

INTRODUCTION

Dragon Heist. It's right there in the title. Heist. Not surprisingly, both you and your players likely expect that there'll be a heist – a daring theft from a dangerous location – in there somewhere. And while taking 500,000 gold dragons from the Vault of Dragons can technically be considered a heist, it's not exactly the sort of heist we've come to expect from watching films such as *Ocean's 11* or *The Italian Job*. So what do you do, if you want to put the heist in Waterdeep: Dragon Heist?

In this document you're given easy-to-use rules and guidelines for running a heist on any one of the four villain's lairs described in Waterdeep: Dragon Heist. We also go in-depth with Xanathar's Lair specifically, providing you everything you need to set up, run and conclude a heist on the beholder crime boss' subterranean lair. Happy Heisting!

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GENERAL HEIST RULES



n the following pages you'll find general advice for running a heist in the Waterdeep: Dragon Heist campaign, including a summary of the different kinds of scores, and guidelines handling the preparation for, the infiltration of, and the escape from, a villain's lair.

SETTING UP THE HEIST

If you want your campaign to include a heist, you first need to create the need for one. This means introducing a 'score': An object – or objects – the characters desperately need, but which can only be found if they stage a heist on the villain's lair. The score can be literally anything you decide – that's what D&D is about, after all – but you can also stick with one of the many options already written into the campaign book. The four most obvious options are the *Stone of Golorr*, one of the keys to the vault of dragons, the cache of dragons itself, or one of the faction missions described in Chapter 2. Below, we'll go over each one of these options.

STONE OF GOLORR

A villain might come into possession of the *Stone of Golorr* during the encounter chain in Chapter 4: Dragon Season. It's already described in the book as a possibility, so you don't have to do anything to make it an option. If you want to make it more likely that a villain obtains the stone, simply increase the difficulty of some of the chases or encounters in Chapter 4 – but make sure that they're still beatable, so your players don't feel cheated or railroaded.

THE KEYS TO THE VAULT

To open the Vault of Dragons, three unique keys are required. Since you control what the keys are and where they can be found, you can easily place one of them in a villain's lair. You're given some options that can do exactly this in the table in Chapter 4. Below are these options plus some additional key options, giving you three examples for each lair:

XANATHAR'S LAIR

- An albino gazer (X13)
- A treasure of gold worth nothing to most but everything to one (X19)
- A beholder eyestalk (X3, X6, X18, X19 or X33)

CASSALANTER VILLA

- An original performance of 'Your Beardy Face' (C3)
- A unholy symbol of Asmodeus (C6)
- A weapon forged to destroy evil (A4a)

SEA MAIDENS FAIRE

- A metallic unicorn (J17)
- A rare and exotic fungus from the underdark (J22)
- A keg of smokepowder (J27)

KOLAT TOWERS

- A statue of Duhlark Kolat (K10)
- A green flame brazier (E8)
- A tyrant's mask (E12)

THE CACHE OF DRAGONS

Of course, there's also the Cache of Dragons – the 500,000 gold pieces stolen from the Vault of Dragons. Now, that's a score worth talking about. It does, however, require that the treasure ends up in the hands of a villain. This can happen organically if the villain either obtains the *Stone of Golorr* and uses it to find the treasure first, or if the villain takes the gold from the party. The last option is a bit harder to pull off, since you'll need the villain to take the treasure from the characters at the end of Chapter 4 without killing them. Here's some ideas on how that can happen:

- While the party fends off Xanathar's henchmen, Xanathar hovers past invisible. It puts Aurinax to sleep with a sleep ray and uses rays of telekinesis and disintegration to transport the gold through carved tunnels to the sewers.
- While the party contends with the Cassalanter's cultists, the unscrupulous nobles sneak past themselves. Using charm, deception and their noble standing, they convince Aurinax to hand over the gold ('so it can be repaid to the poor of the city, to whom it rightfully belongs'). They teleport it out of the vault using a *scroll of teleportation*.
- If the party refuses Jarlaxle's offer, he orders his gunslingers to hold off the party, while he levitates away to find his own way into the vault. He uses his *feather of diatryma summoning* to distract Aurinax, while he (helped by his *cloak of invisibility*) quickly and quietly scoops the gold into his *portable hole* before sneaking away.
- Manshoon's simulacrum has borrowed Manshoon's staff of power. It uses it to cast multiple instances of *wall of force* shaping impenetrable domes around each character. When the entire party has been immobilized this way, they can only watch helplessly as the simulacrum and surviving henchmen disappear into the vault, destroy or incapacitate Aurinax, and calmly walk back out with the treasure stored in a couple of *bags of holding*, all before 10 minutes have passed.

FACTION MISSIONS

Three of the suggested faction missions in **Chapter 2: Trollskull Alley** can also send your party into a villain's lair:

- Bregan D'aerthe's last mission involves killing the treacherous Nar'l Xibrindas in Xanathar's Lair.
- Force Grey/Gray Hands' fourth mission involves killing Nihiloor in Xanathar's Lair.
- Zhentarim's fourth mission could take the party into Kolat Towers, as they chase the traitorous Skeemo Weirdbottle.

Here are some additional examples of reasons why other factions want the party to stage a heist on a villain's lair:

- A faction wants the party to discover who the captain and crew of the three ships in the harbor *really* are. The score could be Jarlaxle's letter to Laeral (see Chapter 7: A Night to Remember) or the drow figurines in his chest (J30).
- A faction has learned that Manshoon's Zhentarim have a ledger with the names of Masked Lords (E13).
- A faction wants proof of the Cassalanter's devil worship. The score is the cult regalia (C21) or the grimoire (C22).
- A faction wants the party to steal one of Xanathar's most prized possessions to disrupt the Xanathar Guild. The score is Sylgar (X19) or the Dream Nullifier (X20).

RUNNING THE HEIST

Before we get into the specifics of running a heist in 5th edition D&D, let's zoom out for a moment and consider what a heist actually is. At the forefront, 'heist' is a cumbersome word (which you'll surely be tired off reading before you're done reading this document) defined by Cambridge Dictionary as "*a crime in which valuable things are taken illegally and often violently from a place or person*".

That's a pretty broad definition, but if we take inspiration from the movies mentioned in the introduction – and other accounts of fictional or real heists – we find that exciting heists can typically be divided into three stages:

- **Preparation** – the characters gather information, acquire resources and concoct a plan.
- **Infiltration** – the characters gain entry, face encounters, create distractions and try to avoid raising the alarm.
- **Escape** – the characters finish the heist and try to escape with the score – or just their lives!

As the DM, keeping these three stages in mind as you run a heist for your players should keep things flowing nicely. It's also recommended that you let your players know about the three stages, and what they're expected to do in each – not to constrain their creativity, but to bolster it. Your players are much more likely to have fun if they understand what's happening, and what's expected of them:

We'll be running the heist in three stages: Preparation, Infiltration and Escape. In the Preparation stage, you gather information, acquire resources and plan. This stage is handled as downtime – mostly out-of-character and by rolling skill checks. When you're ready, we move to the Infiltration stage. This stage runs like any other dungeon crawl – except it's a heist, of course! Finally, we move to the Escape stage, where you try to escape the lair. If it makes sense at the time, we'll handle this stage as a skill challenge – or skip it entirely, if you're very clever or sneaky!

PREPARATION

One of the most important aspects of a good heist is the preparation. It's in this phase the characters learn more about the place and people (or beholder!) they're stealing from, acquire resources and formulate a workable plan.

While preparation *can* (and should) be fun, it can also quickly become boring if it draws out too long or becomes too abstract or convoluted. As the DM, your goal is to make the preparation phase engaging by providing your players with enough tidbits of information so that they can come up with a creative and serviceable plan for their heist, without wasting too much time discussing the small details. You do this by first allowing your players to gather information. When they have enough information, they'll then have the opportunity to act on that information by acquiring resources and planning out their heist.

GATHERING INFORMATION

Instead of asking your players to act out every interaction they have as they gather information about the lair, the score, or the villain, we handle this phase with relevant skill checks.

Start by asking each player how their character spends a day trying to gather information and what information they're trying to learn ("anything I can" is a valid option).

The character then pays 5 gp (covering the costs for a day spent investigating) and makes a DC 15 skill check, using the skill that's most appropriate for the method they've chosen. At your discretion, certain actions or spells might grant advantage or allow a character to succeed automatically.

On a success, the character learns a piece of information – either the specific information they were after or a piece of information chosen at random. They can also attempt one more DC 15 skill check without spending extra time or gold, potentially learning an additional piece of information from the same source. On a failure on either check, the character learns nothing and must wait until the next day to try again.

You'll find lair-specific sources of information and pieces of information on page 4 of this document.

ACQUIRING RESOURCES

As the party learns more information, they'll likely want to acquire specific aid or equipment to increase the heist's chances of success. To make this process run fast and smooth, allow them to freely purchase all equipment from Chapter 5 of the Players Handbook at standard prices.

Recruiting. The characters can also recruit aid for their heist – faction agents, guild specialists, simple muscle and so on. As a rule of thumb, the high risk involved with a heist usually drives prices for **commoner** hirelings up to at least 5 gp. For hirelings with a higher challenge rating (like **bandits**, **thugs** or **veterans**), multiply the challenge rating by 100 gp to find a reasonable guideline (paid in advance, of course).

Factions might also provide aid to the party, as described in Chapter 5 and also on page 4 of this document.

Magic Equipment. For common, uncommon and rare magic equipment, you can use these simplified (and slightly sped up) rules for procuring magic items, inspired by the rules found in Xanathar's Guide to Everything (page 126).

A character that wants to acquire a specific magical item must choose how long they want to search (from half a day to five days) and make an Intelligence (Investigation) check. The DC for the check depends on the rarity of the item and the time spent searching for it, as shown on the tables below. The longer the search, the better chance of success – but also a higher cost for the search itself.

PROCURING MAGICAL ITEMS

Rarity	DC	Asking Price
Common	10	2d6 x 10gp
Uncommon	15	1d6 x 100gp
Rare	20	1d6 x 1000gp

Time Spent	DC Modifier	Cost
½ day	+5	10 gp
1 day	+4	20 gp
2 days	+3	40 gp
3 days	+2	60 gp
4 days	+1	80 gp
5 days	–	100 gp

On a success, the character finds a vendor who can provide the item. The cost of the item is determined at random, but is halved for consumable items like potions and scrolls. On a failure, the character doesn't find the item and has wasted both time and gold looking for it.

PLANNING THE HEIST

Arguably the most important part of the preparation process is coming up with an actual plan. This is the party's task much more than it is yours, so your job here is mainly to facilitate a creative and constructive planning process.

Creativity Rules. Since the specifics of the party's plan depends on the score they're after, the lair they're heisting, the information and equipment available to them, as well as their own creativity, we can't possibly predict (and prepare) for everything they could come up with. A plan might be as simple as "we'll storm the front door and take it from there", or it might be a complex endeavor including deception, distractions, contingency plans and escape routes. The most important thing is that you work with your players and give their ideas a chance to work – as a player, few things are more satisfying than having a good plan come to fruition!

Short and Smooth. Generally speaking, you want the time spent actually planning to be fairly short. Arguing over which entry to use or what illusion works best isn't fun for anyone. To make the process run smoothly, consider asking your party to either pick a 'master planner', who has the final say, or ask them to vote on each element of the plan. Don't be afraid to guide the planning process by summarizing and asking confirmation while your players plan, such as: "So to summarize: the Rogue wants to sneak in through the hidden tunnel, while the Bard suggests you use illusions to enter through the front door as bugbears. Fighter and Cleric, which plan do you like the most – or do you have other ideas?"

INFILTRATION

When the party has prepared, it's time to put things into motion. This is the phase where the actual heisting is done. Most of this phase will be spent in 'exploration mode' much like any other dungeon crawl, as the party moves through the lair, engaging with and reacting to the various objects, challenges and creatures put in front of them.

ENTRY

Before the heist can begin in earnest, the characters will first have to enter the lair. Unless your players come up with their own unique plan, they'll likely enter through one of the lair-specific entries described on page 5 of this document.

ENCOUNTERS

While the characters are within the villain's lair, they risk running into other creatures, much like they would when traveling in the wilderness. It's up to you whether you want to roll randomly for an encounter each time the party enters specific areas of the lair, or if you'd rather choose one or two encounters you like and use them when you think it fits.

You'll find a table with lair-specific encounters on page 6 of this document.

DISTRACTIONS

With sufficient information, the party can have prepared one or more distractions before going into the lair – or create the circumstances for one while within the lair. A distraction works like a 'get-out-of-jail-free-card', in that it will aid the party at precisely the right moment during the heist, allowing them to avoid an encounter, bypass a challenge, or even evade capture entirely. You can either inform your party that their actions have created the opportunity for a distraction, giving them control of when to use the distraction, or simply note them to yourself and use them when it makes sense.

You'll find lair-specific distractions on page 7 of this document, as well as ideas on how and when to use them.

ALARM

Unless your players are exceedingly clever and stealthy, they are likely to raise the alarm at some point during the heist. As soon as the alarm has been raised, most creatures in the lair begin moving to intercept and capture the intruders. If the characters haven't found what they're searching for, they'll have to make a choice: continue looking for the score or try to escape instead? If they choose to continue, the heist becomes a running encounter where they must evade and fight off hostile creatures turn-by-turn while looking for the score. Only when the party decides to put all their effort towards escape, does the heist move to the third phase: escape.

ESCAPE

The third and last phase of the heist is the escape. The heist enters this phase when the alarm has been raised and the party has chosen to escape. However, if your party are either stealthy enough to get the score and get back out without raising the alarm, or have found a way to make an instant escape (such as a *scroll of teleportation*), they'll never enter this phase – which is also perfectly fine.

ESCAPE AS A SKILL CHALLENGE

Handling a running combat with multiple foes (one of which might be a very powerful beholder) can be a daunting task for even the most experienced Dungeon Master. To make things easier on yourself – as well as faster and potentially more fun – you can run the escape as a skill challenge. Running the escape as a skill challenge is fairly simple: to escape unscathed, the party must succeed on a number of skill checks before they accumulate too many failures.

DIFFICULTY AND COMPLEXITY

You'll usually want your skill challenge to have a DC that's a reasonable challenge for the party, but not unsurmountable. A baseline DC of 14 for a party of 5th level adventurers keeps things challenging, but doable. As for the complexity of the skill challenge, requiring at least one skill check per character and allowing for half as many failures is a good starting point. For most groups, a skill challenge with medium complexity (6 successes required, 3 failures allowed) should be appropriate.

SKILL CHECKS

When running the skill challenge, you put away the battlemat and the miniatures and simply ask: "How does your character aid the escape?" until the party has either accrued enough successes or too many failures. A character might use Athletics to topple a statue in front of pursuers, use Perception to try and find a shortcut, or Deception to send pursuers down the wrong hallway. The most important thing is that they're being creative and having fun – and that each player gets to make at least one skill check.

Characters can also use class features, spells and magical items to aid them in their escape. You decide whether this allows a character to use their caster ability check in place of a skill check, or grants the character advantage (or even an automatic success) on a skill check.

You'll find lair-specific escape obstacles on page 8, which you can use if your players run out of ideas for skill checks.

SUCCESS AND FAILURE

If the party succeed enough times, they've hopefully secured their score and the campaign can move on. If they fail too many times, it doesn't have to mean that all is lost – on page 8 you'll find lair-specific advice on how to avoid a failed escape ending the campaign.

XANATHAR'S LAIR

In many ways, Xanathar is the quintessential villain for Waterdeep: Dragon Heist. Likewise, the beholder's underground complex is also the villain's lair that seems most like an actual *lair*. In other words, the perfect place for a heist! Below you'll find information that summarizes, elaborates on or adds to the information in Chapter 5: Spring Madness, which it's strongly recommended that you read first.

PREPARATION

As we've covered earlier in this document, any good heist starts with preparation. This means gathering information, acquiring resources and making a good plan.

GATHERING INFORMATION

When a character succeeds on a skill check to gather information, you can roll on one of the Xanathar Lair Information Tables or simply choose the piece of information you think they should have (make sure you give them at least one piece of information that helps them enter the lair).

The information can come from anywhere, but if your players are having a hard time being specific, you can help them by describing how they learn information from...

- A friendly faction.
- Looking around in the sewers.
- A human **bandit** named Odo – a balding, musclebound man with a lame leg – who once did a job for the Xanathar Guild. Odo speaks a bit too openly while drunk at The Sleeping Wench Tavern in the Dock Ward.
- A half-mad and badly scarred **deep gnome** named Loopmottin, who lives in an alley shelter. She claims she was one of Xanathar's most trusted servants, before she was chased away by the volatile and paranoid Xanathar.
- An opinion piece in an issue of *The Crimson Word*, a gossip newsletter with an abundance of naughty drawings and weird trivia.
- A note in the book *Riddles, Rumors and Secrets heard in the City of Splendors* by the elf minstrel Ajana Craulnober.

A piece of information might prompt the party to seek out specific NPCs or factions, such as Hermann Habbenschneider (see 'Food Delivery') or Noska Ur'gray (see 'Tournament'). Allow the players to roleplay these social encounters, using them as small breaks from the 'downtime-style-search' described on page 2.

FACTION AID

The characters can acquire aid from the various factions they're involved with. The specifics can be found at the start of Chapter 5: Spring Madness (page 101), but common to all factions are that they can show the party to the secret staircase (see 'Secret Stairs' on the next page).

Handling Aid. Aid from factions (or other hirelings) can increase the party's combat strength. To avoid having powerful NPC's outshine the party or bog down combat, use them in ways that aid the party indirectly: such as Jalester Silvermane providing a distraction at exactly the right time, or Meloon Wardragon giving his life to help the party escape. A faction ally should provide dramatic tension – not take the spotlight away from the player characters!

XANATHAR LAIR INFORMATION – ENTRIES

d4 Information

- 1 Xanathar's food is prepared by kobold chefs who receive weekly food deliveries from *Hermann's House of Exotic Food Stuffs* (see 'Food Delivery').
 - 2 Xanathar is hosting a gladiatorial tournament.
 - 3 Contestants can apply with a dwarf named Noska Ur'gray at *The Hanged Man* (see 'Tournament').
 - 4 There's a portal to Xanathar's Lair in the Xanathar Guild Hideout. Xanathar's lieutenants carry keys to activate the portal (see 'The Portal').
- 5 A secret staircase leads from the sewers under the Castle Ward to Xanathar's Lair (see 'Secret Stairs').

XANATHAR LAIR INFORMATION – LAIR FEATURES

d4 Information

- 1 The party obtains a poorly drawn map of Xanathar's lair (give them the 'Crude Xanathar Lair Map').
- 2 Wizards loyal to Xanathar monitor certain areas of the lair through ghostly eyestalks.
- 3 The lair is rumored to be riddled with secret doors, tunnels and staircases.
- 4 All lesser guild members use Xanathar's symbol – a circle with ten 'spokes' – to identify themselves.

XANATHAR LAIR INFORMATION – XANATHAR

d4 Information

- 1 Xanathar has a pet goldfish named Sylgar, which it loves more than anything else.
- 2 One of Xanathar's most prized possessions is a device that prevents it from dreaming.
- 3 Xanathar has a volatile temperament and will often strike out at its own minions if enraged.
- 4 Xanathar is a beholder that possesses strong magic items, among them a *ring of invisibility*, which it uses to hide its identity from both friends and foes.

XANATHAR LAIR INFORMATION – INHABITANTS

d8 Information

- 1 Xanathar's chief advisor is a drow named Nar'l Xibrindas, whom Xanathar doesn't quite trust.
- 2 A crazy dwarf named Ott Steeltoes tends to Xanathar's private quarters and possessions.
- 3 The mindflayer Nihiloor performs weird experiments in its own corner of Xanathar's lair.
- 4 Xanathar's engineer is a dwarf named Thorvin Twinbeard who's watched over by an albino gazer.
- 5 Xanathar's chief enforcer, the dwarf Noska Ur'gray, is always looking for scrap for his pet rust monster.
- 6 Xanathar's majordomo, a dwarf named Ahmaergo, has a weird fascination with minotaurs.
- 7 Xanathar has a jester, a deep gnome named Flutterfoot Zipswiggle. He'll often be helpful to anyone who humors his love for riddles.
- 8 Xanathar uses a halfling prisoner named Bepis as chef for its henchmen.

INFILTRATION

When the party's prepared, it's time to get on with the heist. On the following pages you'll find entries, encounters, distractions and other information specific to Xanathar's Lair.

ENTRY

Only their imagination limits the number of ways the characters can enter Xanathar's Lair. There is, however, a handful of methods that are likely to become apparent to the party as they gather information about Xanathar's lair:

- **Food Delivery** – the party sneaks in via the food delivery to the kobolds in area X30.
- **Hideout Portal** – the party uses a portal in one of the Xanathar Guild Hideouts to arrive in area X22.
- **Secret Stairs** – the party descends a secret staircase under the Castle Ward and arrives in area X1.
- **Tournament** – the party joins a gladiatorial tournament and arrives in area X6.

FOOD DELIVERY

The party can find the dwarf Hermann Habbenschneider in his little shoppe 'Hermann's House of Exotic Food Stuffs' in the Trades Ward. If asked, the blonde-bearded dwarf knows nothing of any deliveries to "a godsdurn' Xanathar". While this isn't a lie, it also isn't the whole truth. Once every tenday, Hermann and his son, Hermann the Younger, find a pouch of gold and an order for exotic groceries on their doorstep. The following night, the two dwarves venture into the sewers with crates of food and leave them on a specially marked (with the Xanathar Guild's symbol) section of the floor.

If the characters ask questions about weird deliveries, Hermann shares this information with characters who appeal to his greed with a bribe (25 gp), who appeal to his conscience with a description of how bad Xanathar is (Persuasion DC 13), or who appeal to his sense of self-preservation with threats of violence (Intimidation DC 15).

This information gives the party at least two options:

Entry through the Kitchen. Succeeding on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check finds that the 10 by 10 feet section of the floor marked with the Xanathar's symbol can be lowered. The kobold chefs use this freight elevator to bring the food down to area X30. Characters who wait for an hour near the crates can enter as the food is lowered into the kitchen. However, unless they use magic to conceal themselves, characters are immediately spotted as they're lowered into the kitchen, causing the two **gazers** to attack and the **kobolds** to flee and raise the alarm.

Tampering with the Food. Tampering with the Xanathar's food delivery can create a distraction during the heist. The party gain one use of the 'Angry Xanathar'-distraction during the heist (see 'Distractions' on page 7).

Entry through Skullport

There's a fifth way into Xanathar's lair: from Skullport. Since this entry is avoided in the campaign book, we also won't cover it here, but if you have 'Waterdeep: Dungeon of the Mad Mage' it is possible to make this entrance an option. Otherwise, consider placing a tunnel collapse in area X4 to make sure your party doesn't suddenly end up in Skullport.

SECRET STAIRS

The simplest way of entrance is likely to be down the secret stairs in the sewers of the Castle Ward (described in the very beginning of Chapter 5). However, while simple, this entry isn't necessarily optimal. Seemingly unguarded, characters arriving here will have to make their way through area X2, where wizards peering through ghostly eyestalks can raise the alarm before the heist has even begun in earnest.

TOURNAMENT

The party can find Noska Ur'gray at *The Hanged Man* tavern in the Dock Ward. Noska looks for prospects to join the tournament while protected by four Xanathar **thugs**.

Joining the Tournament. Noska gladly allows the characters to sign up for the tournament. He quickly explains the tournament: four teams of three fight head-to-head to win more than a 100 gp each and possibly an audience with Xanathar. If the party agrees, Noska Ur'gray claps his hands resolutely and tells them to come back to the tavern in a few days when the tournament starts (you decide when). See Appendix C for more information on how to run the tournament, if your players choose this route.

Back to the Lair. The characters might also choose to follow Noska for another way into the lair. The dwarf and his entourage stay at *The Hanged Man* until midnight before leaving to look for a discrete sewer vent to climb into. The party can follow the band (DC 15 group Dexterity (Stealth) check) as they head to the Xanathar Guild Hideout under the Dock Ward sewers. Noska intends to return to Xanathar's lair using the portal in the hideout (see 'The Portal' below).

Encounter with Noska Ur'gray. A confrontation with Noska Ur'gray can happen if the party is spotted following the henchmen, or if the characters choose to attack the band. Depending on where an encounter happens, you can use the Night Dock Ward Map or the Xanathar Guild Hideout Map. If captured, each thug knows 1d3 pieces of information from the information table, which they'll share in return for a promise of freedom (DC 15 Charisma (Deception or Persuasion) check), or if genuinely fearful for their lives (DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation) check). Noska Ur'gray knows far more – everything on the information table – but will only divulge his secrets if magically compelled, choosing to die or rot in a cell rather than betray Xanathar.

In addition to his weapons and the keys to the prisoners in area X7, Noska also carries a key to the portal in area X22. When Noska doesn't return, the lair is thrown into chaos for a tenday, giving the party the benefit of the 'Disrupted Command' distraction (see 'Distractions' on page 7).

THE PORTAL

The characters can find the portal to Xanathar's lair in the Xanathar Guild Hideout under the Dock Ward. If the characters go looking for the portal, they'll find that the hideout has had its security beefed up, replacing many of the creatures slain or scared off during their first visit:

- **Gazer Guard** – two **gazers** now guard the intersection before the entrance to the hideout.
- **Q2** – the goblin sentries are replaced with **bugbears**.
- **Q5** – four **duergar** loiter in the sleeping area.
- **Q7** – if still alive, **Noska Ur'gray** is here with four **thugs**.

If the characters are spotted coming in, all inhabitants of the hideout prepare themselves to ambush the intruders. When confronted in area Q7, Noska Ur'gray relishes the opportunity for a good fight, first trying to escape using the portal in area Q11 if badly wounded. If he makes it to the lair, he quickly raises the alarm (see 'Alarm' on page 7).

ENCOUNTERS

While making their way through Xanathar's Lair, the party might run into the other denizens of the lair. You can roll a random encounter from the Xanathar Lair Encounter table whenever the party enters an otherwise empty area (X4, X6, X21, X32), whenever you feel like they're loitering too long in an area, or you can pick out your favorite encounters from below and simply place them in the lair as you see fit.

XANATHAR LAIR ENCOUNTERS

1d10 Encounter

- 1 **Xanathar**
- 2 **N'arl Xibrindas (drow mage)** and **grell**
- 3 2 **bandits** and 1 **goblin**
- 4 **Gazer**
- 5 **Bepis Honeymaker (commoner)**
- 6 **Noska Ur'gray** and **rust monster**
- 7 **Nihiloor (mind flayer)**
- 8 **Ahmaergo**
- 9 **Ott Steeltoes**
- 10 **Thorvin Twinbeard**

XANATHAR

A frantically floating **Xanathar** glides through the area towards X18 to speak with Nar'l Xibrindas. The beholder has just heard rumors of a plot to blow up its lair with smokepowder and wants the drow's assessment of the threat (and to gauge Nar'l's reaction, since Xanathar suspects him!). Distracted so, the usually incredibly perceptive Xanathar isn't paying as much attention as it could (passive Perception 17).

If Xanathar spots the characters, it ignores them and hurries past if they look like they could be guild members. If they stand out, the beholder demands to know who they are and what they're doing. A clever lie (Deception DC 17) will send the beholder on its way – otherwise it'll start shooting eye rays until it gets an honest answer.

NAR'L XIBRINDAS

A nervously fiddling **Nar'l Xibrindas** shuffles through the area, followed closely by his **grell** bodyguard. He's just found out that Thorvin Twinbeard knows about the smokepowder he's had smuggled in, and fears the dwarf will rat him out to Xanathar. While Nar'l is distracted by his predicament, the grell following him is alert and looking for suspicious activity (passive Perception 14).

The grell attacks obvious intruders immediately, while Nar'l holds back, curious to learn more. If threatened, Nar'l retreats and tries to raise the alarm.

BANDITS AND GOBLIN

A pair of drunkenly stumbling human **bandits** chase a small **goblin** clutching a chicken drumstick through the area. One bandit is laughing while running ("the little bugger done took yer legs, hah!") while the other, a very drunk and rotund young man, tries to keep up with the goblin while shouting "I'll tear you to... oh, my sides.. pieces... Mask damn you..."

If the goblin spots the characters it'll overlook that it hasn't seen them before if they somehow aid its escape from the bandits. If the bandits see the characters, they demand to know who the strangers are, running to raise the alarm if not properly convinced that the characters belong in the lair.

GAZER

A **gazer** flies through keeping an eye (and eyestalks!) out for suspicious activity (passive Perception 14). If it spots intruders, it immediately veers away to raise the alarm.

BEPIS HONEYMAKER

A frantically shuffling **Bepis Honeymaker** storms through the area, muttering "Salt, salt, salt, where did those buggers lose the salt? Yondalla willing, when I get out of here, I 'll never see a kobold again!" Bepis is looking frantically around – but not for humanoids (passive Perception 10).

If Bepis sees the characters, the halfling furrows his brows and ask who they are. If he discovers they're no friends of Xanathar, he pleads with them to rescue him. He'll share all he knows, but won't follow the characters into danger.

NOSKA UR'GRAY

A relaxed **Noska Ur'gray** strolls through the area, his pet **rust monster** held in a leather leash 10 feet in front of him. The enforcer is taking his pet for a walk through the complex – neither are particularly vigilant (passive Perception 11).

Noska Ur'gray questions any suspicious characters. Only a well-crafted lie can convince the enforcer that they belong in the lair (Deception DC 15). If he thinks them to be intruders, Noska Ur'gray releases his rust monster to attack them and runs to raise the alarm.

NIHILOOR

A casually gliding **Nihiloor (mindflayer)** is returning to its corner of the lair after a meeting with Xanathar, as vigilant as ever (passive Perception 16).

Nihiloor questions any characters it meets who seem like they don't belong, using *detect thoughts* to scour their minds as it does. If it finds intruders, it tries to capture the party, only moving to raise the alarm if hurt badly.

AHMAERGO

Ahmaergo marches through the area, inspecting the lair and ensuring that everything is in order. The dwarf is always on the lookout for intruders (passive Perception 16).

Ahmaergo knows everyone who's supposed to be in the lair, so he doesn't waste time with questions. He attacks lone characters, but flees to raise the alarm if outnumbered.

OTT STEELTOES

Ott Steeltoes sneaks through the area, hiding a small leather waterskin behind his back. Within is a goldfish – the newest Sylgar – which the dwarf is trying to smuggle into Xanathar's sanctum. The old Sylgar has just died (Ott swallowed the evidence before running to retrieve a new one) and Ott is now hurrying to replace it before Xanathar discovers Sylgar's absence. Ott keeps a careful eye on his surroundings – but isn't paying much heed to anything that doesn't look like a beholder (passive Perception 10).

If Ott Steeltoes sees intruders, he's not in a hurry to raise the alarm. Instead, he just ducks his head, pretends he hasn't seen anything and hurries on his way, preferring to inform Xanathar of the intrusion *after* he's replaced Sylgar.

THORVIN TWINBEARD

A huffing and puffing Thorvin Twinbeard walks briskly through the area, dragging a sack full of parts for the pulverizer he's building (various bolts, screws, metal plates, etc.). He's not vigilant nor keeping an eye out for strangers (passive Perception 10).

Even if Thorvin spots the characters, he's too busy to pay them much heed, instead just nodding his hello and moving on toward his workshop.

Distractions

Through careful planning – or blind coincidence – the characters can set up or cause distractions, which can aid them as they infiltrate Xanathar's lair. These distractions play on the information given in the start of Chapter 5: Spring Madness (page 100). There isn't a hard rule for when you should use distractions, the most important thing is to keep the possibility of them in the back of your mind, and pull them forth when the party needs a distraction to avoid discovery, evade pursuers, or stealth through an area.

Below are some examples of distractions and how they can be set up and used, but always welcome your party's ideas for distractions, if they have any of their own.

ENRAGE XANATHAR

If Xanathar is enraged, its destructive behavior causes chaos and confusion as it turns its eye rays against anyone who looks at it the wrong way. This distraction can be caused by:

- Tampering with Xanathar's food.
- Abducting or killing Sylgar.
- Destroying the Dream Nullifier.
- Eliminating Ott Steeltoes or Thorvin Twinbeard.

Other events or plans might also cause Xanathar to become enraged, at your discretion. Some distractions can be planned ahead (see 'Food Delivery'), while others require the party to enter the lair first. Regardless of how Xanathar is enraged, the distraction is usually sudden and violent, such as:

- A kuo-toa is just about to discover intruding characters, when a stray disintegration ray turns him into dust, and a gurgling voice shouting angrily in Deep Speech can be heard disappearing down a hallway.
- A gang of bandits leave an area the party has to pass through, speaking in low tones: "Best get out of sight fast, word is that the boss had a bad lunch!"

DISRUPT COMMAND

Disrupting the command structure in the Xanathar Guild can be done by eliminating one of Xanathar's most important underlings: Ahmaergo, Nar'l Xibrindas, Nihiloor, or Noska Ur'gray. The gap in lair command can distract inhabitants at an opportune moment, such as:

- Bandits are just about to discover intruding characters, but decide not to investigate further, loudly exclaiming that: "It's probably nothing. Besides, who cares – let's grab another game of dice before Noska shows up!"
- A force chasing escaping intruders hesitate a round in confusion, staying out of danger while asking each other: "What do we do? Where's Ahmaergo?"

DESTROY THE LAIR

Probably the most effective distraction comes from destroying Xanathar's Lair – a lofty goal in itself. The characters might come up with creative ways to do this on their own, but most likely it'll be by finding – and detonating – the smokepowder kegs, as described in Chapter 5: Spring Madness (page 100). While the complete collapse takes an hour, the immediate effect of a blast can also cause a distraction beneficial to the party, such as:

- Xanathar leaves its sanctum to investigate the blast, leaving its most treasured possessions unguarded.
- A large section of the ceiling falls on enemy forces just as they're about to catch the escaping party.

Alarm

As the characters move through Xanathar's Lair, they're likely to run into the lair's inhabitants at some point. If they're not careful or stealthy, the party will soon be engaged in combat – running the risk of alerting the entire lair.

COMBAT

If combat breaks out in an area, creatures in immediately adjacent areas are usually alerted, even through closed doors. The instinct of most inhabitants is to investigate before raising the general alarm, knowing from experience that disturbing the volatile Xanathar without due cause is unlikely to go over well. Creatures in adjacent areas arrive two rounds after being alerted, upon which they decide whether to join the fight or running to raise the general alarm (if the fight seems too close to call!).

RAISING THE ALARM

The lair-wide alarm can only be sounded by the five **apprentice wizards** in area X16. The dwarven wizards monitor the entrance hall (area X2), the arena (area X6), the antechamber of madness (area X23), the recreation hall (area X28), and the downstairs hall (area X32). If combat breaks out in any of these areas, or a Xanathar Guild member runs to one of these areas yelling about intruders, the dwarves use the amplification bell to sound the alarm, alerting the entire lair with a call of: "Alarm! Intruders in area (insert area)!" that echoes throughout all the lair's chambers.

When the general alarm is sounded, nearby combatants in Xanathar's Lair begin moving towards the area specified in the alarm. To make it easier to calculate when lair inhabitants show up, assume that a creature can move through one area per round (including the area it starts in). For example, if the alarm points out intruders in area X2, Ahmaergo shows up from area X17 after 2 rounds, Nar'l and the grell arrive from X18 after 3 rounds, and Noska Ur'gray and the bandits from areas X9 and X10 also arrive after 3 rounds, using the secret door in area X8.

DEVELOPMENTS

What happens next depends on the characters.

Running Combat. If the party is still trying to get the score, they now enter a running encounter to get it before they're completely surrounded. They must make their way through the lair in initiative, while more and more creatures move to intercept and join the fray.

Deescalating. The characters also might try to deescalate the situation, perhaps hiding from their pursuers, or using deception to convince the inhabitants that a mistake was made. If they're clever (and roll well!) allow them to have the alarm called off, giving them a chance to resume the heist.

Escape. If the party decides to escape, they'll either have a running escape to reach an exit, or you can run the escape as a skill challenge. See 'Escape' on the next page.

ESCAPE

The gig is up. The alarm's been raised. The party has Xanathar's undivided attention. In other words: time to run!

You can handle the party's escape from Xanathar's lair as you would any other encounter: turn-by-turn, the party must fight a running battle as they try to escape the lair. This can work well if the party's close to an exit and there's not too many foes hounding them. But, if the party has really stirred the hornet's nest, you can avoid a long and complex encounter by instead running the escape as a skill challenge.

ESCAPING AS A SKILL CHALLENGE

There's a wide array of skill checks that can come in handy when trying to escape a mad beholder's lair. It's up to your players to decide what their characters do to aid the escape. If they're having difficulties coming up with appropriate skill checks, you can choose an obstacle from the 'Escape Obstacles' table and ask one character (or the entire party if it's a group check) to make the appropriate skill check.

Another advantage of the skill challenge is that the escape doesn't have to end in the sewers – if you want to, you can describe how the characters are hounded out into the sewers and even into the streets of Waterdeep before they finally succeed on enough skill checks and shake off their pursuers!

FAILURE

While a close success is always the best and most exciting outcome, the reality is, that the party doesn't always succeed. If they fail more skill checks than they're allowed, before garnering enough successes, the entire escape has failed. Luckily, failure doesn't have to mean that the show's over and the campaign ends with a handful of disintegrated adventurers in Waterdeep's sewers.

Losing the Score. If it fits the situation, you can allow the party to let go of the score in return for their freedom and their lives. Perhaps they can throw the *Stone of Golorr* down a hallway, using the distraction to finally evade their pursuers. Or, after failing the skill challenge, they find themselves cornered, but still holding Xanathar's beloved goldfish, giving them an opportunity to trade Sylgar for their freedom.

Capture. If the characters don't have their hands on a score that can buy their release, failure instead means that they're captured. Describe how each character is incapacitated by eye rays, grabbed by Xanathar Guild bandits, or knocked out by Xanathar's lieutenants. Rather than simply destroy the party, Xanathar prefers to wring whatever value it can from the characters. It has them brought to its audience chamber where it, depending on the state of your campaign, enlists the party to help find the *Stone of Golorr*, steal the Cache of Dragons, or even strike against one of its enemies, such as Manshoon and his Zhentarim in Kolat Towers. Which deal the Xanathar offers is up to you – the important thing is that the party has an opportunity to bargain for their lives.

ESCAPE OBSTACLES

d8 Obstacle	Check
1 Xanathar's shoots a Slowing Ray at you.	Acrobatics
2 A door in front of you is locked.	Athletics or Thieves' Tools
3 A couple of bandits try to grab you as you run past.	Athletics or Acrobatics
4 Xanathar uses a lair action to cause grabbing appendages to sprout from the walls.	Athletics or Acrobatics
5 There might be a secret door here somewhere...	Perception
6 New pursuers arrive – convince them to run the other way.	Deception, Intimidation or Persuasion
7 Quick! Duck into this room and let the pursuers run past!	Stealth (group)
8 <i>gasp...</i> So... Much... Running... <i>gasp...</i>	Constitution save (group)

SUCCESS

Hopefully the skill challenge concludes with the party narrowly escaping their pursuers, as they succeed on the required number of skill checks. If so, make sure to describe this moment of triumph in vivid detail. Perhaps this is your party's final obstacle – putting a fitting end to a campaign that has the word heist in the title – or perhaps its just the beginning of a long and profitable career as heisters!

Either way, we hope you and your players had fun, and that we meet you on another adventure soon!