

DEADLY DELIVERY

The Zhentarim's second mission is a simple errand: deliver potions from Skeemo to a mysterious customer.

THE MISSION

Once again it is Davil Starsong who gives the mission to the party, either as they meet him for another reason, or by sending one of his winged snakes to fetch them. Whether he asks the entire party to undertake the mission or only Zhentarim characters is up to you, but since the mission could take a while, it might be nice to have the whole party involved. Either way, Davil describes the mission like this:

"All right. So here's the deal. A friend of ours named Skeemo runs a small shop in the Trades Ward. He's made some potions of mind reading for a client. Bastard's lazy, doesn't wanna deliver them himself – and the client is shy. I want you to head over to his shop, pick up the potions, and deliver them to the client safely. There'll be a tip for you."

In this take on the faction mission, we tackle two problems with the mission brief given in Chapter 2 of Waterdeep: Dragon Heist. One, we're never told why Skeemo is having *potions of poison* masquerading as *potions of mind reading* delivered to the Black Viper. Second, simply delivering some potions from A to B isn't very exciting or challenging.

As to the first point, Skeemo is having *potions of poison* delivered to the Black Viper because Manshoon (whom Skeemo secretly works for) wants to kill the Black Viper for refusing to join his faction of the Zhentarim. Since it would be easy for the Black Viper to trace the poison back to Skeemo, should she survive, the gnome asks Davil Starsong to send some recruits (the party) to deliver the potions for him.

Secondly, we introduce a complication to the delivery: Xanathar's Guild. Wise to the fact that Skeemo is a Zhentarim agent, a small Xanathar band has been keeping an eye on Skeemo's shop. As the party leaves the shop, they scramble to stage an ambush, both to secure valuable loot and to kill what they believe to be Zhentarim agents.

WEIRDBOTTLE CONCOCTIONS

The party easily finds 'Weirdbottle's Concoctions' on the ground floor of a small, two-story building in the Trades Ward. The shop's single square room is lined with shelves carrying vials in varying sizes, as well as individual ingredients for sale, such as crow's feet, bat guano and other odorous oddities. A wooden counter lines the back wall of the shop, behind which is the small laboratory where Skeemo Weirdbottle spends most of his time. A small stair leads up to Skeemo's apartment on the second floor.

Skeemo is an unpleasant fellow, rude and arrogant. He also has a weird habit of talking with himself (see 'The Doom Raiders' on page 1). When meeting with the party, he'll treat them as worthless underlings, ordering them around in a nasal drawl. "Do you see who Davil's sending me, my old friend? Oh, how far we've fallen... Well, they'll have to do. You – recruits! You'll deliver these potions to a lady in a purple cloak near the God Catcher-statue in the Castle Ward. Careful now – they're worth more coin than you lot have probably ever seen!" the gnome says, before handing over the silk-lined coffer containing the four potions. "No, no, my friend, I don't need to tell them to keep their hands off the merchandise. Surely they value their lives more than that!"

THE AMBUSH

As the party leaves Skeemo's shop to deliver the potions, they attract the attention of a Xanathar band, who sets off to follow and ambush the party at an opportune moment.

SCALY SCOUT

Across the alley from Weirdbottle's Concoctions sits the **psionic kobold** Ixla, disguised as a halfling vagrant. Ixla and her siblings have been altered by the mind flayer Nihiloor (see Chapter 5: Spring Madness), granting them the ability to communicate telepathically, cast spells and even blast foes with their minds. As the party heads toward the Castle Ward, Ixla follows along stealthily 30 feet behind them. Using her telepathy, she communicates the party's movements to a band of psionic kobolds and bugbears traveling in the sewers beneath the street, while she looks for an opportune place to spring the ambush.

Traveling Discreetly. If the party makes efforts to transport the potions discreetly – wearing disguises, moving stealthily through the city, etc. – have them make a DC 13 group skill check, using Deception, Stealth or another appropriate check. Spells like *invisibility* or *disguise self* can grant advantage on this check. If at least half the party succeeds, Ixla loses track of the party, and they have effectively avoided the ambush.

Spotting the Tail. Once before the ambush is sprung, have Ixla make a Stealth (+4) check with advantage (without telling the party). Any characters with passive Perception higher than the result notices a small figure following about 30 feet behind the party. If a player tells you that their character is actively looking for pursuers, allow them to make a Perception check and use the result instead of their passive Perception, if it's higher.

Confronting Ixla. If the party spots Ixla and tries to confront her, she immediately uses her telepathy to spring the ambush. If a character manages to catch the kobold unaware (succeeding on a DC 13 Stealth or Deception check, depending on how they go about it), they'll still have to quickly incapacitate or neutralize her with force or a spell like *charm person* to avoid the trap being sprung. Should they succeed, Ixla is easily charmed or threatened into telling the party anything they want to know. However, if the ambushers hiding under the streets don't hear from Ixla for a minute or so, they'll soon come up from the sewers to attack the party.

Potions of Poison

The characters might be curious about the potions they're transporting, which could lead to them discovering that the potions are in fact *potions of poison* and not *potions of mind reading*. A proficient character can examine the potion (looking at and smelling the contents, or tasting a little drop) and make a DC 13 Intelligence (Arcana or Nature) check to learn the true nature of the pale substance in the flasks. Of course, a character that drinks an entire potion quickly learns that it is a *potion of poison*.

See 'Conclusion' on the following page for other ways the party might discover the potions' poisonous nature, and the consequences of sharing or not sharing that information.

AMBUSH FROM BELOW

Unless the party manages to elude or incapacitate Ixla, they'll find themselves ambushed before reaching their destination. The ambush consists of 2 **psionic kobolds** (including Ixla) plus 1 **bugbear** for each party member of 3rd level or higher.

Trades Ward Encounter Map. If Ixla wasn't spotted and had time to choose the ambush spot, the ambushers spring up from sewer grates on either end of the empty and shadowy street running vertically on the left of the Trades Ward Encounter Map. If Ixla was forced to spring the ambush early, the ambushers all come up from the same sewer grate in front of the party on the wide and busy street running horizontally on the bottom of the Trades Ward Encounter Map (remember, if it isn't night, the sunlight of an open street will hinder the light-sensitive kobolds). The buildings of the Trades Ward are two- or three-story buildings, reaching up to 30 feet into the air. Crates, tables, barrels and even lampposts can provide cover to combatants.

Tactics. The heavily armed bugbears immediately move to kill the characters, while the psionic kobolds focus on obtaining the potions. If they are unsure who's carrying the package, they can use *detect thoughts* to figure it out. They'll then use their mind blast to neutralize the party and *command* to force a character to hand over the potions. If more than half the band of monsters are defeated, or the City Watch shows up, the bugbears and kobolds flee back into the sewer through the nearest sewer grate.

City Watch. At your discretion (if the party is losing badly, for example) a City Watch patrol (four human **veterans**) might arrive on the scene after a few rounds of combat, especially if the ambush was sprung in a wide and busy street. The Watch sides with the party, but won't chase the monsters into the sewers, knowing that they're likely to run into more danger than they can handle. When combat has ended, Sergeant Pegrina Dawncastle (a young human female with blonde hair and a long scar on her cheek) asks the party if they know why they were attacked. A good lie or explanation (DC 13 Deception or Persuasion) will convince her to let the characters go without further questioning. However, if she isn't convinced, the Sergeant has her men search the party, confiscating the potions if they find them. Pegrina informs the party that they can check in with the Watch Office in the Trades Ward in a few days, where the potions will be returned to them if they're found to be harmless.

THE DELIVERY

When the party finally reaches the God Catcher in the Castle Ward, they'll find Esvele Rosznar sitting on the back of a hire-coach, her face hidden by a purple hood. If approached with the potions, she silently hands them a black velvet pouch containing 15 platinum pieces, takes the potions, and orders her driver to depart. She ignores any questions, but does give a nod of thanks if the party warns her about the potions being poisonous.

If a character tries to follow the hire coach back to Rosznar Estate in the Sea Ward, they must make a DC 13 Stealth check. On a failure, Esvele spots the pursuer, jumps off the hire-coach and darts into an alley, trying to shake off the characters. Whether you'll allow the characters a chance to keep up with her – either running a street chase (see the *Dungeon Master's Guide* p. 251) or making several contested Perception and Stealth checks – is up to you. As long as Esvele suspects she is being followed, however, she won't return to her family estate, instead leading her pursuers on an endless hunt through the streets of Waterdeep.

CONCLUSION

If the party successfully delivers the potions to the Black Viper, they'll get to keep the 15 pp, and Davil Starsong rewards each Zhentarim member with 1 renown. Should they fail to deliver the potions, they'll receive only Skeemo's endless scorn and derision.

Viper's Vengeance. If the party didn't warn Esvele about the potions being poisonous, the young noble unwittingly poisons herself at a formal dinner party a few days later, ruining a spectacular theft she had planned and nearly blowing her cover. You can have the nimble thief confront the party soon after, perhaps ambushing a character to get answers, burglarizing the party's home, or even sneaking some of the poison into a cask of ale delivered to the Trollskull Tavern, ruining business and causing a scandal. However she goes about exacting her vengeance, have her leave a note that informs the party of the poisonous potions: "*You're fools to think poison would kill a snake. But now you know – my fangs have venom too. The Black Viper.*"

Confiscate and Destroy. If the potions were confiscated by the City Watch, they're examined, found to be poisonous and destroyed within the next few days. When the party shows up to retrieve them they are instead fined 100 gold pieces for possession of an illegal, poisonous substance with intent to sell.

A Poisonous Seed. If the characters discover that the potions were *potions of poison* and not *potions of mindreading* and tell Davil Starsong, he'll thank them for the information, but ask them to keep quiet about it while he figures out what's going on. This plants a seed however – a suspicion about Skeemo Weirdbottle that'll have a satisfying end with the fourth Zhentarim faction mission, where the party are sent to eliminate the traitorous gnome. If the party confronts Skeemo, he'll tell them not to question their betters if they want a future with the Black Network, and then begin scheming for other ways to be rid of the nosy adventurers.

DM's CHEATSHEET

THE MISSION

- Davil tells the party to deliver potions of mind reading from Skeemo's shop in the Trades Ward to a client.
- Weirdbottle's Concoctions is a small shop filled with flasks and ingredients and a small alchemy lab.
- Skeemo orders the party to deliver the potions to a lady in a purple cloak near the God Catcher in the Castle Ward.

THE AMBUSH

- A **psionic kobold** named Ixla trails the party in disguise.
- DC 13 group skill check (Deception/Stealth) to evade Ixla.
- Ixla makes +4 Stealth check with advantage vs party's passive Perception. A character who actively looks for pursuers can make a Perception check and use instead.
- If she realizes she has been spotted, Ixla springs the ambush in the open street. If not spotted, Ixla springs the ambush in a empty, shadowy street.
- 2 **psionic kobolds** plus 1 **bugbear** per character ambush the party.
- 4 City Watch **veterans** might arrive to fight the monsters and question the party, possibly confiscating the potions (DC 13 Deception/Persuasion to avoid).

THE DELIVERY

- Esvele Rosznar sits in hire-coach, face hidden by hood. Silently takes the potions and gives a pouch with 15pp.
- Esvele can be followed back to Rosznar Estate in the Sea Ward with DC 13 Stealth check.

CONCLUSION

- If successful, the party can keep the 15pp and Zhentarim characters gain 1 renown.
- If Esvele is poisoned, she enacts vengeance on the party.
- Confiscated potions are destroyed and party fined 100gp.

BUGBEAR

Medium humanoid (goblinoid), chaotic evil

Armor Class 16 (hide armor, shield)

Hit Points 27 (5d8 + 5)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
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15 (+2)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	8 (-1)	11 (+0)	9 (-1)
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Skills Stealth +6, Survival +2

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Common, Goblin

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Brute. A melee weapon deals one extra die of its damage when the bugbear hits with it (included in the attack).

Surprise Attack. If the bugbear surprises a creature and hits it with an attack during the first round of combat, the target takes an extra 7 (2d6) damage from the attack.

Actions

Morningstar. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d8 + 2) piercing damage.

Javelin. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) piercing damage in melee or 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage at range.

PSIONIC KOBOLD

Small humanoid (kobold), lawful evil

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 9 (2d6 + 2)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
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7 (-2)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	12 (+1)	8 (-1)
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Damage Resistances psychic

Skills Insight +3, Perception +3, Stealth +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Draconic, Telepathy 60 ft.

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Magic Resistance. The kobold has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Pack Tactics. The kobold has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the kobold's allies is within 5 ft. of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the kobold has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

Innate Spellcasting. The kobold's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 11, +3 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

1/day each: *command*, *detect thoughts*, *levitate*

Actions

Dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) piercing damage.

Sling. *Ranged Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Mind Blast (recharge 5-6). The kobold magically emits psychic energy in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in that area must succeed on a DC 11 Intelligence saving throw or take 9 (2d8 + 2) psychic damage and be stunned for 1 minute. A creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.