

# ASK THE ALEXANDRIAN #2: INVESTED IN DRAGON HEIST

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by [Justin Alexander](#) - October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020



Mark writes:

In your [Dragon Heist Remix](#), you have changed events so that there's some more breathing room between Chapter 1 [when the PCs investigate the disappearance of Floon and discover the real kidnap victim was Renaer Neverember] and Chapter 3 [when someone is assassinated on the PCs' front doorstep].

As far as I can see, it's assumed that the players will be doing faction missions, other character-related content, and fixing up Trollskull Manor.

I'm worried that the group will feel disconnected from the overarching plot and the moving parts of the factions in the Grand Game [i.e., the factions in Waterdeep that are all pursuing the half million gold pieces that were embezzled by Dagult Neverember].

What would you suggest to keep the players invested in the Grand Game in that interim period?

To start with, the expected experience is that the players/PCs won't really know that there's a Grand Game going on at the end of Chapter 1. What they'll have is an introductory scenario that has been successfully wrapped up and a large, neon sign saying, "GO TO TROLLSKULL MANOR." At best, they'll have a cluster of loose threads:

- There's a Zhentarim/Xanatharian gang war.

- The Zhentarim and Xanatharians are both interested in the gold embezzled by Dagult Neverember.
- There was something inside Renaer Neverember's locket.

There's no really a defined way for the PCs to immediately pull at these threads. They're deliberately enigmatical elements that are meant to sort of hang around until they get paid off later in the campaign.

So if the PCs *choose* to pull at these threads, it'll be through some clever angle that the players creatively think up on their own initiative. That's great! You just need to figure out how to roll with it. The Remix almost certainly gives you all the tools you need to do this. You'll also probably want to try to breathe a little air into it, weaving the events of their investigation into the wider tapestry of Chapter 2.

(To a certain extent, the players are likely to breathe that air into it themselves: Once you can get a bunch of balls up in the air in your campaign – e.g., the investigation, renovating Trollskull, faction missions, the orphans, the business rival trying to sabotage them – the players will be forced to start juggling their priorities. If you aren't hearing stuff like, "We can't do that tonight, we have to meet with the distillery!" or "Meliandre can guard the tavern in case the dire rats come back, Bassario and Francesca will run that mission for the Harpers, and I'll head back up to the Yawning Portal to see if I can find Yagra," then just add more balls.)

For example, my group made the intuitive leap that Renaer's mourning locket must be connected to his mother's tomb. So after checking out their new digs at Trollskull Manor, they headed straight to the Brandath Crypts... well, mostly straight. They had to request a meeting with Renaer. Then they arranged a time when he could take them to the Crypts ("it can't be tomorrow, because we've got that... thing we're doing"). Once at the Crypts I was actually fascinated to see if they would discover the Vault where the embezzled gold was hidden early and sort of "short-circuit" the entire structure of the campaign, but they ended up missing their Wisdom (Perception) check. Regardless, the investigation had forged a closer relationship with Renaer (who ended up marrying one of the PCs), kept the players puzzling about the Grand Game, and offered a *huge* pay-off when the whole campaign circled back to the Crypts at the end. ("We were *right here!* Oh my god!")

A more likely alternative is for the PCs to start poking around the Zhentarim and/or Xanatharians. That more or less leads straight into [the core structure of the campaign](#): They're investigating a faction, so you should point them at a faction outpost. (Once again, weaving these investigations into the broader scope of everything else happening in Chapter 2.) This activity might preempt some of the "later" revelations about the Grand game, but that's just fine. (The idea of them being "later" revelations is really just a conceptual holdover from the heavily railroaded design of the published adventure. And we're not doing that, right?)

The most likely outcome is that the group will have a little bit of a head start in the Eye Heists that follow the events of Chapter 3. We might imagine the players patting themselves on the back for getting ahead of things, but they probably won't think of it like that. (The structure of the campaign is obfuscated from them. They don't see how your notes are arranged and don't know that this was "supposed" to happen later.)

## BUT WHAT IF THEY DON'T?

Other groups, though, won't pull at those threads from Chapter 1 – either because they can't figure out how to do it or because they just don't care enough to do it. That's OK. It just means that the players' focus is somewhere else. The events of Chapter 1 are still important. They'll either foreshadow what comes later ("If only we'd paid attention to the clues in front of our face!") or they'll be a mystery that eases at the back of their brains. Anticipation heightens the eventual pay-off. ("Oh my god! It's all connected!")

Keep in mind, too, that the Chapter 2 material isn't completely disconnected from the Grand Game: Virtually all of the initial faction missions, for example, either involve one of the factions from the Grand Game, are directly aimed at the events of the Grand Game, or result in revelations about the same. (The exception is the Emerald Enclave, which is probably one of the reasons why I never prioritized getting that faction involved in my *Dragon Heist* run.)

*Note: Also look at [Part 1C: Player Character Factions](#). The Grand Games of Waterdeep usually involve ALL of the byzantine factions of the city becoming collectively fixated on something. That includes the player character factions. Even if the faction play in Chapter 2 wasn't connected to the Grand Game, it would BECOME connected by virtue of the PCs being connected to it.*

One thing I would have liked to have designed for *Dragon Heist* would have been a series of detailed [background events](#) detailing the evolving gang war between Zhents and Xanatharians. I didn't get that done for my campaign, but background events like these can also be a good way to keep elements of the campaign "in the mix" even when the PCs' immediate attention is turned somewhere else.

## BUSINESS AS USUAL

One last thing to keep in mind is that this whole approach doesn't really stop when you hit the end of Chapter 2: The faction missions continue. Now that the tavern is open, you can use [A Night in Trollskull Manor](#) to provide a constant level of activity. The PCs are going to continue pulling at threads and having to deal with blowback from their actions.

In fact, once Chapter 3 starts off with a bang (pun intended), the only thing that's likely to happen is that you'll be tossing MORE balls into the air for the PCs to juggle.