

INTRODUCTION

The Black Network is a storied and ruthless faction worth all the fear, hatred and reluctant respect it receives across the realms. In Waterdeep, the organization is in a tenuous position as internal strife and an escalating conflict with the Xanathar Guild threatens to undermine everything the Zhentarim operations in the city. Intent on increasing its strength and securing a foothold in Waterdeep, the entrepreneurial Doom Raider Zhentarim are looking for new blood to infuse their ranks – and a band of fearless adventurers might just be exactly what they're looking for.

In this series on the Zhentarim you'll find resources meant to inspire and aid you as you include the Zhentarim as a playable faction in your **Waterdeep: Dragon Heist** campaign. It includes the following:

- **Additional insight** into the Zhentarim and advice on how to include them in your campaign.
- **Hatred Surfacing**, a faction mission that has a party of 2nd level adventurers investigating murders in the Dock Ward and confronting a fanatic dark elf.
- **Deadly Delivery**, a faction mission that has a party of 3rd level adventurers facing a Xanathar Guild ambush and devious treachery to make a deadly delivery.
- **Shard Shunners**, a faction mission that has a party of 4th level adventurers delving into the dark sewers of Waterdeep in search of a missing halfling noble.
- **Tyrant's Turncoat**, a faction mission that has a party of 5th level adventurers risking their lives and freedom to investigate and eliminate a treacherous wizard.
- **Five unique battle maps** in several different versions all primed for virtual tabletop and tailored to the faction missions – but usable for any urban encounters!
- **DM's cheatsheets and monsters stat blocks** to help you quickly prepare for your party's adventures.

THE ZHENTARIM

The Black Network's bloody history spans more than two centuries. Formed in 1261 DR by the ambitious and evil wizard Manshoon, the Zhentarim started out as a mercenary network dedicated to the evil wizard's plans of conquest. Since Manshoon's death and the end of the Manshoon Wars (where the arcane clones of himself left behind by Manshoon fought bitter wars against each other) several decades ago, the Zhentarim no longer has a single clear leader. It is instead run by a scattering of local leaders heading up their own bands of Zhentarim throughout Northern Faerun.

While the Zhentarim's reputation has improved in recent decades, the core goals of the organization haven't changed much. The Black Network is still intent on expanding its trade activities — primarily mercenaries and goods, including weapons — and increasing its influence, through savvy maneuvering, clever manipulation and even brute force.

THE ZHENTARIM IN WATERDEEP

The local chapter of Zhentarim in Waterdeep has been divided into two sub-factions: Manshoon's Zhentarim and the Doom Raider Zhentarim, who are at war with each other.

The differences between the two branches are subtle, but should be noticeable by the players. Both seek money and power, but while Manshoon's goal is to rule Waterdeep with an iron fist as the Open Lord, the Doom Raiders seek influence within Waterdeep's current power structure. And where Manshoon's Zhentarim are more than willing to create chaos and carnage to reach their goals, the Doom Raider Zhentarim are more careful and methodical.

To make sure your party understands this nuance, you can have Davil Starsong explain it to them, when they speak with him. You can also make the difference visible. Perhaps the Doom Raider Zhentarim (from the Doom Raiders themselves to their low level goons) dress in fancier clothes in hues of black and green and with the Zhentarim symbol (a black winged snake) on the shoulder or chest, while Manshoon's Zhentarim are dirtier, dressed in all black and carry hidden snake tattoos instead of visible insignia. This both tells your players the allegiance of any Zhent they meet and also hints at the key differences between the branches.

THE DOOM RAIDER ZHENTARIM

We're given a bit of information about the Doom Raider Zhentarim in the introduction to Waterdeep: Dragon Heist, and more scattered bits and pieces throughout the campaign's different chapters. To summarize, the Doom Raider Zhentarim have the following characteristics:

- Its leaders are the Doom Raiders, Davil Starsong (Master of Opportunities and Negotiations), Istrid Horn (Master of Trade and Coin), Skeemo Weirdbottle (Master of Magic), Tashlyn Yafeera (Master of Arms and Mercenaries), and Ziraj the Hunter (Master of Assassination).
- It doesn't have a single base of operations. Davil Starsong has a room in the Yawning Portal and conducts most of his business in the tavern's taproom. Istrid Horn operates from a heavily guarded warehouse in the Dock District. Skeemo Weirdbottle runs his business, Weirdbottle's Concoctions, in the Trades Ward. We're not told where Tashlyn Yafeera lives, but can assume it's either with her employer, the magister Vorondar Levelstone, in the Southern Ward, or in a nondescript apartment somewhere. Ziraj the Hunter's home is purposefully kept hidden, but it could be in abandoned buildings or loft, or even outside the city walls.
- The exact size and strength of the Doom Raider Zhentarim isn't put into words, but since Istrid Horn has **thugs** guarding her, and Tashlyn Yafeera can readily provide the party with mercenaries, it's safe to assume that the Doom Raiders have at least a dozen **thugs** and **bandits** at their disposal.

THE DOOM RAIDERS

You'll find a descriptions of the Doom Raiders in Appendix B of Waterdeep: Dragon Heist. Adding to the information in the appendix, here's a few extra pointers about the adventurers.

Since the Doom Raiders have actually made a living out of raiding lich lairs, most of the dangers they can face in a city such as Waterdeep pales in comparison to what they've already survived. The Doom Raiders are hard to impress and even harder to scare, with an unwavering confidence that borders on arrogance. In addition, their many dangerous adventures might also have given the Doom Raiders different quirks and mannerisms, helping you make the powerful adventurers more memorable as NPCs:

- **Davil Starsong** always pours a little sip out on the table or floor, when he opens a new bottle of wine or liquor, never forgetting that one time he drank ankheg acid disguised as fine wine in a lich's lair.
- **Istrid Horn** has a scribe constantly taking down notes about the names and appearance of anyone she does business with. The dwarf once had her memory wiped by a magical trap and still has trouble putting names to faces.
- **Skeemo Weirdbottle** often seems to have conversations with himself – but in truth, he's talking to a sliver of the lich Athrax's consciousness, which took up residence in the gnome's skull several years ago.
- **Tashlyn Yafeera** has a nervous habit of looking over her shoulder every few seconds. A good thing when you're working as a bodyguard, but the habit persists even when she's alone and safe.
- **Ziraj the Hunter** has developed an almost childlike fear of the undead. His demeanor becomes hostile when talking about them, and in combat he'll either try to flee from undead or kill them fast and thoroughly, if he has no other option than to fight.

DEALING WITH THE ZHENTARIM

The Doom Raider Zhentarim are one of the more interesting factions and the campaign book gives us plenty of ideas on how to make their relationship with the party more dynamic. Throughout the different chapters, your party will have ample opportunity to meet and interact with the Doom Raiders – and even more so if you use the faction missions during periods of downtime.

During Chapter 1: A Friend in Need, the party are inserted into the middle of the conflict-triangle between the Doom Raider Zhentarim, Manshoun's Zhentarim and the Xanathar Guild, with the very first encounter in the Yawning Portal. You can even have Yagra Stonefist explain the situation to the party, if she finds them friendly and interested (see [our document on Chapter 1: A Friend in Need](#) for more details).

At the start of Chapter 2: Trollskull Alley, the 'Hatred Surfacing' faction mission makes for a good challenge for a party of 2nd level adventurers. As described in the document for 'Hatred Surfacing', you can also use the faction mission to introduce Ziraj the Hunter to the party.

During Chapter 2: Trollskull Alley, your party might also find themselves looking for funds to renovate the Trollskull Tavern, which could easily lead them to Istrid Horn and her moneylending business (see [our document on Chapter 2: Trollskull Alley](#) for more details).

Just before starting Chapter 3: Fireball, you can have Davil task the 3rd level adventurers with making a 'Deadly Delivery' for Skeemo Weirdbottle. This introduces them to the arrogant gnome and foreshadows the final mission.

During Chapter 3: Fireball, the party will once again find themselves in the middle of the messy and confusing conflict between the two divisions of the Zhentarim as they investigate the explosion in Trollskull Alley. Davil might aid them in their efforts, eager to remove suspicion from the Doom Raiders and avoid trouble with the City Watch (see [our document on Chapter 3: Fireball](#) for more details).

In the aftermath of Chapter 3: Fireball, it's suggested that the Doom Raider Zhentarim are thrown into turmoil. Davil is being held by the City Watch, Istrid Horn is going into hiding and Tashlyn Yafeera picks up the reins as temporary leader of the Doom Raider Zhentarim. This introduces the party to Tashlyn and makes the organization feel even more real – and underlines that no one is above the law in Waterdeep!

At the start – or even in the middle – of Chapter 4: Dragon Season, you have an opportunity to pit your party of 4th level adventurers against a dangerous band of Shard Shunners in the faction mission 'Shard Shunners'. For advice on how to fit faction missions and downtime in before or after the encounter chain in chapter 4, see [our document on Chapter 4: Dragon Season](#).

Finally, either just before the delve into the Vault of Dragons, or just before closing the campaign book for Waterdeep: Dragon Heist, you can send your 5th level adventurers on a dangerous mission to investigate and eliminate Skeemo Weirdbottle. It's the perfect way to cement an exciting relationship with the Doom Raider Zhentarim: with the blood of a traitor!

However you play the Zhentarim and use the information in this document, your players should be able to make their relationship with the Zhentarim an exciting and profitable one. So here's to dubious morals, gleaming gold and endless adventure!