was essentially the same procedure I'd followed for *Dragon Heist*. It didn't feel like there was really new territory to explore.

I've had a number of recent conversations, however, suggesting that people would like to see more practical examples of what some of this theoretical material actually looks like in actual play. So that's our primary goal here.

I'd also commissioned some really fantastic art depicting the characters from [@BroadfootLenny](#), so if nothing else you'll be able to "oooo" and "aaahh" over some pretty pictures!

THE BASELINE

Let's start by establishing a baseline understanding of how character creation (and the campaign in general) were set up. You might want to start by reading through those two earlier posts for a more detailed discussion of the general procedure, but it's probably not strictly necessary.

GAME SESSIONS

We should briefly discuss how we were actually playing the campaign because it has an impact on how character creation played out.

As I've discussed previously, we mostly played *Dragon Heist* in weekend intensives: We would play four hours on Friday night, then 10-12 hours on Saturday, and then another 8-10 hours on Sunday.

We also went from talking about doing this to *actually doing it* very quickly. This meant that, for our first weekend, we would be creating characters Friday night and then starting the campaign the next day at 10 AM.

This was unusual for me: For a dedicated campaign like this, I'm usually chatting about characters and swapping e-mails weeks ahead of time. There's often a Session 0 with one or two weeks before we actually start play, allowing further development and refinement of the characters before we get going. In this case, all of this was truncated and there would be very little time (particularly very little *awake* time) between creating our characters and launching into a long-term campaign with them.

CAMPAIGN CONCEPT

My pitch for the campaign was pretty straightforward: "Would you like to play the new *Dragon Heist* campaign from Wizards of the Coast? I've been remixing it for my website."

Although brief, this carried with it some key information:

- We were playing D&D 5th Edition. (Just saying "D&D", as I've noted in those previous essays, carries a lot of weight when it comes to campaign concept, in a way that isn't necessarily true for other RPGs.)
- The campaign would in some way involve a "heist."

To this, if I recall correctly, I basically added only one additional piece of information:

- The campaign will be taking place in Waterdeep, which is located in the Forgotten Realms.

I had maps of Waterdeep and Faerûn hung on the walls of our game room for handy reference. For players who were not familiar with the source material, I also briefly introduced them to the various sourcebooks we'd be using, including:

- *Sword Coast Adventurer's Guide*
- 3rd Edition *Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting*
- 1st Edition *Forgotten Realms* boxed set
- 2nd Edition *Forgotten Realms: City System* boxed set

This meant literally holding them up and saying, "These exist, feel free to flip through them if you're looking for inspiration." We also identified the people at the table who *were* familiar with the Realms and could serve as sources of expertise. Besides myself, this was Chris and Peter, both of whom were probably more well-versed in Realms lore than I was.

We also talked about our group's familiarity with D&D, which ranged considerably. Some of us had been playing since the '80s. Another had played virtually no D&D whatsoever, but had just started playing in another 5th Edition campaign a couple months earlier. Another had played one session of 2nd Edition in 1997, one session of 3rd Edition in 2003, and a dozen or so sessions of my OD&D open table. Personally my own experience with 5th Edition was limited — I'd played a couple of sessions in a heavily homebrewed game and hadn't run it at all yet.

BRINGING THE PARTY TOGETHER

The last thing I said before starting character was that:

- The first scene of the campaign would be the five of them walking through the doors of the Yawning Portal to meet a contact who was offering them a job.
- In creating their characters, they needed to figure out how they had ended up there.

[Dragon Heist Remix - Addendum: First Impressions](#) discusses how I handled the opening scene of the campaign in more detail, but I basically knew that this moment at the door of the Yawning Portal would bookend character creation: By immediately establishing what I needed them from them, I knew aiming at that specific moment would be hanging in the back of their brains throughout the entire process, ready to opportunistically shape any and all decisions along the way.

Then, at the end, we would return to this beat. I would show them the "Friendly Faces" handout from p. 223 of *Dragon Heist* and ask them to pick the picture of the NPC they were coming to meet. I knew that combining *why* they were walking through that door looking for a job together with *who* they were meeting on the other side of the door to get the job from would provide a final act of creative closure that would shape and personalize the opening of the campaign.

(Spoilers: It did.)

I think the big thing to note here is how simple this all was. I've talked about it at length, but it boils down:

- Four or five sentences pitching the campaign concept.
- A one sentence improv prompt for them to build their group dynamic around.
- And, later, pointing at a picture and asking a simple question.

It *can* be more complicated than that, but it doesn't *need* to be.

In any case, that's basically the whole set up. So now we're going to look at the specific character backgrounds that we worked up and discuss how the procedure got us to that point.

EDANA

(Created by Sarah Holmberg)

Her father died (at least that is the story her mother told her) when she was still an infant. Her mother fell in with the Shadow Thieves as a way to make best use of her skills to support her young family. When things went south, Edana was sent to stay with family friends while her mother worked on making plans for them to leave safely and secretly, but her mother never came back. She was told that her mother died, though she still hears rumors that make her suspect her mother is alive.

It's part of the reason Edana tries to stay connected to, but not part of, the underworld in Waterdeep. Keeping enough distance to not make herself a target when the inevitable drumming out occurs again, but close enough to hear about her mother's return. Though by this point, she doesn't expect it to happen, it's more out of habit and making best use of the skills that she picks up the occasional job from her underworld connections.

When she's flush, she creates new personas and lives for years as them, spending her time reading, creating art, carousing, practicing her card tricks and forgery skills. When she's skint, she sheds those personas and returns to her true self, takes what work she can and builds up enough funds to start a new life for a while.

DESCRIPTION

Edana is a high elf with golden skin and golden hair. High, delicate cheekbones, with usually a faintly amused expression on her face. Her everyday look is hair braided back in two braids around the crown of her head, with hair loose in back. When she's staying at the tavern she wears deceptively simple looking dresses that in blues and greens that have a lot of detail work in them. When leaving the tavern she wears breaches and a belted tunic. Her cloak has a lot of secret pockets in it.



She's also very skilled in disguising herself. She can style her hair to cover her ears, apply makeup to make her skin look merely tanned instead of golden. She's quick to adjust her clothing to either blend in or stand out, as needed. Even when she's at her most broke she retains one set of very fine clothes.

WHAT EDANA KNOWS: THE ZHENTARIM

- Zhentarim are a shadow organization of thieves, spies, assassins, and wizards that trades mercenaries and goods (including weapons) for profit.
- Their original base of power was among the Zhent people in the Moonsea region, primarily a place called Zhentil Keep.
- Long sought to gain political influence in Waterdeep, but the strength of the city's Masked Lords, nobility, and professional guilds makes that difficult.
- In the late 14th century (about 100 years ago), the founder of the Zhentarim (Manshoon) was killed and Zhentil Keep was razed. Zhentarim power was shattered, with the organization breaking down into many internecine factions.

- Recently the local Zhentarim in Waterdeep were rallied around a mercenary group known as the Doom Raiders. They'd been rising in power. Recently, however, there's been a schism in the Zhentarim: A second locus of power seems to have risen within the group and is peeling support off from the Doom Raiders. You aren't sure exactly who this second locus belongs to, but you do know that:
 - They keep an interrogation house in Brindul Alley in the Trade Ward. It was most recently being run by a woman named Avareen Windrivver.
 - Members of the new faction have taken up residence at Yellowspire, a tower in the Castle Ward.
- This schism is not widely known, because the Zhentarim are simultaneously fighting a gang war with the Xanathar Crime League.

WHAT EDANA KNOWS: THE XANATHAR CRIME LEAGUE

- Xanathar is a beholder. He's hundreds of years old and has held court over the Waterdhavian underworld for centuries.
- The location of his headquarters is a closely kept secret, but definitely lies somewhere under Waterdeep. Possibly in the vicinity of the underground city of Skullport.

CREATING EDANA

Sarah's core concept was an elf with criminal connections who had been coasting for a *long* time. She was already playing a very young elf in another campaign, and here she really wanted to lean into elven longevity. A central image was the endless carousel of identities; each picked up, enjoyed, and then casually discarded.

In play, I think she discovered that the "safety" of Edana's serial identities was less about comfort and more about *fear*. This became very interesting to explore as the events of the campaign kept pushing her to put down meaningful roots.

PUBLIC INTEGRATION: The main thing here was pulling the lore of the Shadow Thieves. Connecting the disappearance of Edana's mother to the height of the Shadow Thieves' power in Waterdeep (centuries earlier) helped cement just how long Edana had been coasting through her disposable identities.

PRIVATE INTEGRATION: Usually the GM's private integration is, well, private... at least for a time. In this case, though, I immediately handed Sarah these short cheat sheets of what Edana knew about the Zhentarim and Xanathar's gang. I framed this as being what she knew about the local criminal scene in Waterdeep, but obviously I knew both of these organizations would be featuring in the campaign. Breaking down exactly what she knew accomplished two things:

First, it let me think very carefully about what information the PCs would just know and what information would need to be discovered through play.

Second, when these topics inevitably came up during play, having the info sheet meant that Sarah could just act as an expert, using the knowledge that Edana had to brief in the other PCs. Instead of asking me what her character knew and then having the information come from the GM, she could just confidently roleplay through the moment.

It also meant that, for example, I could drop some off-hand reference to "Brindul Alley," and then the player — just like the character — could go, "Wait a minute! I know what that means!" Which is infinitely

better than me dropping an off-hand reference to “Brindul Alley” and then calling for an Intelligence check to continue telling them information. (Similar to the [Matryoshka search technique](#).)

MAKING THE PARTY: Edana’s background obviously positioned her as a fixer, and very early on the group decided that she was probably the one who was connecting them with the contact at the Yawning Portal.

In principle, this was pretty straightforward, although it became considerably more convoluted as the other PCs became involved.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: One last thing I’ll note here is how important I think it is for players to think about the physical description of their characters. I think it’s collectively essential for the whole group (and me!) to be able to picture what’s happening in the game world. I also think that the mental construct of a character’s physicality is essential for capturing the psychological gesture of the character. (If you want to delve into *that*, check out [On the Technique of Acting](#) by Michael Chekhov.)

The advice I’ll give for this is often very similar to that found in the [Universal NPC Roleplaying Template](#).

PASHAR

(Created by Peter Heeringa)

Mamoon Pashar Al-Eiraf Um-Hafayah (Moonborn Pashar, the Diviner of Hafayah) was born in Qadib (known as the city of sages or city of wands*) in the free cities of Zakhara in 1392. His father, a traveling gem-running sea-merchant from Hafayah* (city of secrets), and his mother a wizard of the noble class. Though they married in secret, their love was improper for their stations and Pashar was, as a result, cloistered away by his mother to be brought up by the very nurse (his "Marbia") who had raised his mother - a now ancient elf with the gift of reading the scrolls of fate upon the faces of those that stood before her. Pashar heard her provide readings to many and they always came to pass, but she always flat refused to provide a reading for Pashar.

During Pashar's childhood, his father returned to see his mother every three years while he struggled to make money and prestige enough to make himself a suitable match for Pashar's mother. These rare times with his father brought strange gifts from afar, the opportunity to travel about the city, visit the docks, gardens, and more. He was always sad to see his father go, and would be quick to inquire with his mother when their next meeting would occur. Outside of these bright moments much of his time was spent hidden away.

As a boy Pashar learned much about the histories of the world, learned to read the common tongue, elvish, and proceeded to be trained in the elemental languages of the Djinn. There was a routine and rigidity to his upbringing, but he listened well and learned much. All the same, when the moon was full he would sneak out from his confines and observe the stars, listen in on the talk of traders, and attempt to find playmates in the streets. It wasn't until he had a strange vision during a bout of sickness that his mother and Marbia decided it was time to test the boy for the gift.



ADOLESCENCE

In his 50th year, Pashar proved he had the capability and aptitude to learn magic. Delighted, his mother became a far more active part in his life as she provided training and testing in the magical arts. His was not an isolated apprenticeship, however. In addition to tutelage from his mother, he received regular training from his Marbia as well as a select number of arcane associates of his mother. An entire world opened up for Pashar as he was introduced to the fantastical and strange. During this time his father took his first great journey north to his ancestral home in Calimshan. He would return only twice in the next 40 years. After his father's first return Pashar questioned Marbia when his father would take Pashar and his mother. She remarked on his fate for the first and only time, "Once you are a great wizard you will have already been united." Pashar's spirits sank.

These years, while filled with exposure to knowledge from the best libraries within Qadib, dragged on as if they hovered in time. It wasn't until the last decade that Pashar's life would suddenly lurch forward to catch up for the stalled time.

FLIGHT FROM ZAKHARA

In his 90th year, Pashar's mother agreed to apprentice Pashar to a fellow wizard, Khorraveh. During this apprenticeship, Pashar found himself secreting his way past the wards and traps guarding the treasure hoard of his master Khorraveh. He sought to find something to show to his father, who was to arrive the next morning; something that could prove his capability as a wizard. In his exploration he inadvertently released a Djinn of great power from a strange crystal (where it had been imprisoned by Khorraveh). In a mock blessing/curse the Djinn

wiped clean all that was written in Pashar's fate calling out as it departed, "I cast you upon the sea of fate to chart your own course, young wizard."

Khorraveh was furious at the loss of his prize and set to magically imprison Pashar for his transgression. Pashar's fate would have been sealed, but Marbia mysteriously arrived to save Pashar from the terrible end. In the ensuing battle there was terrible destruction within the city. Upon learning what transgressed, Pashar's mother secreted them away in the night. They were able to intercept his father before he arrived. The three were finally to be together, though without the luxury of the life to which Pashar was accustomed.

WRITINGS OF THE PRESENT

The next decade involved travelling north to Faerun, visiting strange and wonderful sites as the now united family made their way to Calimshan. The sea life grew on the trio, and while they spent several months in Calimshan, their time there was brought to a close early. Wanderlust and the lure of lucrative trade routes enticed the family to spur the crew of the merchant vessel onward.

During this time Pashar studied regularly with his mother, assisted his father with trade deals in port, played the zither, or helped keep lookout. In addition to these more mundane activities, his visions began to return and, in turn, intensify. He spoke once of his father's impending death - *blame upon the son*. Another time of a demon descending upon the ship in the night. This talk caused a rift between him and the crew, and Pashar found himself alone more and more frequently.

One ill-fated evening Pashar, with a bright mood, was on lookout. Beset by a terrible vision and rendered unconscious, Pashar was unable to warn of an advancing pirate ship until they were already upon the merchant vessel. In the chaos, his father and most of the crew were slain. Pashar was taken prisoner by a vicious tiefling pirate. While his mother caused irreparable harm to the pirate vessel, in the end she surrendered to save Pashar's life. The pirates gathered what they could from their vessel, scuttled it, and set off in the merchant vessel.

During their captivity, Pashar turned 100, the age of adulthood for elves. Pashar befriended Kittiso, the very tiefling who had captured him upon the ship. Kitti eventually convinced her captain that Pashar should be allowed to earn or buy his freedom.

Down a suitable warship due to his mother's actions, the pirates seemed to think it fitting to ransom the pair of them for the cost of a new one. They named ransom at a price of 600 harbor moons (which sadly got a little lost in the translation). Pashar set off with his Kittiso, his newfound ally, to seek these "six hundred coins."

ZAKHARAN CULTURAL NOTES

*Zakharan society is patriarchal and the father's hometown would be prescribed to Pashar, but it would be expected he would be raised by his mother.

Zakharan society pillars: honor, family, purity, hospitality, and piety

The Bond of Salt is an ancient tradition to link guest and host. When a guest accepts salt from a host, the host is guaranteeing the safety of the guest for three days, the believed time that the salt remains in the system. The guest, for their part, agrees to not harm the host or the host's family for the duration as well. To do so would do incredible damage to one's honor and station.

DESCRIPTION

Pashar's golden skin, silver hair, and emerald eyes cause him to stand out despite his thin frame and short stature typical of sun elves. Not much over 5 feet tall, he doesn't gain any height from his typical footwear of Zakharan slippers and other garb. He wears his hair long and loose behind his ears; or pulled up into a bun under a fez.

CREATING PASHAR

Peter was probably the most knowledgeable player at the table when it came to the lore of the Forgotten Realms. His character concept was also almost fully developed right from the beginning: Not just the general conceit of a cloistered, scholastic elf now eager with wanderlust while fairly naïve about anything not found in a history book, but all the rich, specific detail of Zakharan life.

One thing to note here, in fact, is the section of his character background dedicated to miscellaneous cultural notes. Peter pulled these details on his own, but it's also a technique that I like to use: I'll pull — or, more often, create (one thing I love about character creation is that it almost always prompts me to develop parts of my worlds that I had never thought about before) — specific cultural details relevant to a PC's background.

You don't need a lot of these. (And, in fact, an encyclopedia article can often be counterproductive.) But 4-8 really evocative, specific details — what they think, what they eat, what their clothing looks like, what their popular slang words are, etc. — can give the player a touchstone for both ground and developing their character.

(If you get really lucky, you'll get a player who takes your handful of evocative details and develop them into a richly detailed encyclopedia article that you can tuck into your own notes for future reference.)

BRING THE PARTY TOGETHER: So my first question for Peter was, "What brings Pashar to Waterdeep?"

Peter's original concept was that he and his parents had come to Waterdeep on their travels, and then his parents had gotten into some sort of legal trouble and gotten arrested. He was now stuck in the city and was trying to figure out how to pay off a debt of some sort to get them freed.

You can see how this basic concept, but also shifted and evolved. This was primarily in response to Heather's development of Kittisoth (which we'll dive into next), but the short version is that she was creating a tiefling pirate. Since Kitti and Pashar both had maritime elements in their backgrounds, Heather and Peter thought it made sense for the two of them to have crossed paths at some point.

As the three of us tossed ideas around, it was a pretty short leap to the idea that Pashar's parents had been taken by pirates (instead of being arrested in Waterdeep) and then an even shorter leap to Kitti actually being one of the pirates who had done it. (Pashar's dad also got killed in there somewhere along the way.)

Why Waterdeep? Well, Pashar thought it was the city he knew best in the North. (Because he'd read a number of histories about it. Same thing as being streetwise, right?)

PRIVATE INTEGRATION: As a fish out of water in Waterdeep, I didn't do a lot to privately integrate Pashar into the campaign. (To some extent, "the outsider who has to learn the city" is the hook.)

But the one thing I *did* do was set the ransom for his mother at 30,000 gold pieces. The players all thought his was an insane amount — "a king's ransom" as one put it and "oh-shit-money" as another suggested. But I, of course, knew that the central conceit of the whole campaign was a horde of half a million gold pieces. Pashar would be *highly motivated* once the stakes of Neverember's Enigma became clear.

At this point, Erik — another player — jumped in and jokingly suggested that Pashar, in his naivete, had actually set the ransom. "Right, right," Peter said. "They asked me how much money I thought I could get for my mother. And I was like, 'Thirty thousand gold pieces? How much could thirty thousand be, right?'"

This joke actually evolved into the idea that Pashar had been confused by the size of the ransom: The pirates, hearing he was going to Waterdeep for the money, told him that they wanted 600 harbor moons (a rare currency used only in Waterdeep that was worth 50gp per coin). Pashar heard that as “600 coins,” more or less assumed they meant 600 gold pieces, and thought it was a very reasonable request.

Surprisingly, in addition to becoming a very funny running joke at the beginning of the campaign, this misunderstanding also became a minor lynchpin in the backgrounds of the other characters. So we’ll be coming back to it.

KITTISOOTH KA'ITER

(Created by Heather Burmeister)

My mother was the wife of a fisherman on the main Pirate Isle. She became worried when he hadn't come home as expected from what was supposed to be a routine trip out to sea. She tried to make a pact with a devil in the hopes that it would ensure his safe return, but it went horribly wrong. The end result was her giving birth to me.

She tried to raise me the best that she could, I guess, but most of what I remember is her desperately trying to make me look like a normal child by hiding my leathery bat-wings or crying. It wasn't long before she disappeared entirely, leaving me to fend for myself.

The Pirate Isles are rife with underling children who have lost parents - either on great pirate raids or to great leviathans of the deep or simply to sad, lonely circumstance. I fell in with a group of street urchin kids who took care of each other and learned how to defend my odd looks with brute force. My group of kids would make a little cash here and there by running errands or little missions for the pirate gangs when they'd dock.

When I was around fifteen (I'm not one-hundred percent sure what my birthday is), one of the pirate gangs tasked my group with stealing a compass imbued with magical properties from a well-known captain named Iriqoth Ka'iter. It was supposed to be an easy job, but grace, stealth, and patience were never my strong points. I botched the mission by panicking when I couldn't get the lock on the chest open, trying to brute force said lock by kicking said chest over and over again, and trying to fight the crew when they inevitably found the source of the commotion. I was brought to Iriqoth by the crew so that he could decide what was to be done with me. Being devil-born himself, he took a shine to me immediately. He became my weird pirate captain dad, but insisted I work my way up from the bottom ranks if I was to take his place someday.



That day would never come.

After I'd been sailing for a few years and was just starting to take on the responsibilities of first mate, we were boarded in the middle of the night by a legendary pirate vessel, captained by none other than the Quiet Captain, Kip Braddock. Braddock and Iriqoth had long been at odds, but Iriqoth never took the threat seriously. Kip took the ship, killed my father, and took over the crew. Some day he'll pay for what he's done.

Shortly after, we came across a new piggy (that's what we called merchant ships sailing low in the waves). The merchant watchmen - who turned out to be Pashar - had fallen asleep on duty, so we were onboard before they knew what was happening. It looked like the easiest piggy we'd ever taken. But when Kip started killing the crew (including Pashar's father) so he could take the ship as a prize vessel, Pashar's mother started fighting back. We eventually managed to take her prisoner, but she'd heavily damaged our ship. So we set sail on the littly piggy ship.

Pashar, though completely impractical and ridiculous, is a wonder. He can tell me the names of very devil, and has been trying to help me find out what sort of devil-spawn I might be. He also doesn't seem

to know when I'm making fun of him, which is a riot for me. He also has an indomitable good nature, which is rare on the high seas. We're an unlikely pair, but I think he's my first "friend"... whatever that means. I protected him and his mother from the rougher members of the crew and also offered to accompany him ashore when Kip came up with the idea of ransoming him and his mother for money for a new ship. I'm also hoping that the journey will give me time to plan my revenge.

CREATING KITTI

Heather's central concept was "tiefling pirate." Everything else more or less filled in around this central conceit. In [Part 2](#), we looked at how the decision to link her maritime background to Pashar's had a major effect on shaping the details of Pashar's background. As we wrapped up our character creation session, however, Kittisothe largely remained a cluster of large concepts. There were a few ideas floating around (like "devil-spawn pirate daddy"), but they hadn't really been nailed down. So Heather developed a lot of these details by writing her background between sessions.

You might also note that, unlike Edana and Pashar, Heather chose to write her character background in the first person. There was a brief period when I was a youngling when I wanted consistency in this sort of thing across the characters in a campaign, and an even longer period when I thought that this choice was somehow reflective of what a player valued or was focused on in their play.

These days I don't really think there's a meaningful distinction. There's obviously differences between first and third person and how they can be used, but I haven't found that it reflects much beyond the document itself if at all. (There might be a *slight* bias towards first person being better for developing the voice of your characters, but even that's not consistent: Talking at the table is very different from writing at your desk, and what you learn from one may or may not be applicable to the other. And, similarly third person *might* be slightly better at developing lore outside of your PC due to its objectivity, but not significantly so in the long run.)

With all that being said, one of the reasons I like having the characters actually write something up away from the table – even if it's just a few sentences – is that exploring character through written fiction *is* a different way of engaging with your character, and you *will* find stuff (and develop stuff) that you wouldn't necessarily find at the table. It's the most elementary form of [bluebooking](#), and also an excellent medium for thoughtful collaboration.

PUBLIC INTEGRATION: Heather was not the least knowledgeable player at the table when it came to the Forgotten Realms, but her exposure was limited to a handful of novels she had read when she was a teenager.

I'd made a point of putting a map of Faerûn on the wall and, when she suggested a pirate, I was able to point out the Pirate Isles. The Sea of Fallen Stars immediately captured her imagination and she was able to roll forward from that.

PRIVATE INTEGRATION: Much like her friend Pashar, Kittisothe was going to be a newcomer to Waterdeep, so there wasn't much to tie her into the extant elements of *Dragon Heist*. I did, actually, offer Luskan as an option if she was looking for a port that her pirates could be sailing out of (in which case there would have been some obvious hooks with Jarlaxle), but the Pirate Isles were just more interesting for her.



BRINGING THE PARTY TOGETHER: I've already described most of the initial work here, as it was done in collaboration with Peter/Pashar. Because of this connection, however, as Heather was writing up the details of Kittisoth's background, she also made a point of prepping a short cheat sheet of details that were also pertinent to Pashar's background. (This includes stuff like the name of the pirate captain who'd killed Pashar's father and ransoming his mother.)

This is obviously a good technique for making sure intersecting continuity gets sorted correctly, but it can also be a "sneaky" trick for getting players to collaborate not just with you, but also with their fellow players between sessions.

THEREN

(Created by Erik Malm)

I spent my youth exploring the forests of Evermeet and learning to hunt from my father.

Shortly after coming of age, word reached the wood elves of Evermeet that not only had the ruins of our old home in the Ardeep Forest been overrun by kobolds and other monsters, but a group of humans, led by Lord Nandar of Waterdeep, had begun invading and trying to lay claim to the forest.

When Rond Arrowhome set sail with an army of wood elves to take back and protect the forest, I volunteered to join them. I was trained as a ranger and soon became an expert at hunting both humans and kobolds.

Now that the forest is once again safe, I prefer to spend my days alone with nature – exploring, observing, and experiencing the constant change and unpredictable events of the natural world. I especially love the power, beauty, and unpredictability of thunderstorms and have developed a connection to Aerdrie Faenya, though I am one of the few non-avariel who worship her.

I am always happy to help out lost travelers (who mean the forest no harm) or anyone else in need, though I remain distrustful of the wealthy elite like the Nandars of Waterdeep.

DESCRIPTION

Theren has copper-colored skin with a dark-brown/copper-colored hair (like dark, tarnished copper).

His clothes palette is standard dark forest colors; the sort of thing that would help with camouflage in Ardeep – deep greens, browns, dark grey/black. Theren's original clothing would be elvish and probably trend more towards just greens and browns, emphasizing dark versions of those colors instead of a true black. (That said, the longer he's in the city, the more likely he is to start wearing some greys that would match stonework, etc. Maybe fewer greens as well, or even normal Waterdhavian clothing of a fashionable sort, but with subdued colors.) It's ultimately all about camouflage; to blend into his environment.

Theren is 5'10". Green eyes.

Hair is straight and shoulder length. Normally he just keeps it tucked behind his ears, which tends to keep it in place fairly well due to elvish ears being tall and pointy. But if it's particularly windy (or similar conditions where his hair might obscure his vision), he'll either wear a headband or tie his hair back.

There's nothing particularly remarkable about Theren's facial features – typical elvish face with thinner and more angular features than the average human. Rather, what is remarkable is the way that his life and outlook affect his skin, underlying musculature, and how he carries himself:

Theren has spent much of his life outdoors – baking in the sun, holding night-long vigils in the deep of the forest, and facing unafraid the heavy winds and storms which he is particularly fond of as a ceraunophile and worshiper of Aerdrie Faenya. Consequently, I think of Theren as looking a little



weatherworn (or, at least, weatherworn for a young elf). It's not that he necessarily looks particularly aged or beaten down by the elements, more like that subtle difference between how high quality furniture kept on a patio looks ever so slightly different than the exact same furniture kept in a three-season porch at the end of summer. He looks just a little out of place indoors and looks like he's where he belongs when outdoors.

Similarly, his musculature looks just a little different than the average elf. He's not particularly muscular or anything, though he still has an athletic build, but his muscles are all incredibly dense – like a rock climber's, a farmer's, or anyone else who's primary form of exercise is one of intense and continuous use of their entire body. This also applies to the underlying musculature of his face, making him look a little extra solid/rugged/durable. I suppose it may look a little formidable in some cases, but Theren isn't really threatening, scary, or even particularly imposing, he just looks like someone you'd rather not pick a fight with or try to rob.

His demeanor, posture, and manners have also been affected by his relative solitude and preference for the wilds. Having spent much of his time alone when he doesn't need to worry about what others think about him, he displays his emotions a little more readily, he is a little more likely to speak his mind, his manners are a little more unchecked, and his posture and physical mannerism are a little more informal than a typical elf. To be clear, he's still an elf raised on Evermeet, and a non-elf probably wouldn't even notice anything at all, but to other elves he seems a little... wild/feral.

Finally, although his regular demeanor might be a bit more wild and relaxed, he also has a hunter mode that he shifts into when stalking prey or facing enemies. When he's in this mood, he appears more cold, calculating, and emotionless. Unlike the differences described above, which might not be noticed by a non-elf, this shift is significant enough that everyone except the most unobservant can tell he's hunting something or someone.

CREATING THEREN

The thing I always marvel at when revisiting Theren's background is the intense depth of the physical description. I've had other players create similarly detailed descriptions, but usually it's because EVERYTHING is lavishly detailed. The ratio between Theren's physical description and everything else in Theren's character background seems crazy at first glance.

But it works. And it's a valuable reminder that everyone will have different touchstones that are most effective for them. (This will often depend not only on the player, but also the specific character.)

Look at how much amazing, actionable detail Erik works into Theren's physical description! It's all about blending into his environment? He's a little bit uncomfortable inside? That's gold. Even simple, specific physical actions like when/how he tucks back his hair.

PUBLIC INTEGRATION: Erik was the least versed in the Forgotten Realms at the table. Ironically, we ended up doing the most digging into the weird, esoteric corners of Realms Lore with his character.

The origin point was a simple question: Where would an elf ranger be from?

Evermeet was an easy answer: Big elven kingdom. Just across the ocean from Waterdeep. (Maybe he could be somehow tied into the maritime adventures of Kitti and Pashar?)

On the other hand, where might a wood elf live near Waterdeep? That led us to Ardeep Forest. And that's where we really started digging in. I forget the exact path we followed, but I ended up not only

pulling information from *Lost Empires of Faerûn*, but also tracking down an obscure article about the forest that was written by Ed Greenwood and published in *Dragon Magazine* #270.

There was also more recent lore, revolving around a conflict between Lord Nandar of Waterdeep and the elves of Ardeep in the 1470s. (The Waterdeep connection, however tenuous, made this appealing.) I was not particularly familiar with this era (and not at all familiar with these events), but they were intriguing.

PRIVATE INTEGRATION: The only thing of note here that I recall is that Volo was the “author” of the *Dragon Magazine* article. This didn’t really have anything to do with integrating the character into the campaign, but giving Erik a copy of the article was a nice way to subtly establish Volo’s existence for a player who otherwise wouldn’t be familiar with the name when it was dropped in the first session.

BRINGING THE PARTY TOGETHER: The key question which remained was how Theren would be pulled into Waterdeep. (Remember that every player needed to explain how their character ended up walking through the doors of the Yawning Portal at the beginning of the campaign.)

We looked at a few options, but what stuck was just aiming the Pashar-Kitti vector in the direction of Ardeep Forest: While passing through the forest on the way to Waterdeep, they would have met Theren. After helping him with some local trouble (or possibly being saved by him from local trouble, their mutual versions of the story had very different interpretations of those events), Theren was swayed by Pashar’s sob story and agreed to help him (them, really) raise the ransom money.

It was only six hundred gold pieces, right?

(He was in Waterdeep with them before he discovered that the *actual* ransom price was... uh... considerably more money than that. He hadn’t sworn an oath or anything... but good gods.)

KORA MARWOOD

(Created by Chris Malone)

Kora Marwood was born the youngest to an impoverished family living in Waterdeep. Her father, Hogar, was a member of the guard and occasional longshoreman, and her mother cared for her four siblings and kept house in a shabby apartment in the Dock Ward. In the autumn of 1471, Kora's mother, Samira, took a short-term field job with the Snobeedle Orchard and Meadery. In the midst of a work day, she unexpectedly gave birth to Kora in the middle of the field.

Life continued to be difficult for the Marwoods, and things finally fell apart for the family when Hogar died while working on a job on the docks, killed by a faulty bit of cargo netting and crushed to death by lumber imports from Chult. Samira, fearing for her inability to care for Kora and her siblings, brought them to the Temples for adoption.

Kora, only three years old at the time, remembers little of her mother and her family. While her siblings went to temples of Lathander and Ilmater, Kora was taken by the acolytes of Mystra. She was raised in the mysteries and teachings of Mystra, learning the histories of civilization, magic, and religion. While life was safe and predictable, it was also boring. Kora began sneaking out at night to spend time in the city, and soon found herself enamored with a young man named Aseir Kalid, from Calimshan.

Aseir was an artist, working during the day in his father's shop weaving and dyeing, and then working on his own projects when he had time. When he presented her with a small wooden painting of her one night, she decided that she was done with life in the temple and left shortly thereafter. She lived with him for six months, exploring the city with new eyes. It was in the Spring of 1486 that Aseir fell ill with the Weeping Plague, an illness that began with sores around the eyes and nose that wept a clear fluid, then quickly spread throughout the body, followed by a fever and, for many, death. Brought to Waterdeep from ports far away, the city responded quickly with quarantine. It was then that Kora was reunited with her brother Randal, who had become a priest of Ilmater. Despite his training and magical prowess, he was unable to save Aseir, and left Kora in quarantine to care for him until he passed.



Heartbroken, Kora returned to the temple, throwing herself at the feet of the Head Priest. She begged him to take her back, so that she could serve the temple as a lay healer. While Mystra is not inclined towards life and healing, magic serves all, and they taught her the healing arts. She took to it quickly, showing prowess and aptitude.

She was asked to accompany a pilgrimage to Myth Drannor as a healer and acolyte, and she attended to this. Along the way, she made the acquaintance of a dwarven ranger named Dain Balderk. Dain was initially standoffish with Kora, but after she had several opportunities to demonstrate her knowledge, diplomacy, and skill, he showed a grudging respect. Unfortunately, the arrival of the pilgrimage was preceded by destruction, as the city of the Netherese fell upon Myth Drannor, destroying it. Again.

The pilgrimage stayed at the Ruins of Myth Drannor for several months, caring for the wounded and exploring the wild magic of the disaster. It was during this time that Kora discovered that Balasha Asorio, one of the guides and foragers with the party, was actually an agent of the Zhentarim. Exposing the traitor forced a hasty ambush that had been in the making for some time. The Zhent were repelled, but Balasha escaped and Dain received a grievous wound to his back that would never heal completely. On the return trip to Waterdeep, Dain revealed himself as a Harper, and indoctrinated Kora into the faction.

When the pilgrimage at last returned to the city, Kora swore herself to the service of Mystra and began her life as a cleric in full. She now lives at the House of Wonder as a healer, acolyte, and doing odd jobs when asked. She serves mostly as an informational asset for the Harpers, looking to find those who look to destroy personal freedom and otherwise act out of evil. She still meets with Dain regularly, who acts as a mentor (and handler).

DESCRIPTION

Kora stands about 5'6", tending towards a leaner frame; not scrawny, but more svelte. She has darker skin, that of a deep tan or of a more Mediterranean ethnicity, not quite brown, but not pale. Her hair is dark brown, to the point of appearing black unless under direct sunlight. Her face is more narrow than broad, with a rounded chin, high cheekbones, and green eyes.

When at home and not expecting trouble or a call to action, she wears a robe or a tunic with a simple shirt underneath and blue or black leggings. When out and about, she wears her armor with a tabbard or tunic over it, leather leggings/britches, a cloak, and her shield, mace, pack, and healer's kit at her side. She dresses in white, silver, and blue, with red elements in linings and trim to reflect Mystra's holy colors. Mystra's holy symbol is emblazoned on her shield.

WHAT KORA KNOWS: THE ZHENTARIM

- Zhentarim is a shadow organization of thieves, spies, assassins, and wizards that trades mercenaries and goods (including weapons) for profit.
- Their original base of power was among the Zhent people in the Moonsea region, primarily a place called Zhentil Keep.
- Long sought to gain political influence in Waterdeep, but the strength of the city's Masked Lords, nobility, and professional guilds makes that difficult.
- In the late 14th century (about 100 years ago), the founder of the Zhentarim (Manshoon) was killed and Zhentil Keep was razed. Zhentarim power was shattered, with the organization breaking down into many internecine factions.
- You've been trying to figure out details about the local Zhentarim for awhile, as their power and influence seems to be growing. Recently, however, there appears to have been a schism within the group.
- This schism is not widely known, because the Zhentarim are simultaneously fighting a gang war with the Xanathar Crime League, and that violence is capturing everyone's attention. You know that that this gang war is the result of some provocative action taken by the new splinter group of the Zhentarim.

CREATING KORA

I've run games for and played games with Chris for a number of years now. His approach to character creation tends to be a quiet one: He likes to thoughtfully develop them in great detail, often working ahead of the group even in unfamiliar systems. In this case he was quite familiar with 5th Edition and the

Forgotten Realms, and so by the time we were getting some of the new players up on their feet, Kora was already a fully fledged character rich with details. In fact, virtually everything you see above was already basically in place by the time I tuned in on Kora for the first time.

PUBLIC INTEGRATION: There's an anecdote that's somewhere between gospel truth and urban legend that goes around both the movie and video game production circles. You have either a developer or a writer or a director or maybe an SFX house who's giving a presentation to their producer or editor or investor. And so they very deliberately add one element to their presentation or edit or final render that they know is dumb: Like, maybe it's a noir drama but there's a shot of a guy holding a goose for no reason.

So their boss says, "Looks great, but I think you should lose the shot with the goose." And our creator-hero takes the note and deletes the goose... because, of course, they never *actually* wanted the goose in the first place. The point of the story is that everybody in a decision process feels a need to give notes; either because they psychologically want to feel that they've "contributed" to the final product or because they need to justify their paycheck. If they just say "that's good," it's not like they've actually *done* anything, right? The point of the dumb goose was to provide a lightning rod for the irrelevant-but-necessary comment they pathologically need to provide.

This is my long-winded way of saying: As a GM, don't be the executive in this story.

If you've got a value-add, go for it! That's the whole point of the "public integration" phase. In this case, Chris' expertise and clear vision meant that Kora was already fully integrated into the setting.

No need to look the gift horse in the mouth. Ride on.

PRIVATE INTEGRATION: Chris had chosen for Kora to be a fledgling Harper and had also set up a violent history with the Zhentarim, so that bit of integration with two of the major factions of the campaign was also more-or-less automatically done for me. I simply swapped out the scripted Harper contact (Mirt) for the character that Chris had created (although I eventually brought Mirt back in as Dain's boss; thus Kora's background gave additional depth to the Harpers rather than vice versa).

(I guess maybe it is worth pointing out that swapping out elements you had planned and replacing them with what the players created is not only just as valid as adding relevant stuff to the PCs' background, it's probably MORE valid.)

You'll note that, like Sarah, Chris got a "What You Know" handout for the Zhentarim. Some of the bullet points are duplicated (there's no reason to rewrite or reword stuff you don't have to), but others have unique information, slightly different information, or information with a different interpretation. The goal, of course, is for the two players to be able to actually swap information in-character. (If their handouts were perfect duplicates, the interaction is more likely to be one of them regurgitating everything know and the other player not getting any pay-off from their character's knowledge. The unique information solves that problem. The information that slightly overlaps - or even contradicts! - provokes actual discussion between the players.)

The Snobeedle Orchard appears on the map of Waterdeep:



I had a huge version of this map hanging on the wall and Chris simply grabbed it off the map when fleshing out the story of Kora's mother. This was a really cool opportunity, but I blew it: I completely missed the fact that Dasher Snobeedle, a member of the Snobeedle family, had become one of the wererats sent to harass the new owners of Trollskull Manor (i.e., the PCs). I eventually noticed my oversight towards the end of the campaign when I started doing some meaningful development on Kora's missing mother and was able to work it in. (You can read about that in more detail [over here](#).)

BRINGING THE PARTY TOGETHER: As I mentioned in [Part 1](#), Edana's position as a fixer made her a natural fit for being the character who would connect the rest of the party with their contact at the Yawning Portal. Kora's role as a Harper agent, however, *also* made sense for this role.

There were a few options we collectively considered, including:

- Kora somehow being undercover and investigating Edana. (Chris wasn't really interested in playing Kora with a false identity, and this also suggested that Edana was currently involved in criminality, whereas Sarah was more interested in having her at the tail end of one of her respites.)
- Edana introducing half of the party to their contact and Kora introducing the other half. (The problem was that Kitti, Pashar, and Theren were already grouped up, so there was no "other half" for Kora to introduce.)

The final solution ended up being a somewhat convoluted web of connections: Upon arriving in Waterdeep, Kitti decided the best way she could help Pashar raise money was by joining the underground fight circuit. (I made a note to connect this to the underground fights that figure later in the campaign.) Asking around, they got pointed in the direction of Edana. When Edana realized how much money they *really* needed, told them to skip the fights and decided to take them to Kora, who had been putting the word around that she needed a crew.

"Mystra's got money," was Edana's rationale. But it turned out the job wasn't for the Temple of Mystra. Kora was freelancing. But the offer was better than nothing, so Kitti, Theren, and Pashar accepted. Edana decided to tag along for a little bit just to make sure everything was copacetic. (It seemed to her that young Kora was flying by the seat of her pants... She wasn't wrong.)

And that's when Kora took them all to the Yawning Portal to meet her contact.

DRAGON HEIST: THE FINAL SESSION

[by Justin Alexander – February 28th, 2020](#)



DRAGON HEIST – SESSION 21

February 21st, 2020

With my recent announcement that my [Dragon Heist](#) campaign had come to an end, I've had a number of people, including several of [my patrons](#), ask me for a retrospective or post mortem of my experiences. This campaign journal describing the last session of the campaign will be the first installment of that retrospective, with additional discussions to follow.

As noted above, this was Session 21 of the campaign. We primarily ran the campaign in weekend intensives, starting with a session on Friday night and then continuing with day-long sessions on Saturday and Sunday. In the back half of the campaign our Sunday sessions were shortened due to one of the players joining a roller derby league. There was also one month that we missed entirely and another where we were only able to play a single session. In the end, and entirely by coincidence, we ended the campaign exactly one year to the day from our first session.

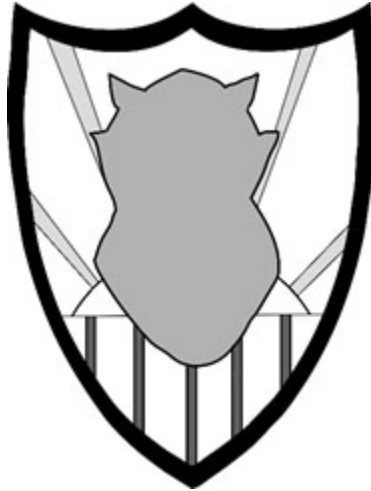
If you're looking for the rest of the campaign journals... Unfortunately, they don't exist. Nor are they likely to exist barring someone deciding to single-handedly sponsor them at great expense or a general outcry of demand from a significant number of my patrons. These journals are not particularly onerous to produce, but they are relatively time-consuming. I think you'll find that sufficient context has been given here to understand what's happening and to be entertained by the group's escapades. If you would like to peek at a few other major events in the campaign, I have written about it previously in two Running the Campaign columns: [A Party at Shipwright's House](#) and [The Manshoon Heists](#).

WHAT'S COME BEFORE

- The Trollskulls have adopted three orphans — Nat, Squiddly, and Jenks — and have recently arranged for their education: All are to be tutored on alternating afternoons by Firedrop (a pixie philosopher) and Nalolir (a podrikev; a dwarven construct with the brain and spinal column of a kobold who escaped from Undermountain a hundred years ago).
- Jenks has been apprenticed to Amara, a baker who only recently left her own apprenticeship when the Trollskulls helped set up a new bakery in what was previously Frewn's Brews (a competing tavern in Trollskull Alley that the Trollskulls rode out of town on a rail... although, to be fair, Frewn had hired the Shard Shunner wererat gang to attempt to ruin Trollskull Manor).
- Squiddly had been apprenticed to Master Kennadr of the Fellowship of Bowyers and Fletchers. He wanted to one day become an archer, but he would begin by learning the tools of his would-be craft.
- Nat, who could speak only through sign language, had been apprenticed to Ethlando, an elven scholar who had once been a magi, but was cursed with having his magic stripped from him.
- Squiddly and Nat would attend their apprenticeships in the mornings before coming home to be tutored with Jenks. Jenks, however, now slept late after working at the bakery with Amara overnight.
- The Trollskulls have obtained the *Stone of Golorr* and two of its eyes. Having briefly allied with the Gralhunds, they eventually decided their true allegiance was to the city and they informed Vajra (who had made them members of Force Grey) of all that they knew. Vajra interceded with the Gralhunds, impounded the nimblewright where they were keeping the *Stone of Golorr* hidden, and then turned the *Stone* over to the PCs. (Vajra herself, along with Renaer Neverember, are preoccupied trying to rapidly build an airtight, *post facto* case against Victorio Cassalanter, who the Trollskulls arrested under somewhat unorthodox circumstances, for being an Asmodean cultist.) The Trollskulls then managed to convince the Gralhunds that it couldn't have been Vajra and *must* have been Jarlaxle in disguise who stole their nimblewright (and the *Stone* within)!
- The Trollskulls also know that the notorious crime lord Xanathar has the third eye of the *Stone of Golorr*. They have befriended Ott Steeltoes, Xanathar's majordomo, and learned that the one thing Xanathar prizes more than anything else in the world is a goldfish named Sylgar. Ott must routinely replace the goldfish whenever it dies. They also learned (and did business with) the fish dealer Ott gets his Sylgars from. They know that tomorrow night — on the 5th of Tarsakh — Xanathar will be holding a gladiatorial contest in his headquarters as part of the Goldennight festival celebrations, and they have been given a teleportal key for Xanathar's teleporter totems that will allow them to access his lair when the time comes...

RETURN TO THE CITY OF THE DEAD

It was mid-afternoon on the 4th of Tarsakh. Edana was waiting at Trollskull Manor for the others to return from their various errands. Embric stopped by to deliver – in an elegant, velvet-lined box – the flasks he and Avi had modified to bear the tavern’s sigil:



These were the (many) flasks that Edana had taken from Osco Salibuck during their raid on the Cassalanter Villa, and she thought they would make lovely, mismatched mementoes for the Trollskulls. As the others returned and gathered in their upstairs sitting room, she pulled them out to much admiration.

The kids came running out of their room, their afternoon tutoring complete. “Where are you going?” Edana asked.

“Swordfighting!” Squiddly called back.

“With wooden swords, right?”

“Yes!”

“If I hear metal, you’re in trouble!”

“Okay, *mom!*”

The kids were gone. Kittisothe couldn’t contain her glee. *They’d called Edana mom!* For the first time!

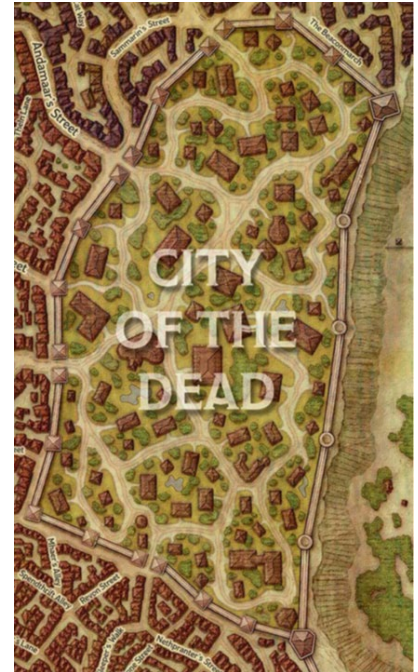
After a brief discussion, they confirmed their intention to hit Xanathar’s lair the next night, taking advantage of the confusion around the Goldennight fights. In the meantime, Pashar had a hunch they wanted to follow up on: In their original attempts to figure out why the Zhentarim had been interested in Renaer’s mourning locket for his mother, they had visited the Brandath Crypts with him several weeks earlier. Now they suspected that they might have missed something. They knew that Lord Dagult had hidden his gold somewhere, they knew that he had done significant construction to build his wife’s crypt, and they knew that he had hidden one of the Golorr eyes in his son’s mourning locket. Why? What was the connection?

Passing through the gardened paths of the City of the Dead, they saw any number of picnickers and the like near the north gates. A gaggle of children ran past flying kites. Further south, they were passed themselves by a procession of self-flagellant priests of Ilmater, seeking to bless the burial grounds.

The Brandath Crypts hove into view. Outside the front gate of the crypts they saw the tall form of the treant Pal'ithil'drassar. Theren, who had actually visited him a few times since their first visit here, greeted him as a friend and they chatted amiably for a while before passing into the crypts themselves.

They passed the grand tombs of porphyry and marble and instead twisted their way into the older tombs, making their way to where Lady Alethea had been interred.

Lady Alethea's sarcophagus, in the center of the chamber, was clearly newer than the rest of the crypt. A bouquet of wilted roses — left by Renaer when last they'd been here, or perhaps replaced since then — lay atop the sarcophagus. Looking up, Edana saw that the ceiling was covered with a faded and chipped tempura portrait of a nobleman identified, by a painted banner beneath the figure, as LORD ANRI BRANDATH. Fresh script around the perimeter of this portrait read, in four languages, "The beauty of our age, in death, is watched over by the spirits of her ancestors."



It was clear to Kora that there were three different ages of construction: The crypt itself was the oldest. At some later date, but still quite a long time ago, the painting of Lord Anri had been added to the ceiling above. And then, quite recently, Lady Alethea's sarcophagus and the new script had been added. (Most likely at the same time, Lord Anri's remains — which they had previously seen in a cheap, new tomb on the far side of the Brandath Crypts — had been moved.) Kora also noticed that Lord Anri's portrait depicted him with an alexandrite-tipped pin and holding a distinctive dwarven compass in his left hand, both of which were symbols of the Maroon Brotherhood, an obscure fraternal order that had once been active in Waterdeep but no longer existed.

Kora pulled out her *wand of secrets*. Standing next to the sarcophagus in the center of the room, she uttered the command word. The wand instantly jerked her hand towards the southern wall. "There," she said.

Edana closely inspected the wall there. She found four false stones. Pushing them in, she heard bolts retracting and was then able to push open the wall, revealing a staircase heading down. Sconces for torches were placed on the walls, but there were no torches in them. The air was dry. There was a thick coating of dust, but a large amount of fairly recent traffic had disturbed it up and down the stairs.

On the top step, Edana noted scorch marks. "There was a trap here," she said. "But someone triggered it."

Pashar stepped closer and looked over her shoulder. "Looks like the remains of a *glyph of warding*."

"That's trouble," Kora said. "Did someone beat us here?"

Watched over by Lady Alethea's sarcophagus, they waited for Pashar and Kora to ritually cast *comprehend languages* and *detect magic*, respectively. (Kitti couldn't shake the feeling that Lady Alethea

was judging her relationship with Renear. “Whatever. I’m awesome.”) When the rites were done, Edana led the way down the stairs.

At the bottom, they found a twisted passage lined with niches containing ancient sarcophagi, their once-sharp features worn away into featureless lumps by immeasurable age. Coming to a corner, Edana noticed that one of the sconces had been ripped out of the wall. It was laying in the middle of the floor. The hall continued for some little distance, but then ended in a complete collapse of earth and stone.

Edana frowned. She reached down to her belt and opened her *bag of holding*. A small skull with jewels for eyes came flying out of it. “Mortaunto!” it cried.

Mortaunto swooped over to the broken sconce lying on the ground and telekinetically floated it into the air. “This is fascinating!” He darted back and forth examining it from every angle. “Hmm...”

“Mortaunto,” Edana asked, “do you see this collapse? From your vantage point, can you see a way through it?”

“Yes! Of course!” Mortaunto cried. “Here!” He telekinetically moved the sconce over to the mouth of Edana’s bag and jiggled it suggestively. Edana complied, opening the bag and allowing him to add the sconce to his collection within.

“Mortaunto!” Mortaunto cried and flew down the hallway... and straight through the wall.

“Oh shit,” Edana said.

Mortaunto flew back out of the wall. “It appears to be... an illusion!”

Kitti clapped. “Mortaunto! You’re so good! I love you so much!”

Edana opened her bag and Mortaunto zipped back in to continue his inspection and adoration of his new treasure. Then she led the others to the illusion. Taking a deep breath, she stepped through.

Beyond the illusion there was an archway filled with a heavy door of steel. The keystone of the arch was decorated to appear like a mountain with a purple alexandrite gemstone in the middle of it (Kora recognized this as a depiction of the dwarven god Dumathoin’s holy symbol). The voussoir around the perimeter of the arch had been carved with more symbols of the Maroon Brotherhood in alternation with dwarven runes: A dwarven compass, a serpent’s forked tongue, a scarabaeus, a brain with two tentacles (this was Ilsensine’s holy symbol, god of the illithid), and a broken arrow (holy symbol of Laduguer, god of the dark dwarves).

“This is strange,” Kora said. She couldn’t imagine what connection there would be between these three very disparate gods.

The door was obviously of much more recent construction than the arch, and its installation had actually damaged some of the ancient symbols in the arch. Edana knelt down and took a close look at the lock.

“This is like a bank vault, but I’ll see what I can do.”

A few minutes into her efforts, however, she tripped something. Some sort of magical effect.

“What did it do?” Kittisothe asked.

“I’m not sure,” Edana said.

“Probably an alarm,” Kora said.

Edana sighed in frustration. "This is going to take awhile. The sun will have probably set before I can get this door open."

They briefly discussed their options. In the end, Pashar sent Darkimedes — his familiar — to fly back to Trollskull and let Lif know that they wouldn't be coming back tonight. Pashar would also be able to create a magical *tiny hut* for them to respite in, rather than venturing out into the unknown dangers of the City of the Dead at night.

And so, while the others retreated to Lady Alethea's tomb to relax, Edana redoubled her focus on cracking the complicated lock. It took her nearly two hours, but she eventually felt the last of the interlocked tumblers release and the door swung open.

BENEATH THE CRYPT

Calling out to the others, she stood up and looked down the long, sloping hallway beyond. The others quickly gathered their things and joined her, and then they proceeded down the hallway together.

About fifteen feet past the door, the construction of the stone changed. "This lower portion is dwarven construction," Edana said, noting the smooth, almost ageless carving. Another fifty feet down they began encountering dwarven graffiti that soon covered both walls — and even the ceiling — in a palimpsest of what turned out to be secrets. Pashar was fascinated, studying the mostly banal confessions and noting down many of them: My beard quivers for Lorlai of the stonecutters. I tasted pixy dust in the third hall. I use rotgrub paste to dye my beard. And so forth.

This continued for several hundred feet before the passage emptied out into a vaulted chamber twenty feet wide and twenty feet high. It seemed to resonate with a silent stillness, suggestive of its great age. The far wall of the chamber was dominated by a massive pair of adamantine doors bearing dwarvish runes taller than a grown man. "All that lies within belongs to the Silent Keeper."

In the center of the floor there was a bronze bas relief of a stylized sun, six feet across. A Chondathan inscription had been carved into the floor in a circle around the bas relief. They read, "Know ye the hidden truth," repeated three times.

"There's magic here," Kora said. "Ancient abjurations."

"Placed here by Lord Dagult?" Edana asked.

"Older than that," Kora said. "Much older." She set to work studying the abjurations. Some great magical rite of warding linked the adamantine doors to bas relief sun on the floor. Their power was immense. "It requires some sort of rite or passphrase to open the doors. And it would take a *wish* to bypass these protections."

Theoretically the Blackstaff or perhaps Laeral would be able to provide such a conjuration, but the cost would be steep and probably not to be borne as long as another option remained.

"This must have been what Lord Dagult used the Stone to hide," Edana said. "The passphrase for entering the vault."

"So if we get the third eye, we'll be able to use the Stone to learn the passphrase?" Theren asked. "And then use the passphrase to open the doors?"

"Maybe," Edana said. "We don't really understand exactly what the Stone does or how it does it."

For the moment, at least, it seemed that they had reached an impasse. They went back up the long hall and Pashar evoked his *tiny hut*. He decided that it should be maroon, in honor of the Brotherhood whose signs they had found here, and they settled in for a secure night's sleep.

A QUIET MORNING AT TROLLSKULL MANOR



Returning to Trollskull Manor, they found the ghost Lif overseeing the unseen servant mopping the floor of the tavern.

"Welcome home," Lif said.

"How was everything last night?" Theren asked.

"We had a good crowd," Lif said. "Master Floon was here and inquired after Kittisoht."

"The one with the great jawline?" Kitti asked. "Did he say what he wanted?"

"Was his wife with him?" Edana asked.

"She was not," Lif said. "And he simply said that he regretted missing Kittisoht."

"Gross," Kitti said. "I do not regret it. But thank you for telling me."

They headed upstairs and checked in with the kids. Jenks was still asleep after staying up late working at Amara's bakery, but Nat and Squiddly both excitedly regaled them with tales of their apprenticeships from the day before.

Theren actually headed over to Amara's and found a well-sized crowd had gathered. She was just wrapping up a croissant for Fala Lefaliir, the herbalist from farther down Trollskull Alley, as he came in.

“How are things going?” Theren asked. “Do you need anything?”

“No,” Amara declared cheerfully. “We’re having a wonderful morning! And I’ll have the order for Trollskull Manor over in the mid-afternoon.”

Fala thanked Theren for his part in making this happen. “We used to have to walk over to the far side of the High Road for a decent bakery. It’s wonderful to have one right here in the alley.” Theren spent a few minutes chatting with her about his plans to convert the alley into greenspace. The whole alley was excited about that, too.

TEAM RESEARCH

Meanwhile, Pashar and Kora headed out to research more details about the Vault. Kora suggested they go to the Font of Knowledge, a Temple of Oghma, since their queries seemed to be primarily religious in nature. They split up, with Pashar researching the Maroon Brotherhood and Kora focusing on Dumathoin.

Kora learned little she did not already know: Dumathoin was one of the first members of the Mordinsamman, the council of dwarven gods. He was known as the Keeper of the Secrets and was the patron of the shield dwarves. Locally, he had been worshipped by Clan Melairkyn, the dwarves who had first begun excavating under what was now Waterdeep. The earliest portions of Undermountain were, in fact, the Underhalls in which the Melairkyn had made their homes and wrought their mithril-craft. The age of the construction they had found beneath the Brandath Crypts certainly suggested that it was likely built by the Melairkyn.

Kora also dug into the strange association of the holy symbols of Dumathoin, Laduguer, and Ilsensine. Here, however, she found little: A few scraps of legends referred obliquely to even older legends, now lost to the earliest mists of time, that suggested that, in the first days of the Mordinsamman, there was a great and bitter rivalry between Dumathoin and Ilsensine. And another reference to Laduguer “as the once-brother of the Secret Keeper.” But these explained little.

As for Laduguer himself, he had once been a member of the Mordinsamman. But when Moradin discovered that Laduguer had created the duergar, he was cast out from the council.

Pashar’s research was a little more rewarding: The Maroon Brotherhood were a secret brotherhood, primarily centered in Waterdeep and most likely founded during the 12th century, although there are many sources suggesting that their *true* origins lay even earlier in history. In the early 14th century, the Brotherhood became caught up in the Shadow Thief Affairs: Their members were implicated in an assassination attempt and the group was broken up by then-Open Lord Lhestyn.

Rumors persisted for the better part of a century, however, that the Brotherhood of them Maroon Pin had actually survived the purge and were secretly controlling Waterdeep (or even all of the newly formed Lords’ Alliance). Some even claimed that every single Masked Lord was, in fact, a member of the Brotherhood — or perhaps that the Brotherhood and the Masked Lords were one and the same.

The rituals of the brotherhood largely remained secret even after their precipitous fall — or perhaps because of it. It was clear, however, that they had accumulated any number of ancient rituals, symbols, and the like. These included their namesake alexandrite pins, dwarven compasses (often hidden within works of art, leading many to conclude that *any* piece of art with a dwarven compass in it must also contain encrypted messages or secret truths of the Brotherhood), a serpent’s forked tongue (representing the telling of secrets), scarab beetles, and the like.

Pashar found one particular example of this sort of thing. Beneath the picture of a broken arrow was an enigmatic phrase: "In beam of sun, strike dragon's scale with mithril true upon the anvil sun." Mid-14th century scholars had exhausted great amounts of work trying to puzzle out what the imagery of "anvil sun" alluded to, with most concluding that it must refer cryptically to a site somewhere within Calimshan, possibly dating back to the lost empire of Coramshan. Debates raged endlessly about exactly which site (or sites) the passage might refer to, until the Maroon Brotherhood conspiracy scholarship slowly faded away by the end of the 14th century.

SHOPPING AT THE MARKET

A little later in the morning, Edana, Theren, and Kitti headed to the Market. Edana tracked down Nardis, the fish seller Ott Steeltoes had told her about. Nardis was a merman. His entire stall was a pool of water. It took a fair bit of haggling, but Edana was able to convince him to sell her the Sylgar look-a-like he was holding for Ott.

As they walked way, Kitti leaned over. "What's the plan here, exactly?"

"If we get caught," Edana said. "We threaten the goldfish."

"Just pretend it's actually Sylgar?"

"Exactly."

Theren, meanwhile, was scouring the stalls looking for a very particular item and, when it proved quite expensive, asked Edana and Kitti, who were just walking up, to pool their money with him to purchase it. Then they returned to Trollskull Manor.

They found Kora and Pashar waiting in their sitting room. Theren walked over to Kora. "Here," he said. "These are goggles of the night. They'll grant you darkvision. Just like the rest of us."

Pashar gasped with glee and then applauded. Kora blushed. "Thank you.

"Now you have a soul," Pashar said.

"What?"

"Oh, yes," Pashar said. "Elves believe that only those with souls can see in the absence of light."

It took them all a moment to notice the small smirk on Pashar's face and realize he was joking. They collapsed in general merriment.

LETTERS OF THE MORNING

A letter arrived by messenger. It was written in silver ink upon black parchment:

*My sources suggest that Ammalia will be seeking her
revenge. Be careful.*

-J

"He's so nice to us," Theren said. "I don't understand. We should buy him a thank you gift."

"How can we shore up defenses here?" Kittisoth asked. "Especially when we're gone. She'll target us here. At home."

"That makes sense," Kora said.

"We could send her a letter," Theren said. "'We're letting all of our contacts know that doppelgangers have been appearing as us. And, just in case you've been had interactions with us, that that was not use.'"

They laughed. But quickly sobered once more.

"We need to hire someone to guard the house," Edana said. "On short notice."

"What about the Zhents?" Pashar suggested.

"That's not a bad idea," Kora said.

"I thought we told them to stay *out* of our neighborhood," Theren objected.

"No, he's right," Kittisoth said. "I trust them more than just about anybody else we've met in this town."

They quickly agreed that it was, in fact, their best option. As they were about to leave for Kolat Towers, however, there was another knock on the door. Another letter had arrived.

We need to meet. The usual place - Dain

Kora sighed. Her Harper contact had the worst timing.

They needed to split up, but Kora didn't want to go entirely by herself, so Theren agreed to accompany here, while Edana and Kittisoth headed to Kolat Towers to negotiate with the Zhents. Pashar would stay at Trollskull to watch over things there.

AN UNHAPPY HARPER

Kora and Theren found Dain in his usual spot at the far end of the narrow, dockside bar.

"Dain," Kora said.

"I'm glad you could come," Dain said. "We need a strike team with some muscle behind it that can strike fast, and I knew you already had some history with the Zhents. We have reports that the Zhents are moving into a place called Yellowspire on Turnback Court. I don't think you're aware of this, but directly behind the north side of Turnback Court — just beyond Yellowspire Tower — the Harpers have a supply cache. It has magic items and other resources. We believe that the Zhents are moving into Yellowspire in order to make a move on this cache."

"You want us to attack the Zhents?" Kora said. She couldn't believe this was happening.

"We need them out of Yellowspire. However you can make that happen."

"All right," Theren said. "The good news is that the cache is perfectly safe. The Zhents don't even know it's there."

Dain frowned. "What do you mean?"

Kora sighed. "You remember when I told you that we killed Manshoon? It was the Doom Raider Zhentarim who helped us do that. And in the process of attacking Manshoon, we discovered a magical conduit between Yellowspire and the Zhentarim headquarters. Our allies — the Doom Raiders — now control Yellowspire."

"Legally," Theren added. "They have a deed."

Dain was stone-faced.

"If you're still concerned, I'd suggest simply moving the cache," Kora said. "

Dain shook his head. "It would be a security risk, no matter what short term alliances you may have made. And moving the cache would potentially expose it."

Kora shook her head, too. "We can't do it."

Theren was exasperated. "You can't just attack people in a building they legally own!"

"You're new to the Harpers, stripling," Dain said dismissively. "But we do what's *necessary*, whether it's legal or not."

"I understand that," Kora said. "But we can say with absolute certainty that they are not there for the cache! There's no risk to it!"

"Fine," Dain said. "If your team isn't up to handling this, then we'll find someone who can."

"I don't think you —"

"It's *fine*," Dain said acidly. "Leave."

Kora shoved her stool back from the bar and left.

RETURN TO KOLAT TOWERS



Edana and Kittisoht arrived at Kolat Towers. From the edge of the energy field protecting the grounds, they waved to two Zhentarim guards standing at the front door of the towers. One of them jogged over and, with their pass-amulet, ushered them through.

While they waited near the door, one of the Zhents — a man they recognized from their raid on Manshoon's inner sanctum — ran up the stairs. A few minutes later he returned with Ziraj, who greeted them with a friendly (and toothy) grin. After a few pleasantries, he led them back up the stairs.

"Yes," he said, responding to a question from Edana. "We staged a raid into the upper levels of the tower yesterday. It looks like Manshoon didn't go up there very much. We mostly found a bunch of crap belonging to the Kolat brothers who originally owned the tower and a few of their old wards."

They came to a chamber that was in the middle of being refurbished into an office or operations center or something of the like for Tashlyn Yafeera. She looked up and smiled as they came in.

"It's good to see you again," Kittisoht said.

"And you!" Tashlyn said. "What brings you by?"



"We're having some trouble at Trollskull," Edana said. "We've upset a powerful figure and we have cause to believe they're going to come in the next few days to attack us. We need someone to guard the manor — and our children — when we can't be there."

Tashlyn threw herself back into her chair. "That shouldn't be a problem. We'd be happy to do you a favor. Istrid should be available and... Ziraj, you're probably free to head over with a few of your boys tonight, too, right?"

Ziraj nodded.

"Of course, diverting that kind of manpower will slow down our efforts to hunt down the rest of Manshoon's loyalists. What would help," Tashlyn said suggestively, "is if we had a powerful spellcaster to call upon. But with Davil out of action... Well, you see the problem. Now, a little birdie on the street has told me —"

"Was it a raven?" Edana asked.

Kittisoht nodded sagely. "Or an owl?"

Tashlyn blinked. "It's a metaphorical bird." She took a second to regroup her thoughts. "Let's say a voice on the wind. A voice on the wind told me that you've gotten friendly with the Blackstaff."

And I'm sure that the Blackstaff would be able to free Davil."

Edana thought it over. "I can't speak on behalf of the Blackstaff. And I'm sure that the Blackstaff herself would want payment for such a service."

"You can broker a meeting?" Tashlyn said. "That's enough." She clapped her hands and stood up. "It's settled."

They spent a few more minutes working out the details and then headed home.

THE THIRD LETTER

Back at Trollskull Manor, there was a knock on the door.

Pashar nervously answered it. It was another messenger. With another note. This one from the Gralhunds.

They have taken our son. We need your help.

Lord Orond

Pashar told the kids to stay in their room and then rushed out to Gralhund Villa. An ashen-faced servant led him upstairs to the Gralhunds' bedchamber. Entering, Pashar saw that the glass doors leading out to the balcony had been smashed in. Broken glass glittered from the plush rugs.

Lady Yalah was sobbing on the bed. Lord Orond was standing over her trying to comfort her, but seeing Pashar come in she walked over to him. "Pashar! Everything Kora and Edana said! It was true! We weren't able to protect them! The dark elves came! They took Zartan!"

"And your other son?" Pashar said quickly.

"Greth is in the next room. He's all right."

"What happened?"

Lord Orond ran his hand through his disheveled hair. "The dark elves attacked. We weren't expecting them during the day. They broke in through these doors. They children were in here playing. The guards weren't able to come quickly enough. They couldn't get here before... they... They took my boy! They took..." He sobbed.

"Did they leave anything?"

"Yes," Lady Yalah said, swallowing her own sobs. She held up a slip of black paper. Black paper with silver ink on it.

Pashar gingerly stepped over to her, took the note from her hand, and read.

We require a simple transaction. The life of your boy for the Stone.

"We just don't know what to do," Lord Orond said.

"Are there any unique objects that we could use to perhaps magically trace Zartan?" Pashar asked.

"He had a stuffed unicorn," Lord Orond said.

"Did you see which way they went?"

"They crossed the roof," Orond said. "But they had snipers and they kept us pinned down until they were gone."

"We'll do whatever we can," Pashar reassured them.

"Whatever you can do," Lady Yalah pleaded. "We'll do anything! Please! Just save my son!"

Pashar excused himself.

PLANNING BETRAYALS WITH THE BEST INTENTIONS

The others arrived back to find that Pashar was missing.

"He'll be back," Kittisothe said with confidence. "What did Dain have to say?"

Kora quickly explained.

"Can we just talk to the Zhents and ask them to leave?" Kittisothe asked.

Edana shook her head. "I don't think we'll be able to convince the Zhents to leave when there's no good reason for them to do so."

"The Harpers are in the wrong here," Theren said bluntly.

"I actually agree with you," Kora said. "They're valuing property over people because they don't want to deal with someone finding out their secrets." She paused and thought about it for a moment. "I think we should move the cache ourselves."

Kittisothe grinned. "Sure. Why not? We just do it and tell them later. Didn't they just make you a Harpshadow?"

"That's right," Edana said. "You're empowered to make these kinds of decisions."

"That's true," Kora said. "I'm supposed to use my initiative and my discretion. And using my discretion, we're going to solve this problem. They'll thank me later."

"Where do we put it?"

"I think we can move it to Thunderstaff Manor," Kora said.

That's when Pashar walked in. "I have great news! The ruse continues! They have no idea that we were responsible for taking the *Stone of Golorr*! Also, Jarlaxle has stolen one of their children."

"Oh my god," Kittisothe murmured.

"Who?" Kora said.

"The Gralhunds."

Pashar quickly filled them in on everything he'd learned from the Gralhunds.

"Didn't we convince them that *Jarlaxle* had taken the *Stone*?" Theren said.

"We convinced them that Jarlaxle took their nimblewright," Edana said. "So, from their perspective, he must not know what he has."

"Or he's trying to figure out how to open the nimblewright and access it." Theren nodded.

"And what does Jarlaxle actually know?" Kittisothe asked. "Does he know *we* have the Stone?"

"I don't think so," Kora said. "Some people might know that Vajra took it, but I think only Vajra — and Renaer — knows that she gave it to us."

But what now? They could tell Jarlaxle the truth. They could cut a deal to give him credit for helping to recover the stolen gold (if they could convince Vajra and Laeral to go along with it). They could use the Stone, empty the vaults, then pluck the Eyes back out of it and turn the blinded Stone over to him.

The truth was that they sympathized with him. He'd helped them several times despite having every reason not to. "And he's just trying to gain protection and leverage for his city," Kora said. "Just like any ruler would for his people. Even if his people are a bunch of pirates." ("Pirates are not bad," Kittisoth said. "Well..." Edana said. "What's that supposed to mean?") His motivations seemed honorable.

"But he took a child," Edana said. "He crossed a line."

"Either way we need to do something right now," Pashar said. "The child is already in danger."

"We just need to reassure him," Kittisoth said. "We just need enough time to get the third Eye from Xanathar and then access Vault. After that, we'll have all the leverage. This whole thing can be done by tomorrow morning."

"All right," Kora said, "then we need to seek a meeting with Jarlaxle at the Seven Masks Theater. We'll reassure him that we're all working for the same ends, and that we just need a little more time to 'find him what he needs.'"

"Perfect," Theren said. "Even if he later finds out everything we've been up to, we'll still be able to honestly say that we didn't lie to him. I think he'll respect that."

RETURN TO THE SEVEN MASKS THEATER

They didn't have a lot of time to do everything they suddenly needed to take care of before infiltrating Xanathar's that night, so they grabbed a carriage and rode to the Seven Masks Theater.

Arriving at the theater, they found it under guard. Suspicious looking thugs were watching the front door from across the street, and a couple more were loitering around the side entrance. The thugs looked human, but... They shrugged and headed down the alley, passing by posters still advertising performances of *Sapphiria's Booty* and identifying themselves to the thugs. "We're here to meet with Rongquan. Is he in?"

The thugs knocked on the side entrance. A moment later Rongquan cracked open the door and peeked out. He broke into a big grin. "Big five!"

The Trollskulls, recognizing the anti-doppelganger code they had set up with him, answered with smiles of their own as they were ushered into his office.

"How can I help you?" Rongquan asked. "Can I get you a drink?"

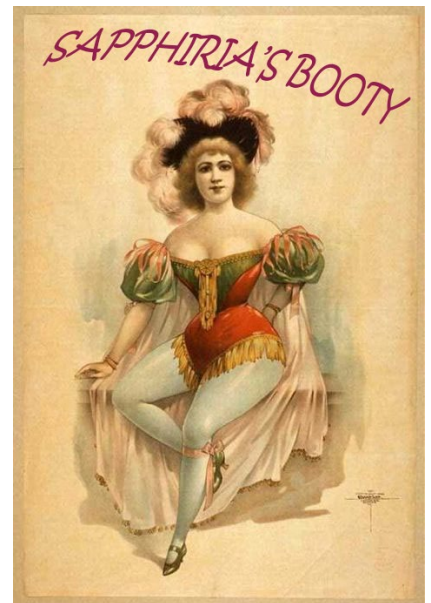
"That's all right," Kittisoth demurred. "What's with all the guys outside?"

Rongquan, having grabbed a drink of his own, flirtatiously laid his hand over Kittisoth's own. Kittisoth resisted the urge to roll her eyes out of her head... mostly. "To tell you the truth... it's a cover story!"

"Really?!" Kittisoth said with faux adulation and naivete. "What do you mean?"

"I'm not really sure," Rongquan said. "Some very secretive business with the investors. I'm not even allowed to leave my office!"

"Could we speak with the investors?" Kittisoth said, batting her eyes. (The others barely concealed their laughter.)



"Well... I suppose!" Rongquan knocked on the inner door of his office and spoke with some people on the other side. A few minutes later another knock came, Rongquan excused himself, and a dark elf entered. They were surprised to see it wasn't Jarlaxle.

"Is Mr. J here?" Theren asked.

"No," the dark elf said. "No he's not." He flopped down into a chair and kicked his boots up onto Rongquan's desk. "Elves," he muttered. "It's always elves..."

Theren frowned. "You are an elf."

"Don't insult me," the dark elf said.

"We need to speak with him," Edana said.

"He has plans this evening," the dark elf said. "But you could leave a message for him."

"Where are his plans taking him this evening?"

"If I told you that, I don't think 'Mr. J' would be very happy with me."

"Well, Mister... What was your name?" Pashar asked.

"Soluun."

"Well, Mister Soluun, give Fel'Rekt our best, and when you hear back from Mr. J, if you could be so kind as to—"

"If you have a message, I'll take it," Soluun said bluntly. "And then get out."

Kittisoth fumed. "Excuse me? Do you have better things to do? Because—"

Edana restrained her. "Just let him know that we have a concern. About a neighborhood matter."

"All right," Soluun said. "I'll pass it along."

"We don't have time for this," Kora said. "We're here about the kid."

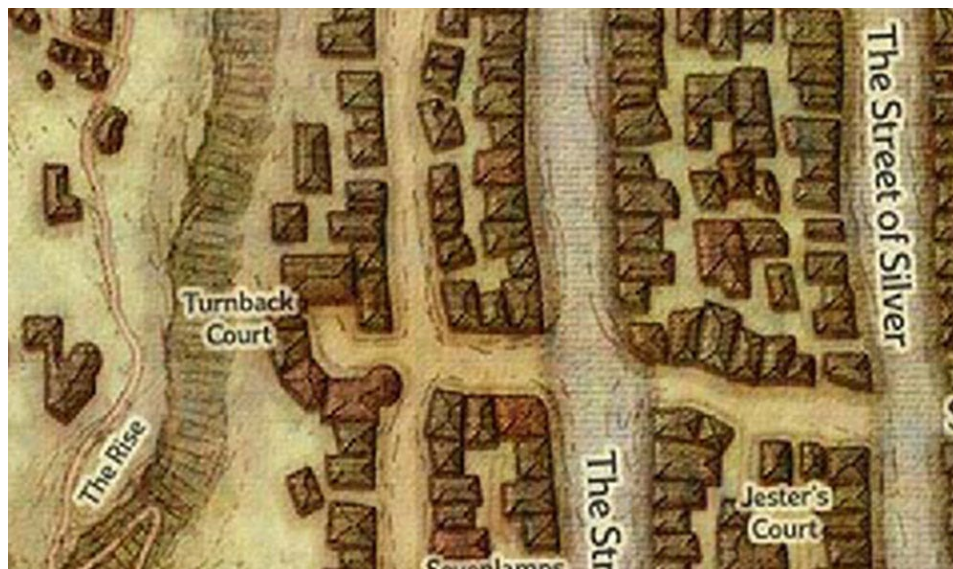
"I'm sure I don't know what you mean."

"I'm sure you don't," Edana said. "And I'm sure that if any harm comes to that kid, it will not be in Mr. J's best interests."

"I don't know who this kid is," Soluun said. "But I'm sure he's somewhere safe." He gave a little smile... and Edana was certain that he kid was here, in the theater somewhere.

But there didn't seem to be anything they could do about it. They'd played their little dance, but now the music was coming to an end. They stalked out of the office and back to their carriage.

THE HARPER CACHE



It wasn't hard to identify the warehouse Dain had been talking about. It was, in fact, backed directly against Yellowspire Tower. Approaching it from the court north of Turnback Court, they found that its windows were boarded up and there was a big padlock on the front door that Edana made quick work of.

The interior of the warehouse was one big space, with various stacks of crates and boxes here and there. Everything had a thick layer of dust on it. The place was clearly ill-used.

"Everyone take your Harper pins off," Kora said. She slipped their pins into a *bag of holding*, removing them from this plane of existence, and then cast *locate object* and zeroed in on a Harper pin underneath a nearby crate.

With a shrug, Kittisoht lifted the crate out of the way, revealing a trap door with a heavy iron pull ring. Hauling the trap door open revealed stairs down to a small basement room. Kora redistributed their Harper pins as they went down the stairs.

At the bottom, they found an empty room. It only took Edana a few moments, however, to find an illusory patch of the wall concealing a small indentation. Following a hunch, she pressed her Harper pin into the indentation: The wall slid back silently, revealing the supply cache. It was packed with useful stuff. There was a rack of swords, shelves filled with iron rations, a small box of Harper pins, several chains shirts, a number of potions, and fourteen bags, each containing a hundred gold dragons.

They rapidly emptied all of it into a *bag of holding* and reversed their tracks, replacing the crate and the padlock on the front door as they left.

Now they were out of time. They needed to head to the fights.

THE XANATHAR RAID

It was back to the beginning. They returned to the warehouse where Floon and Renaer had been held by the Zhentarim and slipped through the same sewer grate they had dropped through so many weeks (and what seemed like a lifetime) ago.

The Xanatharians had apparently destroyed the chalk marks which had guided them originally, but Theren remembered the path they had taken through the sewers and led them back to the hideout. As he drew near, he motioned the others to silence and slid up towards the intersection.

He knew there were four arrow slits looking out over this intersection from the last time they'd been here. Observing them carefully now, he ascertained that there were two goblins behind each. He waved Edana up and she cast a spell to put them to sleep.

They hugged the wall of the sewer (metaphorically speaking) and came up to the lair's secret door. Theren slipped through it first. As he approached the landing leading down into the chamber with the teleportation totem, however, he heard the distinctive buzz-humming of stirge wings ahead.

Peeking around the corner, he saw a goblin leaning up against the teleportation totem with a pair of stirges buzzing around his head. The goblin absentmindedly reached up and patted one of the stirges affectionately on the head.

Stepping out into landing, Theren put an arrow through the goblin's skull, sending a spray of blood across the stone floor. The stirges immediately swooped down into the pool and began slurping up the blood, but two more arrows left them dead in the midst of their "feast."

Edana slid across the landing and through another door into the guard chamber where the other goblins were still snoring. She efficiently slit their throats and then returned to the others, who had gathered around the totem. They clasped each others' arms and Edana slid the teleportal key into the totem. She twisted the key and...

...they were elsewhere.

They had appeared standing in the middle of a large, fifty-foot long chamber with vaulted ceilings. They were standing between four large stone pillars that ran from the floor to the ceiling. The key was inside a depression in one of the pillars, one of several identical depressions which ran around the circumference of that pillar and the others.

There were several halls and a stairway leading out of the chamber. At the far end of the hall directly in front of them they could see two burly men wearing studded leather armor, thankfully facing away from them and looking out into a crowded hallway. The sounds of a party washed over them — people talking, glassware clinking, merry laughter.

Edana and Theren quickly shoved the others behind one of the pillars, where the guards couldn't see them. Edana peeked out. They hadn't been noticed.

Kora took the moment to cast *locate object*, searching the last of the Eyes. She quickly had a vector: It was on the same level they were, roughly in the direction of the guards ("Of course," Kittisoht said), but somewhat off to the left.

"Which way do we go?"

They'd prefer not to have to try to sneak past the guards. The staircase, even though it led down, was roughly in the right direction. "There might a way down and around," Edana suggested. "So that we could come up behind or even right on top of the Eye."

The others agreed and they slipped over to and down the stairs, which curved down to a T-intersection. Edana peeked around the corner: Thirty feet to her left was a door. Fifty feet to her right was another T-intersection. It was a maze down here. And, worse yet, between her and the other T-intersection, hanging down from the ceiling, was a spectral eyestalk.

"I don't like that," she muttered and headed back to the others.

Neither Kora nor Pashar had any idea what the ghostly eyestalk might be. "If it's magic, I could dispel it," Kora suggested. "But that might just alert Xanathar that we're down here."

"What about an illusion?" Theren suggested. "Make it look like the hallway is empty?"

Edana agreed and raised the illusion. Cloaked by the vision of the "empty" hallway, she slipped over to the door at the end of the hall. From the far side of the door she could hear metal clashing against metal... and the smell of something cooking. She came back to the others. "Do you think we can slip through the kitchens?"

"This hall isn't going the right way," Theren said. "We've gotten twisted around coming down the stairs. I think we should go back up to the main level?"

The others agreed and headed back up the stairs, re-entering the teleportation chamber.

They spread out to check the other hallways, to see if they could figure out a better way of circling around the guards. Unfortunately, the other hallways all went in basically *exactly* the wrong direction. As they considered their options, however, the sounds of several people shouting came from the direction of the party. Theren darted over to one of the pillars and glanced out. The two guards had turned towards the raised voices... and they were moving away!

"Let's do it!" Kittisoth declared and stepped forward. But Theren grabbed her and yanked her back behind the pillar. Just moments after the guards vacated their post, three figures — looking back over their shoulders towards the party — had rounded the corner into the hall and were heading their way.

The figures headed towards the stairs. Theren slid to the other side of the pillar and tracked them. As they reached the top of the stairs, a beam of light caught them and he could see their faces plainly: They were drow.

"Jarlaxle's men," Kittisoth murmured.

The drow disappeared down the stairs. The Trollskulls darted out, down the hallway the drow had just left, and into the party.

The party filled a grand promenade nearly thirty feet across that curved out of sight to both the right and left. Down the middle of the hall were pillars carved with eyes which seemed to track those who passed nearby. At the moment, those eyes were darting back and forth, as the entire hall was filled with an eclectic, cosmopolitan crowd of ritzy elites rubbing shoulders with scarred gangsters while servants bearing trays of food and drink passed between them.

Off to their left they could still hear the raised voices and confusion of whatever altercation had distracted the guards. Off to their right, they could see other hallways with guards posted on them. Directly ahead, however, a ten-foot-wide circular door led to a smaller passage. The party spilled down this hall and into a larger chamber beyond: That was more or less the direction Kora was detecting the Eye from.

They slid through the crowd. No one seemed to give them a second glance as they passed through the stone door and came to the top of a short flight of stairs led down to the floor of a forty-foot-high dome that was at least eighty feet across. The floor was tiled in black marble, inset with in gold with the circle-and-eyestalk sigil of Xanathar. Jutting from the ceiling was bell-shaped protuberance. On the far side of the dome, directly across from them, an identical set of stairs led up to another open, circular door, this one with two guards flanking it. Off to their left, directly in line with Kora's vector to the Eye, was another circular door — this one shut, but also with two guards. Small clusters of people were happily chatting here and there throughout the dome.

They walked across the room. Kora pulled out the *rod of rulership* they had taken from Victorio Cassalanter when they arrested him and discreetly waved it in the direction of the guards. "Would you be so kind as to let me and my friends in?"

The guards came to sharp attention. "Yes, sir!"

They pushed open the stone slab of the door and the Trollskulls strode through it. As they went, Kittisoth glanced nervously over her shoulder to see if anyone was paying undue attention to the exchange. No one was. But at just that moment Jarlaxle walked into the dome, accompanied by two men.

Kittisoth cursed and darted in after the others. It didn't look like Jarlaxle had noticed them, though. Instead, he seemed to be focusing his attention on the two guards on the *other* side of the room, albeit while attempting to disguise his interest.

The Trollskulls found themselves in Xanathar's sanctum. The room was magically lit with a bluish light. Luminous violet particles drifted through the air like mist. A twenty-foot-wide fishbowl dominated the center of the room. Filled with water it also contained a small coral reef, a miniature shipwreck, and a sunken treasure chest. On a small table next to this huge fishbowl they saw a smaller fishbowl, this one containing a single goldfish: Sylgar. On one wall of the room hung a huge mirror with the word XOBLOB carved into its silver frame. In a small chamber beyond an arch in the other wall of the room they could see a huge device of twisted crystal.



"Where is it?" Edana asked.

"There," Kora said, pointing at the large fishbowl. "In the goddamn treasure chest."

Kittisoth had fetched up just inside the door and was watching the dome outside. Several Xanatharian guards came rushing out of the door on the far side of the dome — the one Jarlaxle was still keeping one eye constantly fixed on. These guards spoke with a quick but quiet urgency to the two guards stationed there, and then all of the guards there rushed back through the door. No one else in the room seemed to

take any note of this, but Jarlaxle, of course, immediately put his drink down and, with his men, beelined to and through the door.

Kittisoth stepped back from the door. "I'm not sure where Jarlaxle is going, but—"

Pashar suddenly dropped to his knees and began babbling incoherently in the Tongue of the Beholders... or at least what he *thought* was the Tongue of Beholders. It was really just nonsense.

"Dammit," Edana cursed. "We need to get out of there. Maybe I could use mage hand to try to clear the treasure chest out? It'll take me forever to sift through it, but I need to see the Eye before I can actually grab it telekinetically, though."

"I'll go in," Kittisoth said. "I'll just climb up on this table and try to— Wait. I can fly. Devil's breath, I am so stressed out!" She leapt and flew and dived down to the chest.

Kora, meanwhile, used a quick spell to purge whatever poison had gripped Pashar's mind.

"I've got it!" Kittisoth declared, splashing out of the top of the fishbowl.

Edana snatched it and thrust it into her *bag of holding*, removing it from the Material Plane.

"Go! Now!"

They walked out of the room. "Close the door, please," Kora said to the guards. "And kindly escort us to the teleportation pillars?"

"Yes, sir!"

The guards stepped away from the door and took them across the dome, through the door, and into the promenade. The disturbance they had heard earlier had apparently come to an end and they could see that the guards had returned to their posts. But it didn't matter: Kora's guards escorted them right through the checkpoint and into the pillar room.

Behind them they heard a gruff voice call out: "Someone has broken into the master's sanctum! Seal the lair! Find them immediately!"

But they were at the pillar. Edana thrust the teleportation key into the pillar.

They were out.

THE THREE EYES

They would have cheered, but as they reappeared in the sewer hideout, they found four goblins kneeling over the corpse of their dead friend. Reacting instinctively, the Trollskulls lashed out with their swords and cut them down before the goblins even realized they were among them. Then they rushed out through the secret door, back through the sewers, and emerged into the clean, exhilarating air of Waterdeep.

They'd done it!

Kora sent a magical message to the Blackstaff: "We have all of the Eyes and the Stone of Golorr. We believe that the Enigma is located beneath Brandath Crypts. Going there now."

A moment later, Vajra sent a reply: "Good luck!"

They jumped in a carriage and headed across Waterdeep, racing the sunset to the City of the Dead. Passing through the gates before they were closed for the night, they made their way quickly to the Brandath Crypts, through Lady Alethea's tomb, into the secret crypts, and down the long, ancient passage to the vault doors.

Standing there, atop the bronze sunburst and facing the dwarven-carved doors of adamantium, Edana drew out the blinded Stone of Golorr and placed it in the palm of her left hand. Taking a deep breath, she pushed the first of the Eyes into the Stone.

A warmth spread through the palm of her hand and she heard a voice murmur in the back of her mind: "Oh... I have returned."

She took the second Eye and pushed it into its socket.

"You have the Eyes! Unblind me, mortal!"

The voice seemed stronger now.

"Will you give me the knowledge I seek?" Edana said aloud.

"Yes," replied the voice. "That is my purpose."

"Wait... what?" Pashar said. Instinctively, he reached out and touched Edana's shoulder. The other's, following his example, also reflexively reached out; not certain whether they were warding their friend, seeking to stop her, or volunteering to ride with her into whatever danger she might face. Only knowing that they needed to be *together* in this moment.

Edana pushed the third Eye in.

THE STONE OF GOLORR

Blackness.

They were in a void.

Edana still had the Stone in the palm of her hand. They were still all linked in a network of outstretched hands. But all around them was utter nothingness.

Then, abruptly, there was a bloom of light.

Not an explosion. More like the opposite of an implosion. A rapid, organic expansion or unfolding. An entire planet that was bulging and shaping itself into existence before them. Then, as if a hand had swept across the blackness, stars appeared in a vast river that filled the sky. Soft starlight fell across the dark mass of the planet and waters gushed forth, covering its surface in cascading torrents of incomprehensible scale.

And then something went... *wrong*. The planet seemed to schism, as if their vision were double. Then it *ripped*. The sound of that washed over them in a horrendous wave. They were seeing impossibilities as the two worlds separated and began phasing back and forth in an impossible superposition.

In the midst of this chaos, there was a bolt of white light; or perhaps something vast and crystalline lancing in from out of the darkness. It plunged into the very heart of the two schisming worlds.

In her head, Edana heard a voice: "Thus I came."

The planets ripped apart.

... and they found themselves back in the vault, standing atop the sunburst.

The others stumbled back half a step, but Edana could still feel these tendrils of alien thought reaching up along the back of her spine. The hairs on the back of her neck stood on end. Her sensorium was... not *overwhelmed*, exactly, but shocked by a wash of sensations she had never experienced before: Not sight. Not taste. Not hearing or smell or touch. Impossible, alien sensations. There were etheric harmonies that she could see/feel/smell/taste passing through her. She was sensate to psychic tendrils that linked the world in endless enigmas.

She was attuning to an alien thought pattern that was emanating from the Stone of Golorr. The Stone was trying to find an interface between the way *it* thought and the way *she* thought. After an endless moment it began settling down. The mirrored thoughts still sizzled and warped in a fizzing cascade on the edges of brain, but she ultimately understood *what the Stone was*.

The Stone was in a weakened state from having been blinded by Lord Dagult, but it would grow in strength over time. Edana would be able to call upon that strength to pull out the secrets (so many secrets!) that had been encoded into the Stone. Knowing what secret to request of the Stone would be difficult – since these secrets had, as she knew from Manshoon’s research, literally been stripped out of reality – but in the absence of a specific conception, the Stone would nevertheless provide some random secret, chosen from its depths according to the whims of its alien logic.

“Gods...” Edana murmured.

When she’d had a moment to collect herself, she explained to the others what she now knew at a primal, even instinctual level.

“Can we just ask what Dagult did?” Theren asked.

“We know what he did,” Kora said. “What we need to know is how to get through this door.”

“Do we think it’s a password?”

Edana held forth the Stone. “Tell me how to retrieve the treasure of Lord Dagult Neverember.”

She felt its thoughts percolating and intermixing with her own. She reached out across the strange interface that the Stone had created between them. It took a long time for their thoughts to align – it was like the Stone was trying to pick her while she was trying to pick it – but they came together like two bodies orbiting into a collision, oscillating faster and faster until a tangle of images and words began bubbling up.

Where laid his wife to rest ‘midst bones of son’s blood sealed, there where Anri laid himself to rest, lies that which Open Lord concealed.

Twisted underground tunnels lit by strange lights. An endless field of corpses. Halls of stone. A golden dragon, aging so rapidly that scales shed from its skin; one of those scaled held in perfect focus as it falls. The sound of a silver hammer striking stone. A beam of sunlight in a darkened room. A chisel carving Dathek characters which transform themselves into two words: BRANDATH CRYPTS.

As Edana related what she had been shown, Theren recalled the enigmatic phrase Pashar had found in his research. “In beam of sun, strike dragon’s scale with mithril true upon the anvil sun.”

“We’re on the sun,” Theren said.

Kora nodded. "So we need to bring a dragon scale and a mithril hammer here?"

"There was something else," Edana said. "A beam of sunlight."

"I can do that," Kora said. "With a *daylight* spell."

"We know a dragon," Kittisoht pointed out, thinking of Zellifarn.

"We can do this," Kora said. "But we can't do it right now. So we should leave now. Get out of the graveyard before they lock it for the night."

Kittisoht nodded. "Let's get home."

CRISIS AT THE HOMEFRONT

As they returned to Trollskull, they could see that the tavern was rollicking. It was Goldennight and, as they passed by the windows, they could see the patrons inside were pasted with gold dust and encrusted with jewels streaming down their cheeks and arms. By the bar, Rishaal and Lif were looking in a book and laughing together while Lif served drinks. Fala Lefaliir, with her hair coiffed into an elaborate curly-cue topped with the miniature figure of a dragon with its wings spread, had arranged a huge assortment of teas in front of her and was sampling them in turn.

Outside Trollskull, they could see the Zhentarim, a silent perimeter. Ziraj was standing in the alley, watching the rear of the building. They found Yagra and two other zhents at the bottom of their stairs.

"It's good to see you, Yagra," Edana smiled.

"I heard you had cause to worry," Yagra said. "

"Thank you," Edana said. "Any problems?"

Yagra shook her head. "All quiet. But we'll keep a watch through the night. We've got another shift coming to relieve us later."

"Come in for a drink when you're done!" Kittisoht said.

They headed up the stairs and through their front door, breathing a sigh of relief to finally be home. From the next room over, they could see the reassuring maroon glow of the *tiny hut* Pashar had created for the kids.

And sitting on the couch was Jarlaxle.

"Good evening." The dark elf smiled.

"Son of a bitch," Kora muttered.

"So you take children?" Edana said, her voice dripping with venom.

"Not plural," Jarlaxle reassured her. "And only when necessary. Honestly, the child is probably safer with me than with his parents. Please! Sit!"

Some of them sat. Others refused.

Jarlaxle nodded. "So it would seem you're acting as agents for the Gralhunds. I seem to remember suggesting that you'd be better off not getting involved with them."

"What are you looking for?" Kora asked, cutting to the chase.

"The Stone of Golorr," Jarlaxle said frankly.

"Why?"

"My understanding is that the Stone contains certain secrets that Lord Dagult wished to keep from the city. I want to see those secrets rightfully restored to Waterdeep."

"To what end?" Theren asked.

"I've made no secret of my agenda. I want to see Luskan risen to its proper place in the Lords' Alliance. It will be good for Luskan. It will be good for the entire Sword Coast to have that kind of unity in the face of a dark and turbulent sea." Their faces were stony. Jarlaxle smiled again. "Now, I believe that the Gralhunds have the Stone, based on the information you so kindly gave me when we met under other guises, and I have what they want. It should be an easy arrangement to make. And as you're acting as their agents, I'm sure you reached out to me to make those arrangements."

"We heard you were busy tonight," Edana said.

Jarlaxle's smile faltered... just a fraction, but it was there. "Those plans were, unfortunately, not as successful as I might have hoped. I'm certain we'll have better luck here."

"So you want the Stone, and in exchange you'll give us the child," Kora said.

"Yes."

"There's a problem," Theren said. "They don't have the Stone."

Jarlaxle laughed. "And yet they did! What do they say happened to it?"

"You could have just tried asking them," Kittisoth snapped, anger at the stolen child roiling her gut.

"Why didn't you just approach them and ask?"

"I did approach them," Jarlaxle said. "From a position of strength. Have we not opened negotiations?"

"You could have talked to them first! Before stealing their child!"

"My experience," Jarlaxle said, "and I think you'll agree with me from your own experience, that if you don't warn the people whose houses you're breaking into *and then sinking*, that you're more likely to meet with success.

"Well, I have no idea what you're talking about," Kittisoth said, arching an eyebrow.

Edana, meanwhile, had gone over to the *tiny hut* and poked her head inside to check on the orphans. Nat and Squiddly were inside. "Where's Jenks?"

"He headed over to bakery for his apprenticeship!"

"Everything all right?" Pashar asked as she came back into the room.

"Yes," Edana said. "The kids are fine. Jenks is over at the bakery."

But Theren's eyes grew wide. They'd made a mistake. He dashed out the door.

"Here's what we're going to do," Jarlaxle said, standing up. "The Gralhunds have told you that they don't have the Stone. This is an obvious ploy. Tell them that this should be a simple arrangement. Bring

the Stone to the theater tomorrow. The boy will go home. Waterdeep will be given what is its right. Everyone will be satisfied."

"And what if they really don't have the Stone?" Pashar asked. "Or if they've secured it somewhere that it will take a great deal of time to retrieve it from?"

"Then send me word and I'll keep their child safe," Jarlaxle said. "It's probably for the best. As Kittisoth said, they don't seem to keep their own home very well protected." He opened the door and stepped out. From outside they heard Yagra yell, "What in the Nine Hells?!"

BLOOD AT THE BAKERY

Theren, meanwhile, had run around the tavern and into Trollskull Alley. Racing over to Amara's bakery, he threw open the door.

Amara was laying in a pool of blood in the center of the floor. She had been stabbed several times. She was dead.

"Jenks?!" Theren screamed.

There was no answer.

Acting on instinct, Theren grabbed Amara's body and began hauling it across the alley back to Trollskull Manor. He managed to slip past the Goldennight revelers without raising an alarm. As he reached the base of their stairs, Yagra gasped. "What happened? Is everything all right?"

"No," Theren said coldly. "It isn't."

He went up the stairs and into the sitting room. The others gasped as he threw Amara's body down. Blood stained one side of his clothes.

Pashar rushed to Amara's side and cast a simple rite that would preserve her body for later revival. As he worked the rite, he found a note pinned inside her clothes and passed it to Edana. She read it out loud.

Trollskull Manor,

You have sentenced my children to a fate worse than death. I am going to do the same to yours, one by one.

Ammalia

No one spoke for a long moment.

Then there were a dozen plans swirling: Edana asked Yagra to come in and help clean up the mess. Others were trying to figure out where Amara's body could be moved so it wouldn't alarm the kids when they came out. "What do we tell them?" Kora asked. Was there some place they could be moved where they would be safer? Kittisoth headed for the balcony, ready to fly to straight to Renear and demand that he keep them in his secret manse.

Kora cut through the chaos by sending a telepathic message to Vajra: "Ammalia Cassalanter murdered neighbor. Kidnapped our child. Threatening to kill. We are responding in force shortly. Please come to Trollskull. This must end."

Coming now.

"She's coming," Kora said.

"I'm going to tell the children," Edana said. "They have to know what's going on."

Before Edana could even leave the room, however, Vajra and Renaer appeared in the middle of it. Renaer rushed over to Kittisoth to embrace her and-

"Don't touch me," Kittisoth said. Her eyes boiled with rage.

"It's not you," Kora said.

"I understand," Renaer said, taking a step back.

Kittisoth turned to Vajra. "What are you going to do? You promised us that you would clean this up."

"I understand that you're upset," Vajra said. "Who is dead?"

Edana peeled back the sheet she had placed over Amara. "A baker who worked on the far side of the alley. Our boy, Jenks, was apprenticed to her."

"I'm very sorry," Vajra said. "You should know that Renaer and I have been working very hard. Over the past two days we'd gathered the evidence to take proper legal action. We raided the Cassalanter villa this afternoon to arrest Ammalia, but she had vanished. We don't know where she is. We've impounded the mansion and were investigating both all of its contents and the temple beneath it."

"What about other locations?" Pashar asked.

"There's only one I can think of," Renaer said. "An old windmill on Coachlamp Lane. Although it belongs to someone named Seffia Naelryke, it was originally paid for by the Cassalanter. It's a thin lead, but..."

"It's good enough," Kora said.

Things moved quickly now, but with purpose: Edana went to the children. There were tears and anger and pain, but she talked them through it. Theren, meanwhile, went out to speak with the Zhentarim: they pulled the big guns, with Ziraj and Yagra coming inside to keep a close guard on the *tiny hut* while they were gone. Vajra told Yagra that she would have people coming to collect Amara for resurrection shortly.

Then they went down the front stairs. With a wave of her hand, Vajra summoned spectral steeds pulling a carriage. "Mount," she said, and then lifted off into the sky, flying above them as they tore through the streets of Waterdeep to the Southern Ward. As they drew near Coachlamp Lane, Vajra swooped down to speak with them through the window of the coach.

"I'm detecting strong wards," she said. "Abjurations designed to warn against the approach of strong magic. Lady Ammalia knows I'm the one who's been pursuing the investigation her. I'll need to hold back, but I'll come quickly when needed."

"Is everything arranged for her arrest either alive or dead?" Pashar asked.

"Do what you need to do," Vajra said. "We'll clean it up later." She swooped back up into the sky.

They rode on. The windmill was easy to spot — a round tower two storeys tall, with some sort of blocky later addition thrust out awkwardly to one side.

They moved quickly but carefully. Edana slipped through the shadows, efficiently checking the perimeter of the building. There was a dark-haired woman in an upper window, looking out over the street, but no sign of Ammalia herself. Edana chose one of the entrances on the opposite side of the building, a door leading into the annex.

There were bedrooms back there. They checked them one by one until they found an occupied bed: Hope surged for a moment that it might be Jenks, but it was a man with a beard and short, dirty-blond hair. Theren and Edana bracketed the bed to either side, and Kittisoth's demonic shadow, cast from where she filled the door, fell across the man as they rudely awoke him and thrust the point of poniard against his throat.

"Scream and you die," Edana said. "Is Ammalia here?"

The man nodded. His eyes wide with fear.

"Does she have the boy?"

He nodded again.

"Is he alive?" Theren asked and then, after another nod, "Where?"

"Upstairs," the man whispered hoarsely.

"Where is *she*?" Edana asked.

"Asmodeus will have your souls," the man said, still in a hoarse whisper.

Edana drove the poniard up into his skull. Blood gushed out across the white sheets. She stood up, dragging a blanket up with her to wipe her blade.

Edana, coming out of the room, put a hand on Pashar's shoulder. "I'm sorry."

"No," Kittisoth said. "No apologies. She took our *son*. She's planning to *sacrifice* him. No more mercy." She turned to Renaer. "She's *dead*. You understand?"

Renaer nodded. "Yes she is."

They went down the hallway, leaving the annex and entering the first floor of the windmill. Coming to the first door, Edana listened.

Creak. Creak. Creak.

A rocking chair.

Creak. Creak. Creak.

Edana signaled to Pashar and knocked an arrow. Theren came to kneel beside her, also knocking an arrow. She eased the door open. Ammalia Cassalanter was in the rocking chair, reading by the light of a fire.

Creak. Creak. Cre-

Pashar dropped a *silence* spell over the room. Edana shot.

Ammalia was already rising from the chair, raising her hand as if to cast, only for her eyes to grow wide as she realized she had no voice. Edana's shot grazed her, but then Theren rapidly shot multiple arrows that struck her in the shoulder and then center mass. Edana shot again, her arrow joining the other blooming in Ammalia's chest.

Kittisoth pulsed her wings, raw rage made manifest as she flew through the door above Edana and Theren's heads. Electricity sparked from her eyes and raced down her arms, crackling across the head of her axe as she fell upon Lady Cassalanter. Blood sprayed across the wall, dancing in the flickering firelight. Ammalia reached up one plaintive hand to ward off the blow, but then Theren was there, having cast his bow aside, and his sword swept out and chopped off her hand, sending it spinning across the floor.

Lightning leapt from Kittisoth, burning silent, forked trails in the rug as it scorched Ammalia. Lady Cassalanter screamed silently, her mouth gaped in a rictus of terror and pain, and collapsed back in a hacked and ruined heap into her chair.

Pashar was horrified. They'd unleashed death before, but not like this. Not in visceral rage, nor so clearly in violation of the Code Legal. "I'm still sorry, Pashar," Edana said. "But this was necessary."

Revenge was done, but the work was not complete. They raced up the nearby stairs and found three doors. Behind one of them Edana was fairly certain they would find the silent watcher she had seen from outside. Avoiding that one, they quickly checked the others. The first room contained ritual paraphernalia arranged around a pentagram of blood upon the floor. Rage crackled behind Kittisoth's eyes as a sick dread bubbled in her stomach, but behind the next door they found — in a crumpled pile on the ground, bound and gagged — they found Jenks.

Breathing.

He was alive.

Theren kicked open the other door and Edana used a *sleep* spell to dispatch the woman behind it. Kittisoth rushed to Jenks' side and began undoing the bonds. He jerked awake in terror.

Now Edana was there, too. "It's okay. It's okay. It's okay."

Tears filled Jenks' eyes. He sobbed. And then again. Uncontrollably. "Mommy!"

Kittisoth wrapped her wings around him.

And slowly, far too slowly, the sobbing eased.

And, at long last, stopped.

AFTERMATH

A little while later, Pashar and Kora met Vajra at the front door. They briefly explained the situation.

"Is there anything else that needs to be done here?"

Pashar shook his head. "Just dead cultists. Although the woman is still alive if you need to question her."

"What about the Cassalanter children?"

"We didn't find them," Kora said. "But they're in danger. We need to find them quickly. Before the Festival of Leiruin."

"You've found a solution?"

"After a fashion," Pashar said.

"We'll find them," Vajra promised. "Take Jenks home. You were never here. I'll take care of it."

As they left, Kittisoth grabbed Renaer's hand and gave it a little squeeze. She pulled him after her, and he willingly came.

While the others carefully guided Jenks out of the windmill (Kittisoth covered his eyes with one wing), Pashar lingered with Vajra a little longer to explain what needed to be done once the Cassalanter children were found. "Based off our research, if, when their birthday comes, the parents on whom the blood ritual is attuned *and* the children are dead with every trace of their original bodies destroyed, then the triggering moment of the ritual will pass. The children could then be returned to life with a *true resurrection*, and Asmodeus would have no further claim to their souls."

"That's very dark," the Blackstaff said.

"But necessary," Pashar said, glancing back at the room where they'd left Lady Cassalanter.



A BRIGHTER MORNING

On the ride back to Trollskull, it was clear that Jenks was shattered. The horrific experiences of the last few hours had broken him. When they got back to the Manor, the other kids came rushing out of the maroon dome. There were tears and hugs and endless comforting.

The next morning, Kittisoth woke up in bed with the three kids snuggled around her. One of her wings was protectively draped over the top of them.

Renaer, who had slept in the couch in the front room, was cooking breakfast as they all came staggering out of their rooms. Kittisoth joined him and showed him how to make a pirate's breakfast. The kids came out a little later, rubbing their eyes. Jenks was clearly still a little shaken by his ordeal, so Renaer made him pancakes in the shapes of various divine symbols and began quizzing him on which gods they belonged to.

After breakfast, Pashar and Edana headed over to Amara's Bakery and cleaned up the blood. Kittisoth kissed Renaer goodbye and spent the rest of the morning hanging out with the kids. Kora headed to the Market to track down a dragon scale.

"How much for a gold dragon scale?" Kora asked.

"Sixteen hundred gold pieces."

"... how much for a tin dragon scale?"

Even chromatic scales proved expensive, but they didn't have time to wait for Zellifarn to fly back from wherever he lived (even if he'd agree to). Kora paid what needed to be paid.

Leaving Pashar to finish up at Amara's, Edana headed over to Steam and Steel. Embric and Avi were quarreling about which one of them had won their drinking contest the night before.

"Were you drinking at Trollskull?" Edana asked.

"No," Embric said regretfully. "We went to a friend's party instead."

"Oh! So you both lost!" Edana grinned. Embric and Avi laughed heartily.

"What can we do for you?"

Edana wanted two things: A mithril hammer for the vault and a set of Trollskull Manor amulets for the kids: a flask didn't seem appropriate, but she wanted something they could theoretically cast *locate object* on in the future.

They could wait a few days for the amulets, but Edana agreed to give them a fistful of free drink tokens for Trollskull Manor if they finished the mithril hammer that same day. Nevertheless, with the cost of the true silver they'd completely tapped out their once substantial cash reserves.

But if everything went well, that wouldn't be a problem soon enough.

A HARPER TRIAL

As Edana opened the front door of Trollskull Manor, however, she looked down the street and saw Dain storming down the street towards her, accompanied by a pair of men in blue robes. She sighed and went down to the bottom of the stairs to wait for him.

Dain pulled up in front of her, flanked by the other two. One was an albino elf with piercing blue eyes. The other was a dark skinned human male whose eyes were just golden spheres that glowed softly. All three of them wore their Harper pins, openly displayed.

"Where is she?" Dain demanded.

"Not today," Edana said.

Dain opened his mouth to retort.

"Not. Today."

"This is Harper business," Dain said. "Move aside if you honor your oath."

"It doesn't have to be like this," Edana said. "But it can't be today."

"Are you a Harper or not?!" Dain fumed.

Edana messaged Kora. *Dain's here. He's pissed. I'm telling him to go away. He's not listening. Should I convince him?*

Inside the Manor, Kora sighed. *No. Wait for us.*

A few moments later, the others stepped outside. Dain looked up at Kora, who had been the first through the door. "Kora," he said. "I'm very disappointed."

"I thought you would be," Kora admitted.

"You disobeyed orders."

"I acted with a Harper's discretion."

"We'll see what the High Harper has to say about this," Dain concluded. "You'll come with us now. You and your friends."

"No," Kora said. "This was my decision. I'll answer for it alone."

Dain shook his head. "They're all Harpers."

"I'll come with you," Kora said. "But I can't speak for the others."

"You're making this worse for yourself."

Kora sighed. "I can't *make* people do things. That's not how the Harpers are supposed to work."

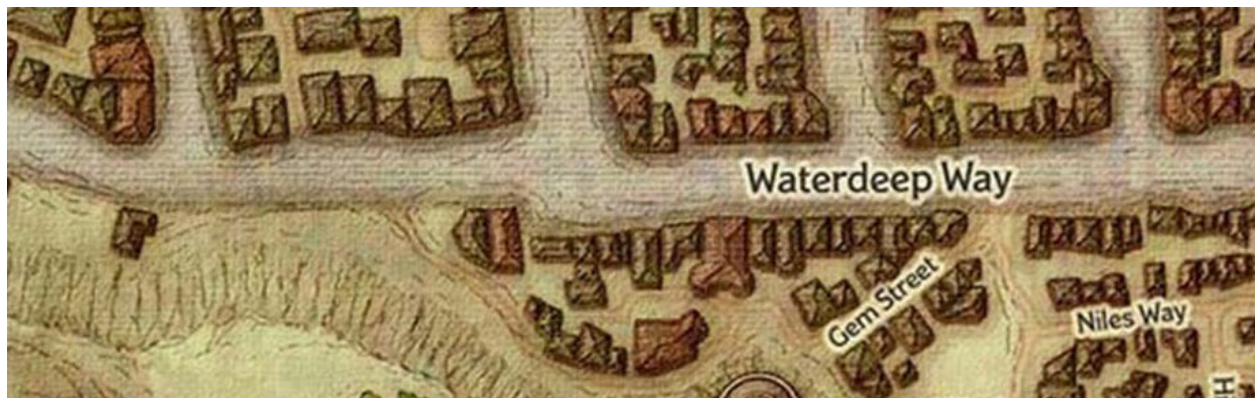
"Couldn't the High Harper come here?" Theren suggested. Kitti laughed from the top of the stairs.

Dain ground his teeth. "For the last time: will you come?"

The others nodded their agreement, but Kora shook her head. "Someone needs to say." She turned to Dain. "To protect our children." She dropped her voice to a whisper. "Please. One of them was kidnapped last night."

Dain softened. "Yes. Of course."

It didn't take them long to conclude that Kittisoth — and her temper — was the best one to leave behind with the kids, and then Dain lead them across the city and deep into the Castle Ward. On Waterdeep Way, west of Castle Waterdeep and east of Piergeron's Palace, their escorts turned abruptly and vanished into what had appeared to be nothing but a vine-covered wall a moment before. Passing through the nigh-invisible gap there, however, they found themselves climbing up the side of Mt. Waterdeep.



They climbed quite high, in fact. The griffon patrols above the city were flying even with them and the air was getting quit thin when they passed into a crevasse on the side of the mountain. There, inside a kind of cleft, they came suddenly upon a cave.

At every step along the way they had been baffled by their route. They would have never seen the gap in the wall, nor the path beyond it. There were several more turnoffs they didn't see until they'd taken them. Even the cleft had looked like nothing remarkable until they were already on top of it. It seemed as if they were in plain sight on the side of the mountain, and yet they weren't even certain they would be able to find their way back here if their lives depended on it.

As they entered the cave and worked their way into its depths, they noticed that Dain was touching various places along the wall with clear deliberation. Whatever path he was guiding them along here was warded, and there were numerous other passages they did not take (and perhaps were not designed to be taken).

At last they emerged into the heart of a massive geode. Crystals, glittering in the light, lined the dome of the cavern and had been leveled beneath their feet to form a smooth floor. On the far side of the cavern stood a statue of a man with a bald head and long beard. Edana, Kora, and Pashar recognized this as Lord Aghairon, founder of Waterdeep. The statue was gesturing outwards, as if taking in the whole room as a conclave. In one hand it grasped an actual staff – somehow cleverly worked through a grip of stone. Pashar recognized this and gasped. Leaning over to the others he whispered, “That’s the *dragonstaff of Aghairon*.” The keystone of the dragonward which kept all dragons out of Waterdeep... unless they had been touched by the staff.

They realized that, as they had been captivated by the statue and staff, a dozen people had stepped forward from the darkness rimming the chamber into the light. They wore hoods low over their faces, masking their faces in shadow and leaving them unrecognizable.

Dain stepped forward. “We have brought those who are to be judged.”

A figure floated *through* the statue of Aghairon. The translucent blue ghost of a young elven woman, with a Harper pin fastened even upon the clothes she wore in death as a tribute to the faith which held her to this world and its business.

“High Harper,” Dain intoned, “I bring before you Harpshadow Kora and her disciples, who have confessed in writing to disobeying orders and the theft of Harper property.”

The spectral Harper spoken then. “Step aside, Harpsinger, and let them answer the charges in their own voice.” She lowered her gaze to them. “We have been told that you have disobeyed the orders of a Harper given to you in good faith, and that you have betrayed the Harper trust by aiding and abetting our ancient foes the Zhents. You have furthermore stolen a cache of Harper supplies which are to be used in the struggle against all evil and injustice in the world. How answer you?”

Kora took a step forward. “First and foremost, we have stolen nothing. We have secured the cache, intending to keep it safe until it could be relocated. This we have done. Nothing has been despoiled. Nothing has been taken.”

“Where is the cache now?”

Theren spoke up. “I have it here in this *bag of holding*. I can dump it out here if you would like.”

“Unnecessary,” the High Harper said. “And where did you plan to relocate the cache?”

“The city recently bestowed the abandoned property of Thunderstaff Villa to us, beneath which there are hidden chambers which can be easily secured,” Kora said. “We intended to consult with Dain before placing the cache there, but we think it would make a good location.”

“And how do you answer the charge of being complicit in the plots of the Zhents?”

“We killed Manshoon!” Kora said indignantly. “And, yes, in this effort we allied with the Doom Raiders, who are also of the Zhentarim. In working with them, however, we have learned that they are not evil actors. They seek to shake off the malignancy of Manshoon. Are the Zhents truly the enemies of the Harpers? Or was Manshoon enemy to us both?”

Dain harrumphed from his place off to one side.

"You are young," the High Harper said. "We have often seen the Zhents mislead those who are young."

"Perhaps," Kora said. "But if we have been 'misled' in to slaying Manshoon, will this council object?"

Edana stepped forward. "Shedding blood merely because they are living in a specific building seems unnecessary. And unjust."

Theren agreed. "They have legal ownership of the tower. If we had done what we were ordered to do, we would have been in the wrong."

"And we are not mere thugs to be ordered about!" Kora declared. "We are thinking people! We are a powerful group! We have brought demon-worshipping nobles to heel and thwarted Jarlaxle! We have infiltrated Xanathar's lair! We have killed Manshoon!"

"We are no children to be summoned for scolding," Edana said.

"We are Harpers," Pashar said. "We are meant to be just and lenient! We are meant to use not only our initiative, but our judgment! And Dain has shown no judgment at all! Not only were these orders ill thought, but he had previously ignored us when we told him that one of his superiors had been enthralled by Manshoon!"

The spectral Harper seemed taken aback. "What is this?"

Dain snorted. "It's a ridiculous conspiracy theory! They accused Mirt of being a traitor, but I think the truth of it is that *they* are the traitors!"

"We told you that Mirt had been compromised and that he needed *help!*" Theren shouted.

"Help that the Blackstaff is now providing," Kora stated simply, laying a calming hand on Theren's shoulder.

"The Blackstaff?"

"Dain wouldn't do anything," Theren said. "So we went to Vajra."

"Surely *someone* here other than we are close to the Blackstaff and can verify the truth?" Kora asked.

A murmur passed around the chamber.

Edana spoke up. "The point is that you recruited Kora and promoted Kora because she is wise and kind and just. I became a Harper because of her. And if you don't trust her judgment, then I have been misled about what it means to be a Harper. She is the best of you!"

The High Harper floated back a few paces. At some unspoken signal, two of the gathered Harpers stepped forward. The rest stepped back. The broken circle looked around at each other, there were nods, and then the two who had stepped forward also stepped back, as if to form a consensus.

"I see," the High Harper said, coming forward again. "You have been found... innocent. And justified in your actions. Here is my judgment upon you: *Brightcandle* Kora, you will be taking over responsibility for the North Ward." ("Oh shit," Kora murmured.) "You will begin your work with your fellow Harpshadows. You have much work to do and we trust your judgement." She turned to Dain. "Dain, we understand your concerns. But perhaps it will be best if *Brightcandle* Kora is allowed the... how did you put it, Pashar? The... initiative to follow her own instincts, in the Harper fashion."

Kora bowed her head, uncertain of what she truly thought or felt, but certain in this: "You will not regret this."

One of the Harper lords stepped forward from the circle and lowered his hood. It was... Mattrim Three-Strings, the bard from their own tavern. He winked and led them out of the cavern and back to the wall onto Waterdeep Way. "We'll talk later," he said, and then vanished in to the crowds.



KISS AND TELL

"Mattrim Three-Strings?!" Kitti shouted. "That's amazing!"

They had just finished telling her the tale of their trial. Kora still seemed a little shellshocked. Kittisoth pushed a glass of whiskey over to her.

"For an organization founded to undermine authority..." Pashar mused.

"...they get real twitchy whenever somebody questions theirs," Edana finished his thought.

"I'm just glad they came to the right decision, otherwise—"

There was a knock on the door.

"Ah, fuck," Kittisoth said and opened the door.

Amara was standing there.

"Oh my god! Come in!" Kitti gestured with her hand, throwing her wings back to open the way.

Amara was clearly a little shaky. There were tears in her eyes. "The Blackstaff told me what you did for me. I can't thank you enough!"

"Come in! Come in!" Kitti demanded. "And we should be thanking *you*! Or apologizing! We had no idea that we were putting you in danger." She led Amara over to the couch and pushed a glass of the whiskey into her hands.

"Thank you," Amara said again. "The Blackstaff — I still can't believe that was the Blackstaff! — told me a lot of what happened. I just wanted to come by and say... I'm all right. Yes. I'm all right."

Jenks, having heard her voice, came running into the room and gave her a big hug. "Amara! Oh, Amara! I thought your were dead!"

"I was," Amara smiled. "For a little while. It's all right Jenks."

Jenks stepped back and wiped a tear from his cheek.

Amara patted him on the shoulder. "I'll understand if you don't want to come back to the bakery —"

"No!" Jenks cried. "We've got to bake the bread! We need to break the crust!"

Amara grinned. "That's right, Jenks. You've got to break the crust!"

They hugged again. A little while later, Amara said her goodbyes. Kittisoth waved goodbye as she headed down the street and then shut the door. She turned back to look at the rest of the group. Everyone sighed heavily. It had been a long day and —

There was a knock on the door.

"Gods dammit!" Kittisoth exclaimed.

She opened the door. It was Embric, delivering the mithril hammer. "I'll see you tonight for those drink tokens!" he laughed, heading back down the stairs.

Kittisoth shut the door again. "So who do we leave in charge of the kids while we head back to the City of the Dead?"

"Hasn't Renaer been hanging out all afternoon?" Edana suggested.

Renaer — who had, in fact, already been playing with their kids in their room — was more than happy to oblige. He leaned in and gave Kitti a deep kiss. The others cheered.

"Stop it!" Kittisoth glared at them. Then, with a grin, she went back in for a second helping, raising her wings to afford a little privacy.

INTO THE VAULT

They headed down the long, sloping dwarven hall and emerged back into the shadow-shrouded vault. Edana's hooded lantern swept back and forth across the immense chamber.

Kora placed the dragon scale atop the bas relief of the bronze sun and cast *daylight*. The bright light gleamed off the bronze beneath her feet and glittered in the depths of the dwarven runes — as crisp and fine as the day they'd first been crafted — on the adamantine doors.

Theren stepped forward and struck the dragon scale with the mithril hammer.

In that instant, there was a deep, sonorous tone that echoed around them. The doors slid back silently into the walls, revealing a vast chamber beyond. As they stepped up into the doorway, they looked into an even larger chamber — at least a hundred feet long, with a ceiling far above their heads — lit by a silvery, magical light.

Three bridges crossed the chamber above them. These had become worn with age. Stone had collapsed from their spans, and also crumbled from the large support pillars which ran down the center of the chamber to keep them aloft. Despite this damage, they could see that the support pillars had been carved to resemble warhammers with their square heads pressed against the floor.

Down at the far end of the chamber, they could see three tall niches, at least twenty or thirty feet high, which contained chipped frescoes. An equally massive doorway of bronze near these and off to the left appeared to lead out of the chamber.

Before crossing the threshold, Kora cast a ritual which would allow her to detect magical auras and Pashar simultaneously worked a rite which would allow him to more easily translate any inscriptions they found within. The others drunk in the ancient ambience while they waited and then, when the time came, took trepidatious steps forward.

As they approached the frescoes in the far wall, they could see the scenes they depicted more clearly. The first showed the dwarven god Dumathoin placing glowing gems into a range of mountains which appeared to be a primeval representation of the Sword Mountains. The second showed Dumathoin visiting the Illithid god Ilsensine, manifested in its form as a disembodied emerald brain, and bathing with it in the greenish psionic energy of the maze-like Caverns of Thought. And the third showed Dumathoin, Ilsensine (depicted in its form as an Illithid avatar), and Laduguer, the god of the duergar, with hands clasped in a dwarven circle of friendship.

"I don't understand," Kora said. "Why would the dwarves depict one of their own gods being in league with the illithid?"

Theren approached the gargantuan door of bronze. Pushing lightly upon it, he discovered that it pivoted easily at its mid-point, rotating into a perpendicular position allowing them to pass to either side of it. The room beyond was only small in comparison to the chamber they had just left. A broad stairway without railing ran up the far wall and then along the wall to the left to an upper level.

"That must go up to the bridges," Kora surmised.

"I could fly up?" Kittisoht suggested.

"The stairs look sturdy enough," Kora said, walking towards them.

The wall behind the stairs was covered in another fresco, this one depicting a vast dwarven army battling goblins. As Kora drew near it, she realized the whole fresco was magical. She stepped closer to analyze its enchantments, and then backpedaled: The entire fresco was enchanted to mesmerize anyone looking upon it, drawing them into its 'glorious' details.

She quickly explained the problem to the others: The fresco was directly next to the stairs. Anyone walking up it was at risk of studying the fresco for the rest of their lives.

"I'm flying up," Kittisoht said, and did so.

"Do we need to see it?" Edana asked. "Could we just close our eyes?"

Kora nodded. That would work, and she'd already resisted the effect. The others were quickly blindfolded, and Kora led them up the stairs to where Kittisoht was waiting.

The upper hall, with three archways that did, in fact, lead to the bridges, had a series of pillars running down its length that, like the larger pillars below, had been carved in the likeness of warhammers. The wall opposite the archways bore a cracked mosaic depicting a dwarf smith at a forge, crafting dwarves out of black metal and diamonds. (Kora detected no magic emanating from this mural, but did recognize the figure as Moradin, creator god of the dwarves.)

Looking out at the bridges, they could see that two of them, although damaged, still appeared to be passable, but the third was missing a section in its middle. All three bridges ended in seemingly identical adamantine doors, smaller in scale, but similar to the larger one below.

After a brief discussion, they decided that crossing the *broken* bridge actually made the most sense. "Because it makes the least sense, if that makes sense," Kora said.

"Makes sense to me!" Kittisoht said, and flew them across one by one.

Edana discovered that the door had been magically locked, but Kora was able to dispel it. The door swung open, revealing a modest chamber (only roughly the size of the Trollskull common room!). Four suits of rusted dwarven plate stood in the corners of the room, draped in cobwebs. The floor was a mosaic in a dwarven abstract style that was no longer very popular, arranged around a circular motif in the center of the floor. Carved into the far wall, in dwarven characters which Pashar (with magical aid) could read, was an inscription: *A secret never told will part Dumathoin's lips.*

Pashar pulled out his notes and read aloud one of the banal, graffitied secrets he had copied from the long hall.

Nothing happened.

"I don't think it's a secret any more because it was written on the wall," Kora said.

"All right," Pashar said. Then he took a deep breath. "I... I didn't really do something good. I stole this crystal from my master's collection and released a djinn. That's the real reason he erased my name from the Book of Fate."

The others stood in a stunned silence which allowed them to clearly hear the faint puff of air as the motif in the center of the floor began to rotate up into the room.

"I can't believe it," Kitti murmured.

The motif revealed itself to be a hollow pillar which recessed into the ceiling above, allowing access to a staircase leading down.

"This is why you follow the letter of the law so carefully now?" Edana said blithely to Pashar.

"Well, I... We have a treasure to find!" he declared.

"Uh-uh. No!" Kittisoht said, following him down the stairs. "I have more questions for you!"

The circular stairs bottomed out onto a large landing leading to another set of broad stairs. At the bottom of these they could see a glinting, glittering light, almost like sunlight reflecting off a pond at dawn. At the bottom of the stairs was a vaulted antechamber, and a twenty-foot-wide doorway opened into another vast chamber beyond.

There were four more of the titanic, hammer-headed pillars here, defining a central area within the wider chamber, and leaving a kind of walkway around its perimeter. In the space between these pillars was a pile... a mound... a *mountain of gold*. A hoard of coins eight or ten feet high, spilling down into a haphazard carpet that covered the floor.

So abruptly confronted with the treasure, they were hesitant to enter the chamber. Edana instead reached out with a *mage hand* and telekinetically pulled one of the coins to herself.

It was a Waterdhavian dragon. Bright, shiny, and new. It was definitely Neverremember's Enigma.

"Hello?" Kora called. Theren echoed her in Draconic and Deep Speech.

Kittisoth walked forward, slightly dazed. The others also took a few steps forward, as if drawn in her wake. Then, with a pulse of her wings, Kittisoth took to the air, as if the earth could not contain the enthusiasm bursting within her.

And then they heard the shifting of some titanic bulk.

The dragon uncoiled from behind his hoard of gold.

THE DRAGON



The red dragon's head curled up. One heavy foot crashed down atop the pile, unleashing a cascade of coins. Its tail began whipping back and forth.

Kittisoth screamed. Kora cursed, and then cried out, "STOP! We have a legal claim to the gold!"

"Oh no," Edana said, "I don't think dragons—"

"MY GOLD?!" The dragon's voice boomed.

"We can't cluster!" Pashar shouted. "Split up!"

Edana broke left. Theren simultaneously broke right, racing around the perimeter of the room while pestering the beast with arrows from both sides. Unfortunately, their shots simply ricocheted off its thick scales.

The dragon took to the air, beating its wings. The wind from those monstrous pinions actually blasted Kittisoth back against the wall. As she, knocked slightly senseless, slid to the floor, Pashar, who had also been knocked off his feet, scabbled across the floor and fetched up behind the thick stone of the doorframe.

He was just in time. The dragon's chest drew in air like a bellows, and then its fire spewed out. Kittisoth reacted quickly, pulsing her own wings in order to sort of half fly, half leap across the floor, scooping up

Kora in one arm as she dived behind the other side of the door. Both of them were still badly scorched as the flames washed around and past them, but they managed to avoid the worst of it.

“IT IS MY GOLD NOW!” the dragon roared. “MINE! NEVEREMBER WILL NEVER TAKE IT BACK FROM ME!”

The dragon dived to one side, looping through the pillars and circling in behind Theren, who cut between another pair of pillars and ran fleetly up the pile of gold. Theren kept up a steady volley of arrow fire the entire time and a few managed to find chinks in the dragon’s armor.

It roared again, this time in pain, and swooped up in a high arc in order to follow Theren through the pillars. Pashar, however, had been waiting for this moment: As the dragon reached the highest point of its flight, he cast a paralyzing enchantment.

The dragon froze in midflight and *plummeted* from the sky, barreling down straight towards where Theren stood. Theren leapt over the top of the pile, sliding down the far side of it with gold coins scattering around his feet. The dragon plowed into the mountain of gold behind him, sending a huge avalanche of glittering coins cascading down and around Theren as he landed at the bottom of the pile.

Kittisoth swept past him, flying down the length of the dragon and hacking left and right with her greataxe, her mighty thews punching through its scales and laying bare the muscle beneath the ghastly wounds.

In her wake, Theren spun around and lowered his bow. The flame sacs to either side of the dragon’s neck bulged, glowing with a pure, white hot rage... but it could not move while Pashar’s spell laid upon it. Not even to breathe.

Theren shot it in the eye. Drew again. Shot it through the other eye. His arrow lodged deep in the creature’s skull.

With a final, shuddering breath, it was done.

The dragon was dead.

AFTERMATH

“That is a lot of gold,” Edana said.

Theren had set to work preserving the corpse. (“Dragon steaks at Trollskull!”) Kittisoth claimed one of its scales as a memento.

Discussion fell to logistics. How were they going to get all of this gold out? And, once they got it out, what should they do with it? They’d promised Vajra that it would be returned to the city and the citizens of Waterdeep from whom it had been stolen. But now that they were actually faced with the physical reality of all that gold, it suddenly didn’t seem that simple.

“Do we let Jarlaxle take any of the credit for this?” Edana asked. “As a way of—”

“—of getting him off our back?” Kittisoth finished.

“Yes,” Edana said. “There’s the kid. And the Stone. And all of that. But to cut to the heart of it, what he wants is to be publicly recognized as having helped Waterdeep. He wants the political leverage.”

Theren nodded. “I think we can speak honestly on Jarlaxle’s behalf and say that he’s been of help to us.”

"But he took a kid," Pashar said. "A kid."

"I know," Theren said quietly.

"And this might be the best way to recover the kid," Edana pointed out. "Or, if he knows that the game is done and he gets nothing, does he care about any of this — any of us — any more?"

"No," Kitti said. "He kills everyone and then he comes for us."

"Or he might say, 'Well played,'" Theren suggested.

"I think we should give him credit," Kora said. "He's worked with us in good faith. I don't forgive him for taking the kid, but that's also why we should broker the deal and get it done. All he wants is the Lords' Alliance. He just wants a seat at the table."

"Which, in all fairness, maybe he should have," Pashar said.

"Having a neighbor that's constantly in conflict with you isn't great for business," Edana said. "As we well know."

"But is Vajra really going to be all right with this?" Theren asked.

"Does it matter?" Kittisothe snapped.

"We're talking about negotiating a seat in the Lords' Alliance," Theren said. "Is she going to be all right trading that for gold? Even if it's a lot of gold?"

"Look," Kittisothe said. "They don't have to. Just because Jarlaxle gets credit for this, they can still do whatever they want. If they don't want to accept him as members of their council, bullshit, whatever... That's on them. If we broker the deal — if we give him credit — it's not our decision to make him a Lord Whatever."

The others nodded.

"I think we're agreed," Kora said.

EPILOGUE: HONORS



They contacted Vajra and made arrangements for the gold to be brought out of Neverember's Vault. It took workers the better part of a full day to load it all up.

A day later they stood upon the grand stairs in the courtyard of Castle Waterdeep in a carefully negotiated and orchestrated ceremony. Renaer stood at Kittisoth's side — the son of Neverember returning his father's ill-gotten spoils along with the heroes of the hour who had been most responsible for its recovery. In her speech to the assembled nobles, burghers, diplomats, guild representatives, broadsheet writers, and other notables, Kora made a point of thanking "the great aid that our sister city of Luskan, by virtue of their Lord Jarlaxle, gave us in pursuit of this gold." Jarlaxle, who was standing among the crowd of nobles, tipped the broad rim of his feathered hat in silent recognition.

Laeral, of course, had known that this was coming, and her own speech was careful in thanking, "Lord Neverember and *all* those who aided you in this brave enterprise as part of Force Grey." Kora appreciated the subtle political touch of pulling an official shroud over the whole affair.

Publicly, Laeral awarded them all the Bright Sleeve — literally a sleeve of cloth-of-gold embroidered with (at their request) "The Trollskulls" in recognition of their "acts of bravery above and beyond expected conduct or paid duties."

In a private ceremony, afterwards, Laeral passed over a small coffer containing one thousand harbor moons — a tenth of the hoard they'd recovered.

EPILOGUE: J

Even before the ceremony, Jarlaxle had released the Gralhunds' son. (The Gralhunds could not express their eternal gratitude for what the Trollskulls had done.) A few days later, a note arrived on black paper and written in silver ink:

Well played. -J

P.S. Thank you.

EPILOGUE: KORA'S SEARCH



Kora stood at the entrance to the Snobeedle Orchard and Meadery in Undercliff. Dim memories danced within her. In the wake of all that had happened, she had come looking for her mother. She'd felt a need to tie off loose ends.

Taking a deep breath, she stepped off the main road and headed down the private drive which drove into the heart of the orchard. The road was shaded by a canopy of tall fruit trees and lined with the gentle swell and distinctive round doors of halfling mounds.

All Kora truly knew about her family was that, after the death of her father in an accident on the docks, her mother had given up her and all three of her siblings to various temples.

Her sister, Kaila, had been taken in by the Hospice of St. Laupsenn, a Triad Temple dedicated to the gods of Ilmater, Tyr, and Torm that had been erected by the Ilmatari knights of the Order of the Golden Cup. Kora was introduced to Vhaspar, an old man in his seventies, half blind with cataracts, to whom Kaila had been apprenticed. Sadly, he told Kora that her sister had caught the spotted plague while tending to the sick in 1488 and died.

She had more luck at the Spire of the Morning, the temple of Lathander where her other sister, Kamara, and her brother, Keryth, had been fostered. The temple was built of pink marble and, as she had arrived,

the first light of the dawn had just been striking the seven spires of copper, gold, and silver which had been designed to reflect that light brilliantly across the city.

Delsanra Iangella, the Sovereign Mother of the temple, told her that Kamara had recently gone on pilgrimage to the House of the Triad in Bryn Shandar, a Lathanderian temple far to the north near Ten Towns. "But your brother should be down in just a moment." Delsanra had gestured up towards the spires. Keryth had become one of the seven Dawn Priests, charged to stand atop the spires and call out the Songs of Dawn when the sun rose and the Songs of Night's Warding when it set.

He, too, had thought about contacting their mother a few years before. "She was still working at the Snobeedle Orchard in Undercliff,"

"I was born there!" Kora exclaimed.

"I remember!" Keryth laughed. "But to speak true, I felt... unwelcome there. It felt less like an orchard and more like a cult. I... didn't find the answers I'd hoped to. I haven't been back."

Keryth remembered more of their childhood than Kora did, and he had been able to share a few tales with her before needing to return to his duties. They'd made promises to talk again. Kora wasn't sure if that would happen, but his words had led her here.

To the orchard.

EPILOGUE: THE CASSALANTER CHILDREN

Meanwhile, the others had been summoned to Blackstaff Tower. Entering the tower they found that, rather than ascending it, all of their paths led down... and down... and down.

They came at last to a room. Vajra was waiting for them outside the door.

"I found the Cassalanter children. You need to be here for this." She opened the door and stepped in.

"No," Kittisothe murmured, shaking her head. "No... No."

But Pashar nodded firmly and followed Vajra. Theren went with him. Edana took Kitti gently and helped her inside. It was horrible, but it was their plan. It was their responsibility. Vajra was right. But she wasn't sure she could ever forgive her for it.

As Vajra said, "It's all right. It's going to be all right," she drove two blades simultaneously into the backs of the Cassalanter children's heads, neatly severing their spinal cords. With a wave of her hand, the Blackstaff opened a furnace in the wall of the chamber and levitated the children's corpses into it.

Kittisothe sobbed and fell to her knees, her wings quaking.

The bodies burned away.

EPILOGUE: KORA'S MOTHER

At the end of the private drive, Kora found a complex of larger buildings, mostly still built in halfling style. The main building, in fact, appeared to be less constructed and more grown directly out of the ground as a tangle of trees winding and twisting around each other.

After some short introductions, she was led to an elderly halfling woman dressed in green robes with silver trim. The old woman smiled at her. "Yes, yes, of course. Welcome. My name is Blossom. Blossom Snobeedle. It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance." She gave a small smile and her eyes twinkled. "I remember when you were born in the field, just over there."

"That's right," Kora said. "I was born in a field."

Blossom nodded, hearing the tone Kora couldn't quite control in her voice. "I remember Samira's heartache at giving up her children. Those were hard years after your father passed."

"I'd like to talk with her, please," Kora said.

Blossom tapped her cane. "You didn't ever properly know this. Your mother didn't want you to know. But no amount of hardship could have made her give you up. The only reason she ever gave you up was because she was following the Voice of the Wood."

"What?"

"She'd joined the Circle of Initiates," Blossom said. "All that you see here is owned by the Emerald Enclave, a powerful druidic order. Your mother had joined the order. She was still learning the druidic arts when she received a vision from the God of the Ents that she needed to give her children up for the greater good. It broke her heart. But she did what she needed to do."

"I wish I could introduce you to your mother now. But unfortunately that's not possible. Three months ago she did me a great service: My youngest son, Dasher, disappeared in Waterdeep. He'd just been running some errands, but he didn't come home. After much heartache, he was found by a man named Davil Starsong. He had been kidnapped by a gang of wererats named the Shard Shunners. They'd infected him. They'd turned my son into a monster; severed his connection from the Old Growth."

"He needed respite and time to heal. Samira offered to journey with him to the Isle of Ilichôn in the Sea of Fallen Stars, where the stronghold of our Enclave is located. They left three weeks ago."

Kora wiped a tear that was threatening to fall from her eye. "Thank you. I am very proud of her for helping... for helping your son. And you should know that the wererats who plagued your son... they've been dealt with."

"Indeed?" Blossom smiled. "Even out here we've been hearing good things about you Kora. About you and your friends."

"When she comes back, could you please tell her to come and visit?" Kora asked. "I run a small tavern with some friends. I'd love to share a meal with her."

Blossom nodded. "Of course. I'll let her know."

"It's just off Trollskull Alley," Kora said. "It's called Trollskull Manor."

EPILOGUE: THE FEASTS OF LEIRUIN

Festival season was finally coming to an end with the Feast of Leiruin. In Trollskull Alley, the celebrations they had arranged were a roaring success. Spring garlands were strung between dancing poles. Matrim Threestrings was singing while laughing children dunked for apples and chased each other through the swirling, chaotic joy of the evening.

In the midst of this merriment, the five of them came together on the porch of Trollskull Manor and headed into the tavern's common room. They were waving to various neighborhood faces that were starting to become familiar to them when Floon came running up. "Edana!" He was holding an orange tabby cat. "My friend Riklyn Harvester has been transformed into this cat by an irate sorcerer who was upset that he had picked up a girl at the Old Skull Tavern. Now, I've got Riklyn right here and —"

"Meow!"

"—I'm really hoping you can help turn him back!"

Kittisoth frowned. "Why do you think she would be able to turn him back?"

Floon looked confused. "Edana helps with everything, doesn't she?"

Pashar laughed.

Kitti's eyes narrowed. "Was it *Riklyn* who was trying to pick up the girl?"

"Of course!" Floon declared. "I was just being a good wingman! Riklyn's a player! You'd like him!"

"I would *not*!"

Edana smirked. "Kora, can you do anything?"

Kora sighed and cast *detect magic*. "Uh... the cat's not magical."

"What?"

"That's not Riklyn. It's just a cat."

"What?!"

Kittisoth laughed and laughed and laughed.

"Meow!" The cat leapt out of Floon's arms and ran off into the crowd.

"Riklyn!" Floon shouted. "Wait... you're *sure* that wasn't Riklyn?"

"Positive," Kora said.

Floon shrugged. "Then he must be with the girl." And he headed off to get a drink.

Mattrim danced by with Bonnie, the barmaid from the Yawning Portal, in his arms. He made a point of flashing his Harper pin to them as he spun by. Kitti laughed again.

And then, across the room she spotted Isgrigg heading toward Ilthaea, one of the floating star elf triplets. She pounded Pashar on the shoulder. "Look!"

Isgrigg nervously said, "Would you... uh... like to get a drink some time?"

"Oh!" Ilthaea blinked. "I always thought you liked Ulthaea."

"No!" Isgrigg said. "I like *you*."

"Thank you," she said. "Yes. We *should* go out for a drink. It is written."

Pashar cried out, "It is written!"

"What?!" Kittisoth shouted.

Just then, coming in from the alley, they saw Valetta, the priestess from the House of Gond, accompanied by Nym the Nimblewright. Nym came over to them. "Thank you very much. For the invitation."

They had a brief conversation with them, and then Volo came trundling over to them.

"Oh gods..." Kittisothe murmured.

"My friends!" Volo cried. "Trollskull Manor! I must say, this is the finest decision I've made in decades! So much activity! I'd actually like to talk to you about arranging for a signing of *Volo's Guide to Mountains... Er... Monsters*." He might have been a few drinks in at that point. "I also have a number of questions to ask you about the forthcoming *Volo's Guide to Spirits and Ghosts!*"

EPILOGUE: THE DANCE OF LEIRUIN

Later that evening, Kittisothe and Renaer danced in the midst of the Feast at Brandathall. They swirled about the ballroom, gliding (and occasionally floating) beautifully across the floor. The others were nearby, part of the large crowd mingling around the busy dance floor.

They saw the Gralhunds come in. Their eyes met and, from across the room, the Gralhunds mouthed, *Thank you...*

Kitti and Renaer swept around the ballroom. Kitti twirled around just in time to see Laeral and Vajra teleport in on one side of the room. Mirt was with them! He was a little pallid, but he gave a grateful nod of the head to the new Brightcandle and her friends.

Kitti danced on. As they passed the door, Jarlaxle came walking in – as himself, for a change. Seeing Kitti's doubletake, Renaer grinned. "Don't worry. Osco has an eye on him."

"Oh good," Kitti grinned sardonically. "My confidence is restored!"

They passed Hermione, who was dancing with a tawny-haired Calishite noble. She gave Kitti a bawdy wink, and Kitti replied with a bawdier thumbs up.

And then the song was winding down. Renaer took the lead and they twirled out into the middle of the floor. As the music ended, he spun down onto one knee and produced a ring.

"Kittisothe, would you go on one last adventure with me?" Renaer grinned. "The greatest adventure of all?"

The entire room seemed to hold its breath.

"... Yeah. Sure. Let's do it!" Kitti grinned and blushed red. "But I may need to go to the Sea of Fallen Stars to save my friend's mom. And I also lost a bet with Pashar, so I'm going to have go Dip first."

"Well, we could be married in the Yawning Portal," Renaer suggested.

"No!" Kitti said. "We could not!"

EPILOGUE: THUNDERSTAFF

Time passed. Now they were placing the last of the Harper cache into the secret chamber beneath Thunderstaff Manor. Theren tucked the last package onto a shelf and they all stowed their Harper pins, their business as Harpers completed.

They headed back up the stairs. As they came into the entryway, the doors burst open. The two Cassalanter children came rushing in, joining the other children who were there playing at the new Thunderstaff Orphanage.



EPILOGUE: THE SEA OF FALLEN STARS

Pashar stood at the prow of a ship, the sea wind in his face and an endless horizon before him. Kora stepped up to join him on his right side. Theren stepped up to his left.

Kittisoth swooped down from the skies, flying past them and alighting next to Renaer on the lower deck. She threw her arm around her husband and smiled.

The swanwing ship sailed on into the Sea of Fallen Stars, seeking the next great adventure.

EPILOGUE: TROLLSKULL FUTURE

One year later, Edana stood on the balcony of Trollskull Manor looking out across the city towards Mount Waterdeep. Below her, the Trollskull Gardens that had been meticulously planned by Theren filled the alley – a verdant sweep of green growth and flowering trees. Squiddly was down there, shooting at a target propped up against one of the trees.

Nat was sitting in the bole of a different tree off to one side, nearly of a height with the balcony. Her brow was furrowed in concentration... and little sparks leapt from her fingertips.

Jenks, who was working in the kitchens down below, called out, “Do you want a roll? Catch!” He hurled one up through the window and Edana snatched it nimbly from the air.

Taking a bite from the gloriously fresh bread, she turned to head back into the manor. But as she did, Vajra flew down from the blue sky and alighted gently on the balcony next to her.

There was still work to be done.

*The Sea goes ever on and on,
Away from manor where it began.
On distant shores we light upon,
Let others follow us who can!
With them a voyage new begins,
But one day with thought of child and friend,
We'll turn back to lighted inn,
Where toils began and journeys end.*

THE END

GM: Justin Alexander

Kittisoth Ka'iter - Heather Burmeister
Mamoon Pashar Al-Eiraf Um-Hafayah - Peter Heeringa
Kora Marwood - Chris Malone
Edana - Sarah Holmberg
Theren - Erik Malm

POST-CREDIT SCENE

Edana sat cross-legged in the secret chambers beneath Thunderstaff Orphanage. She held the Stone of Golorr in the palm of her hand. Its alien thoughts melded and danced with hers. The secrets it had stolen from the world flowed into her.

She had gained so many of them already: Horrible racial slurs. The elvish word *essylathir*, which meant the beauty of eyes which are the color of a storm-tossed sea. The existence of tawny-haired bipeds known as "fuzzies" that lived in the High Forest. The Kingdom of Otheria, which ruled a demesne from the Sword Coast to the sands of Anauroch five hundred years before. The name Anu-Devan which had one been the most popular male elven name. The location of sixteen silver bars buried in the rear yard of a tavern in Murann in 916 DR. The spells of *blacksteel* and *midnight shroud*. The ritual required for the creation of a Hell cyst. The location of a vast complex of gothic archways, each leading to a different locale holding great secrets.

Now a new secret was leeching into her: An atrocity performed during the Crown Wars.

She saw the utter truth of it. How history had long maintained that the dark elf Ilythiiri had viciously attacked the kingdom of Orishaar on the thinnest of pretenses, thus beginning the Second Crown War.

But there, buried inside, was the secret: That the Orishaari had actually betrayed the Ilythiiri at a wedding which was to unite their two people and slaughtered most of the Ilythiiri royal family. The Stone had wiped this truth from history, leaving the official histories to turn the murderous moon elves into victims and the wronged dark elves into villains who were served with a cold justice when they lost the Crown Wars and were forced underground into the sunless realms of their cavernous kingdoms.

And none would ever know but her.

Her eyes snapped open.