

AGE 12+

# DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

## MENZOBERRANZAN CITY OF INTRIGUE™

ROLEPLAYING GAME SUPPLEMENT

Brian R. James ♦ Eric Menge

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# Introduction

A seething powerhouse of malevolent drow, each striving tirelessly for supremacy in the eyes of their fell goddess, Menzoberranzan is the pinnacle of conceited depravity. Nevertheless, peer deep through the strata of selfishness, debauchery, and vice and one can behold a grand civilization rich in history, culture, and artistry. It's this tantalizing dichotomy between the beautiful and the profane that draws great interest toward drow society. Presented in this book is the fabled Underdark city of Menzoberranzan, birthplace of famed drow ranger Drizzt Do'Urden. But this isn't his story—it's many stories, yours chief among them.

This book is designed for maximum utility. No matter what edition of the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*® rules you're using, you'll find almost all of the material in this book usable in your game. You can use this book to run a campaign set during the years before the birth of Drizzt, in the midst of the War of the Spider Queen, or during the current era of the *FORGOTTEN REALMS*® campaign setting. Menzoberranzan is a whole environment waiting for you and your players to explore, in whatever way you want to use it.

## A MENZOBERRANZAN CAMPAIGN

Running a group of evil drow characters through adventures rife with intrigue and treachery can be quite a different experience from most *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* campaigns. These six characteristics best encapsulate the spirit of a *Menzoberranzan: City of Intrigue* campaign.

### 1. You're a Drow

In this campaign setting, you're no goody two-shoes surface dweller visiting the City of Spiders on holiday. No, you're a resident. Whether drow or slave, noble scion or commoner, you call Menzoberranzan home. This is your opportunity to disregard the spiteful propaganda of the surface elves and step into the role of one of D&D's most iconic and insidious races.

### 2. Evil Reigns

Menzoberranzan is a nasty place. In drow culture, treachery and murder are commonplace, as are acts of debauchery. Drow in this setting routinely have orgies with demons and engage in despicable acts of bloodletting. Although the tenets of drow society are presented tactfully, players should be under no illusions; Menzoberranzan is populated by vile and

capricious sadists, who seek to improve their personal standing through the suffering and misery of others.

### 3. Lolth Is Supreme

No other force in drow society is as pervasive as the Church of Lolth. Although other divine entities have appeared in drow religious rites over the millennia, all are secondary to Lolth and are barely visible in the shadow of the Spider Queen. Beings such as Vhaeraun and Ghaunadaur have adherents in some eras, but few are worshiped with the same devotion—and fear—as Lolth. It is she, and she alone, who stands at the heart of drow religion.

### 4. Station Is Everything

Despite its members being born of chaos, drow society is governed by a deeply entrenched hierarchy. Each drow divides everyone else—including other drow—into three categories.

- ◆ Those with more power, who must be appeased and placated (at least until they can be replaced)
- ◆ Those who are useful to one's own advancement, who must be exploited in all ways possible
- ◆ The weak, who are worthless except as labor or disposable troops

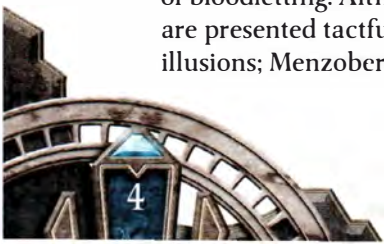
As drow see it, each day is a new chance to improve your station or to eliminate those in your way.

### 5. Secrets Are Currency

Drow are not mindless brutes who charge headlong into the unknown. In fact, the residents of Menzoberranzan, called Menzoberranyr, are meticulous and calculating in their endeavors. Although wealth and might are certainly respected, the true currency of the drow lies in secrets. Information is power, and with it an individual can wield influence far beyond his or her station. The machinations of the drow are legendary, and these sorts of long-term schemes should be part of any Menzoberranzan campaign.

### 6. The Underdark

High adventure isn't confined to the city alone. The myriad intrigues of the drow can send the player characters deep into the gloom of the Underdark. Although drow are renowned for their ruthlessness and villainy, there are creatures in the deep places of the world that give even them pause. Despite the dangers, few Menzoberranyr shy from an opportunity to exploit the myriad riches of the Deep Realms. From the neighboring Dark Dominion to the Shadowed Ways and beyond, adventure in the Underdark awaits.





## FOR THE DM

Most of this book is designed primarily with the Dungeon Master in mind. It will help you craft an exciting and memorable campaign centered on drow themes.

**Chapter 1: Campaign of Intrigue** is advice for you on how to set up the basic framework of a drow campaign.

**Chapter 2: The Way of Lolth** narrows the scope, revealing the inner workings of drow religion and society. You can share much of this information with players, perhaps leaving some facts for their characters to discover when they begin adventuring.

**Chapter 3: Drow Factions** provides you with a full set of tools to create exactly the sort of challenge you and your players want to experience. Here are details of the most distinctive drow noble houses in Menzoberranzan; a look at the city's great academy, Tier Breche, and the houseless drow mercenaries known as Bregan D'aerthe; and descriptions of three major power groups that want to destroy the drow and all they stand for. When each player chooses the factions his or her character will be associated with, you can share with that player the background choices and other details provided in that section.

**Chapter 4: City of Spiders** is where Menzoberranzan comes alive. Each section of the city and its environs is detailed here, so that you can paint a

realistic picture as the characters move around in the setting. Much of the general information given here is common knowledge to those who live in the city, and thus likely to be known by drow player characters as well. Some of the specifics, though, are a different matter, and might need to be discovered.

**Chapter 5: The Northdark** is a collection of Underdark adventuring opportunities, locations that you can bring into play if you decide to take the campaign, quite literally, in a different direction.

**Chapter 6: Be a Drow** is directed at players, but you should be familiar with it as well.

## FOR PLAYERS

*Menzoberranzan: City of Intrigue* discusses the underpinnings of drow society and beliefs, including their Lolth-dominated religion—all of which is vital information to players of drow characters.

In addition, this book includes guidelines for selecting a drow house to ally with, as well as character backgrounds to aid a player in fleshing out a character's backstory and motivations.

**Chapter 6: Be a Drow** is designed expressly for players, supplementing and fleshing out what the rest of the book covers with advice on how to capture the drow persona at the gaming table.

# Campaign of Intrigue

Running a game set in a reviled city of villainy such as Menzoberranzan often presents interesting new twists or challenges for Dungeon Masters used to running traditional high fantasy campaigns. Adventures within the city proper have as much excitement, bloodshed, and treasure as a traditional dungeon crawl, but usually involve more intrigue and less exploration. With campaigns centered on intrigue, entire sessions might pass without a single combat encounter. However, the rich possibilities for roleplaying in a world of cruel, ruthless nobles can provide hours of entertainment.

*Menzoberranzan: City of Intrigue* provides a framework for building an entire campaign in the infamous drow city. This chapter provides a springboard for designing an Underdark campaign oriented primarily around a party of drow adventurers. The chapter includes the following sections.

- ◆ **Campaign Flavor:** Different campaigns might focus on intrigue or insurrection, raids upon the surface, or all-out war with other Underdark races.
- ◆ **Campaign Era:** Determining the time period for your campaign can influence its overall tone and feel. A campaign set during the founding years of the city is very different from one that takes place during the War of the Spider Queen.
- ◆ **Schemes in the Shadows:** As your campaign unfolds, the city does not remain static. Menzoberranzan is rife with competing factions, and the characters need to know where they stand with each of those groups at any time. This section gives you a simple system for keeping track of this information, plus some thoughts on plot elements that can radically alter what the adventurers are up against.
- ◆ **Making the City Your Own:** This brief section discusses customizing the city for your unique interpretation of the game.





# CAMPAIGN FLAVOR

The first step in creating a Menzoberranzan campaign is deciding on the particular flavor for your campaign. While it's possible to run a typical dungeon crawl campaign with the materials provided in this book, *Menzoberranzan: City of Intrigue* offers a great opportunity for Dungeon Masters to explore alternate styles of gameplay.

## Political Intrigue

The everyday plotting and backstabbing common to drow society make for a compelling campaign of political intrigue. The long-simmering rivalries between the noble houses of Menzoberranzan threaten to break out into open warfare at a moment's notice. Sprinkle in the machinations of an outside faction or two, and you have a nearly limitless supply of plot hooks for your campaign.

Placing the player characters within the middle of a power struggle is a hallmark of political intrigue. With the likelihood of the adventurers being of questionable morale character themselves, they might enjoy playing one or more of the factions against each other. Or they might slowly grind both groups down, pretending to maintain the balance of power between the two while they siphon power for themselves.

Goals in a political game can include:

**Spy Against your Rivals:** Few races are as innately attuned to stealth and subterfuge as drow. A great espionage campaign would evolve over time. At low levels the characters might start out as common burglars or cutpurses working for a Braeryn street gang. As they rise in standing and notoriety, the characters are secretly approached and recruited by Bregan D'aerthe to infiltrate and gather information against the noble houses. Each successive mission becomes more difficult than the last, until they are performing epic feats of espionage such as spying on Lolth in the Demonweb Pits—think Mission Impossible, but even more dangerous.

## THE GODFATHER

**Did You Know:** As R. A. Salvatore was designing the underpinnings of Menzoberranzan society for the novel *Homeland*, his greatest inspiration was drawn from Mario Puzo's epic crime novel *The Godfather*. It's easy to envision a drow matron mother as a mob boss with her house priestesses serving as "made members" of the crime family. Males in this scenario serve the role of *soldato* (soldier), reporting up the hierarchy to a *capo*, represented in drow society as a high priestess.

**Run a Gang:** Lead an alliance of noble houses and wage war against your rivals. The characters might start as low-level enforcers for one or two houses, tasked with overtly intimidating a rival house or faction. As they succeed in their assigned duties, the adventurers gain in station, which in turn permits them to rise quickly within the organization. The key to this storyline is to have the characters graduate quickly from being mere pawns and thugs, to being a driving force for the organization. As a drow of low station, one or more of the characters might have sought the support of a rival house or an individual patron. Now that those characters are indebted to that rival faction or individual, they could be asked to carry out secret tasks that run counter to the goals of the party as a whole, creating further plot lines.

## Ideological Scheming

Another campaign flavor you could explore is one of ideological conflict. As presented, Menzoberranzan is firmly under the influence of Lolth's strong-handed dogma. An intriguing campaign seed might be to pick one or more long-standing tenets of drow society, and then pit the player characters against that ideal.

An ideological game might include one of the following goals.

**Abolish the Matriarchy:** Establish equality for males in Menzoberranzan society. This seed works best with a male-dominated party that has at least one high-ranking female sympathetic to their cause.

**Spread Heresy:** Spread the teachings of other faiths beyond Lolth. The characters might adopt the faiths of Eilistraee, Vhaeraun, or Ghaunadaur and work to weaken the Church of Lolth, either secretly or overtly.

**Spread Insurrection:** Lead the slaves of Menzoberranzan to freedom or open rebellion. Whether out of genuine sympathy or as a power play, the characters galvanize the non-drow communities toward insurrection.

**Topple the Nobility:** Weaken the influence of the Ruling Council to affect change in the city. Perhaps the characters are members of a merchant clan or other commoner organization that seeks to strip the nobility of their undue privilege.

**Lead an Exodus:** Break the drow free of their subterranean shackles and lead them into the world above. Perhaps the characters have discovered that *faerzress* is responsible for the drow compulsion to remain in the Underdark and they're seeking a magical means of freeing their people from this millennia-old affliction.

**Turning the Tables:** As an alternative to any of these options, the player characters can be drow who are tasked by their houses to put down the rebellious efforts of undesirable forces in the city.

## Rise of the Underdark

In a Rise of the Underdark campaign, the player characters are drow of Menzoberranzan who are focused on raiding the surface world for any of a variety of purposes. Menzoberranzan is their home base, their place of (relative) safety, while their adventures take place mostly on the surface world or in Underdark passages leading from the city to the surface. Such a campaign is not necessarily free of all the intrigue and backstabbing that characterizes drow society, but it becomes a background element rather than the primary focus of the game.

Here are three possible reasons for raiding the surface world.

**Harness Arcane Power for Lolth:** In 1480 DR, Lolth is trying to take over dead Mystra's control of arcane magic. Under the command of her priestesses, drow raiding parties seek out magical artifacts, the remains of mighty dead wizards, and places of power. At these sites, the drow seize control of the item in question or siphon the magical energy of the place off and bring it to Lolth through her priestesses. The following section discussing Campaign Eras gives more information about this effort.

**Capture Slaves:** The proper functioning of Menzoberranzan relies on the labor of slaves, many of which are captured from the surface world. The characters might be part of an organized force that regularly brings slaves to the city for sale, or independent drow looking for a quick profit. In a twist, they might be duergar or members of other slaving races hoping to capture slaves for eventual sale in the drow city.

**Kill All the Elves:** Inspired by religious fervor, a thirst for personal revenge, or sheer hatred, the drow often raid the surface for the sole reason of killing as many surface-dwelling elves as possible.

## Drow at War

A campaign centered on war pits the drow player characters against the dwarves of Mithral Hall, the deep gnomes of Blingdenstone, or other races in the Underdark. Such a campaign might focus on defending Menzoberranzan or on assaulting the cities and strongholds of its enemies, or a mix of the two as the fortunes of war shift. A war campaign might also involve multiple different wars against different foes and under different circumstances.

A war campaign offers an opportunity to play through some of the great events of Menzoberranzan's history described in the next section of this chapter, including the Time of Troubles and the War of the Spider Queen.

Any of the following directions can provide interesting direction to a drow campaign.

**Punish the Offenders:** The drow of Menzoberranzan marshal their warriors to strike against a

nearby community as an act of revenge for some slight, real or imagined. For example, in 1371 DR, Triel Baenre ordered the destruction of Blingdenstone in retaliation for their support of the dwarves of Mithral Hall during an earlier conflict. The offense might also be a matter of encroaching on territory or stealing resources, harboring a drow fugitive, or simply drawing the ire of Lolth in some manner.

**Smite the Infidels:** This is a war against another drow city. It might be a city where a god other than Lolth is worshiped (for example, Ghaunadaur and Vhaeraun were worshiped alongside Lolth in nearby Eryndlyn before its destruction in the Spellplague), or a city that has (at least in the opinion of Menzoberranzan's priestesses) earned Lolth's disfavor through some blasphemous act. In such a campaign, priestesses play a very important role, and there's no room for anything but unswerving devotion to Lolth—unless one or more of the characters turns out to be a secret sympathizer with the enemy!

**War of Conquest:** For some reason, the drow decide that Menzoberranzan isn't big enough and a war party sets out to conquer territory for the city's expansion. This campaign might take place at a point in time where Menzoberranzan's population is exploding and the drow simply need more room. Alternatively, a dissident group or sect might flee Menzoberranzan and launch an assault in an effort to found a new city free from the tyrannical rule of House Baenre.

**Defend Menzoberranzan:** In this campaign, it is Menzoberranzan that is under attack, whether it's from duergar, dwarves, svirfneblin, illithids, or some other Underdark race. The characters' role might be shoring up the city's defenses, or they could form a strike team sent on missions to disrupt enemy supply trains, assassinate their leaders, or plant magical explosives in their midst. During the War of the Spider Queen, Menzoberranzan came under attack by duergar from Gracklstugh, the Scourged Legion, and agents of the Jaezred Chaulssin.

**Civil War:** From time to time, intrigue among the noble houses rises to such a fever pitch that outright war breaks out. It's common enough for one house to launch an assault against another, but such conflicts can escalate if the attacking house doesn't finish the job quickly. If the defenders have time to call on their allies, the twisted networks of allied and rival houses can erupt into open conflict with two or multiple different sides.

# CAMPAIGN ERA

Once you've chosen a campaign flavor, give some thought to the time setting of your campaign. Your choice of flavor might suggest a certain era of play—for example, if you want to run a Rise of the Underdark campaign featuring drow characters harnessing arcane power for Lolth, you might set your campaign around the time of Danifae's appearance in the city, in 1480 DR. Most of the material in this book will be useful to you regardless of which era you choose, so select the era that holds the most appeal for you and your players.

Presented below are brief campaign ideas tied to specific periods in the history of Menzoberranzan.

## The Founding (-3917 DR to 1297 DR)

Five thousand years ago, the great drow city of Golothaer was busily destroying itself in a civil war. Drow houses faithful to the Spider Queen battled for supremacy against renegade factions aligned with the slime deity Ghaunadaur. As decades of death and destruction plunged the once-spectacular city into ruin, a proud and formidable priestess of Lolth named Menzoberra turned away from the fray, gathering seven families of wealth and station to found a new settlement loyal to the Way of Lolth.

Leaving the chaos of war-torn Golothaer, Menzoberra's band set forth into the unknown, trusting to Lolth's guidance. As Lolth's chosen one, Menzoberra received dream-visions sent by the Spider Queen to guide the refugees' progress through the Underdark. After wandering the Underdark for many years, the band of pilgrims suffered its first major setback in a bloody confrontation with the dwarves of the Black Axe Clan. The drow lost nearly half their number that day in the Cavern of Cloven Heads. Before his body faded mysteriously into the stone floor, the last dwarf to fall wished upon the drow invaders "the doom of many eyes."

Menzoberra's band eventually came to a huge vault filled with giant, edible mushrooms, overrun with swarms of spiders that bubbled up from the depths, and illuminated by the soft radiance of a myriad of prismatic lichens. A brief survey of the region found the ground choked with the bones of dwarves who had fallen prey to the cavern's current tenant: an immense beholder whose body was as wide as the base of Golothaer's largest tower.

Finding themselves promptly engaged in a perilous confrontation with the gigantic beholder (called Many Eyes by local dwarves, the drow later learned) and its mind-slaved minions, the drow made preparations for a hasty retreat. Suddenly, the drow were

gifted by a rare visit from Lolth, who floated above the beleaguered band in the form of a beautiful female head whose tresses trailed away into long, dark arachnid legs. The Spider Queen told the drow that they were her chosen people, and this was the place she had chosen for them. If they were worthy of her, they would defeat Many Eyes and make this cavern their home.

Many drow perished fighting Many Eyes, but in the end they prevailed, and it was Menzoberra who delivered the killing blow. Left to stand with her at the baptism of their new home were the families named S'sril, Thaeyalla, Baenre, Masq'il'yr, Nasadra, Tucheth, and Uusralla. They made a home together in the beholder's treasure-strewn lair, a large cave in the southern wall of the great vault. There they raised an altar to Lolth, which was rewarded by the appearance of a demonic yochlol. This handmaiden of Lolth told the survivors to call their home Menzoberranzan, in recognition of the priestess's favor earned in the service of the Spider Queen.

All too soon, the same feuding that destroyed Golothaer, born of pride, cruelty, and bloodlust, surfaced within the drow of Menzoberranzan. A blood feud between House Thaeyalla and House Nasadra quickly threatened to destabilize the newly founded settlement. When Menzoberra sided with House Nasadra, the wizards of House Thaeyalla spent their own lives to fuel a ritual that rent the side cavern of the noble houses asunder. In a single cataclysmic strike, the explosion obliterated the houses of Thaeyalla, Masq'il'yr, Tucheth, and Uusralla, as well as Menzoberra herself.

The explosion transformed the former side cavern into the great plateau that came to be known as Qu'ellarz'orl. By some miracle, the great central pillar of the main cavern survived the explosion, keeping the entire vault from collapsing. The drow called it Narbondel for its strength.

The bitter Nasadra survivors sought to proclaim their rule over the other remaining drow, but the tattered priestesses of House S'sril defied them. The other surviving house was Baenre, which was powerful enough to decide the issue either way. In the end, House Baenre sided with S'sril. To prevent further bloodshed, it was proposed that House Nasadra would travel on to found another city devoted to the glory of Lolth.

Lolth appeared directly, and firmly blessed the wisdom and forbearance of House Baenre. The Spider Queen then laid down the Way of Lolth, the basic laws under which both cities would live. She also decreed that the two cities must remain amicable to each other without fail, or both would face her wrath. House Nasadra left Menzoberranzan that night, and went on to found the drow city of Ched Nasad decades later.

A campaign set during this period could focus on the founding itself. If the “Exploring the Deeps” style of campaign flavor appeals to you, perhaps the player characters start by journeying from Golothaer with Menzoberra, serving as advance scouts for the exiles and navigating the hazards of the Underdark. Even in this earliest stage, rivalry among the seven noble houses could be a significant factor in the campaign, made all the more interesting by the fact that the houses are not yet established in any ranking.

Alternatively, a similar campaign could take place in the early years after the establishment of the city. The player characters could be responsible for exploring the caverns and tunnels around Menzoberranzan, ensuring that the city is relatively safe.

If a “Rise of the Underdark” campaign is what you’re after, the year 942 DR saw drow raiders plundering cities along the Sword Coast, enslaving many humans living along the Dessarin River. Two small nations (Talmost and Harpshield) near present-day Waterdeep were ravaged and burned.

If you want to run a “Drow at War” campaign, consider the strange conflict against Chaulssin in 734 DR. Raiders from Menzoberranzan arrived at the city and found it deserted, though it was haunted by creatures from the realm of shadow. A few days before Menzoberranzan’s attack, the god Vhaeraun had warned the drow of Chaulssin of the impending assault and helped them flee into Shadow, where they founded their own city.

Finally, this period covers more than five thousand years, during which time the city experienced tumult enough to fuel a hundred campaigns. The recorded history of the Realms tells us little about these events, so you should feel free to make up events of your own and set them in whatever year you choose. Surely during those years the city was from time to time wracked by civil war, ravaged by plague, and besieged by duergar, illithids, or other Underdark denizens. This period offers you the greatest degree of creative flexibility of all the eras discussed here.

## Sable Years

### (1297 DR to 1358 DR)

In the Year of the Singing Skull (1297 DR), an infant named Drizzt was born to House Do’Urden, marking the beginning of its end. Destined to be sacrificed to Lolth as the third-born male of his family, the young drow survived only through a series of fortuitous events.

As an adolescent, Drizzt brought great favor to House Do’Urden through his accolades at the Academy. Yet by the time he graduated from Tier Breche in the Year of the Adder (1327 DR), it had become increasingly noticeable that the young warrior did not possess a drow’s love of treachery and intrigue. Early the following year, Drizzt fled Menzoberranzan

for the wilds of the Underdark. With only the magical panther Guenhwyvar as a companion, Drizzt endured ten years of exile in the Dark Dominion that stretched out beyond the city. Unable to slay Drizzt and reclaim Lolth’s favor, House Do’Urden was later destroyed by House Baenre in the Year of the Prince (1357 DR).

A campaign set during the period between the birth of Drizzt and the demise of his house provides many tantalizing possibilities for fans of the *Legend of Drizzt* series of novels by R.A. Salvatore. One scenario might see a player taking on the role of Drizzt, with the rest of the party adopting other personas within House Do’Urden. Through careful roleplaying, the Drizzt character might persuade others in his family (the party members) to join him in a crusade against the injustices of the Way of Lolth.

An intriguing alternative would be to alter the course of history by having the infant Drizzt sacrificed to Lolth on the evening of his birth as was planned. Without Drizzt around to bring disfavor to House Do’Urden, who knows how far the ambitions of Matron Malice might take her?

Another interesting possibility might be to center a campaign on the Academy. Each character is a member of a different house serving his or her final year at the Academy. The campaign is organized as a series of tests and challenges for the young drow students. The final assessment of their skills might even involve a contest against the star of the Academy, Drizzt Do’Urden, in the Grand Melee (page 99).

## Time of Troubles

### (1358 DR to 1372 DR)

The Year of Shadows (1358 DR) witnessed the gods being cast out of their planar dominions and forced to walk Faerûn as mortals. During the four-month period in which this tumultuous event took place, all priests lost access to their divine spells, while arcane spellcasters suffered through the unpredictable effects of wild magic. To the great advantage of practitioners of psionic power, such as House Oblodra, the mind magic of the Invisible Art remained unaffected by the magical chaos.

Even more fantastic, the avatar of Lolth appeared in Menzoberranzan during the later weeks of the crisis. The presence of Lolth within the City of Spiders was kept secret by House Baenre, and during her brief stay, the Queen of Spiders made her displeasure with House Oblodra known to Matron Yvonnell Baenre. When the crisis finally abated, Matron Yvonnell used her Lolth-granted abilities to summon an elder evil to drag House Oblodra down into the Clawrift and into oblivion.

The appearance of Lolth’s avatar can be a significant event in a campaign featuring the Time of

Troubles. What if House Baenre had failed to keep the event secret? The public revelation of Lolth's divine presence within the city could spark an all-out civil war as each house seeks to gain Lolth's favor. Alternatively, the Queen of Spiders might rally all the drow houses under a single banner and instigate an attack against Menzoberranzan's neighboring settlements in the Underdark.

A psionic-themed campaign set in Menzoberranzan during this era could be entertaining. Matron K'yorl Oblodra was foolish and failed to attack her rivals until it was too late. By placing the characters at the helm of House Oblodra's destiny, coupled with a well-timed betrayal of Matron Baenre by her illithid advisor Methil, it wouldn't be hard to envision the fall of House Baenre and the ascendancy of a new drow psiocracy in Menzoberranzan.

**Yvonne's Folly:** Exuberant with the favor of Lolth, Matron Yvonne Baenre turned her sights on the dwarven delve of Mithral Hall. In a single stroke, she sought to slay the renegade Drizzt Do'Urden and secure for House Baenre the valuable mithral mines held by Clan Battlehammer. Unfortunately for Yvonne, her hubris ultimately failed her, leading to her own demise and the loss of six thousand troops. This ill-fated war could serve as the setting for a "Drow at War" campaign.

**Triel Ascendant:** For a brief time after the death of Yvonne, Menzoberranzan's history is marked by the rise of Triel Baenre as matron mother of the First House of Menzoberranzan. With House Baenre's position called into question by the defeat at Mithral Hall, Triel had her hands full trying to solidify her position as matron mother. Her early reign was marked by mounting unrest throughout the city as rival houses sought to test the inexperienced matron.

**Fall of Blingdenstone:** In the Year of the Unstrung Harp (1371 DR), Triel made a desperate gamble to secure the support of the Ruling Council and strengthen her hold on the reins of power. She launched an attack on the deep gnomes of Blingdenstone, in revenge for the assistance they had given to Mithral Hall. Through the casting of great magic rituals, the drow conjured a horde of demons and loosed it upon the svirfneblin city. In the span of a few hours, the horde eradicated the city's population.

## War of the Spider Queen

(1372 DR to 1385 DR)

**Lolth's Silence:** In the summer of 1372 DR, Lolth inexplicably fell silent, cutting off the flow of divine magic to her priestesses. The Jaezred Chaulssin took advantage of the situation to launch attacks on drow-ruled cities throughout the Northdark. By year's end, Menzoberranzan was besieged: the Jaezred Chaulssin secured an alliance with House Agrach Dyrr and

brought a large duergar army from Gracklstugh to the city, bolstered by Kaanyr Vhok's Scourged Legion. The following year, Lolth's Silence ended and the drow broke the siege of the City of Spiders. The Jaezred Chaulssin quickly moved to cement their control over the ruins of Ched Nasad.

A campaign set during Lolth's silence might feature player characters taking the place of the heroes of the *War of the Spider Queen* novel series, traveling to the Demonweb Pits to investigate the cause of the Silence and vying to become Lolth's *Yor'thae*, her Chosen.

Alternatively, it could focus on the state of Menzoberranzan during the silence. The instability of the priesthood as divine practitioners try to conceal their sudden weakness provides a fine opportunity for insurrection in an "Ideological Scheming" campaign. The continuing intrigue among the houses comes to a height, and the threats from beyond the city, the attacks of the Jaezred Chaulssin and the Scourged Legion, make a fine backdrop for a "Drow at War" campaign.

**The Reckoning:** Soon after the end of Lolth's silence, Lolth and Eilistraee played a cosmic match of *sava* (a drow-invented game similar to chess) to determine the destiny of the drow. While the competition played out, Lolth's new champion, the Lady Penitent, returned to Faerûn to destroy the last hope of the drow race. As the followers of Eilistraee fell one by one to the Lady Penitent's wrath, Lolth turned her attention to the other gods of the drow pantheon.

The Reckoning began as Eilistraee killed Vhaeraun, and it ended with the Dark Maiden, in the mortal body of her Chosen, being decapitated by the Lady Penitent. After Eilistraee's fall in 1379 DR, only the ancient entity Ghaunadaur remained to challenge Lolth for supremacy among the deities of the drow. The Spider Queen attempted to destroy Ghaunadaur, but That Which Lurks proved to be a stronger foe than Lolth suspected.

A campaign set during this period could cast the characters as faithful servitors of Lolth helping the Lady Penitent to track down the apostates who serve Eilistraee, or the characters could be such apostates themselves, constantly hunted for their beliefs and their rejection of the Way of Lolth.

## The Spellplague

(1385 DR to 1480 DR)

The Spellplague that ravaged Faerûn in 1385 DR brought little change to Menzoberranzan. The lands of the north, whether on the surface or deep underground, were not racked with the same changes seen in places such as Chessenta and Mulhorand. The city was not untouched by any means—spellscarred monsters rampaging through the Underdark erupted

into the heart of the city, strange magical effects blew through like storms, and Menzoberranzan's neighbors launched half-hearted attacks to test the city's defenses. In this time of crisis, the rival noble houses and other factions actually came together and worked in relative harmony like never before.

If you want to run a campaign that downplays the intrigue and rivalry among the drow houses, this is a good era in which to do so. Such a campaign could center instead on the role of outside factions such as the Jazred Chaulssin or the Sept of Ill'Ghact. You could postulate a series of surface raids as the drow try to take advantage of the instability in the sunlit world above, or concentrate on war with other Underdark races. You might also decide that the Spellplague opened up new caverns and tunnels beneath Menzoberranzan, and cast the player characters in the role of the first intrepid explorers of this uncharted territory.

**The Demon Weave (1480 DR):** Following her ascension to greater godhood, Lolth has been biding her time, spinning her webs of treachery and ambition, and looking for ways to increase her sway still further. Her goal in this age is to seize control of arcane magic in the wake of Mystra's death.

To facilitate this grasp for power, Lolth has sent a prophet, Danifae Yauntyrr, to all the cities of the drow. During the War of the Spider Queen, Danifae was a fallen priestess, a scoundrel, and a seductress, but her journey to the Demonweb Pits marked her as Lolth's *Yor'thae*, her Chosen. Lolth devoured and assimilated Danifae to complete her transformation.

Danifae has now returned to Menzoberranzan, apparently as an avatar of Lolth herself. Danifae whispers to the leaders of all the great drow houses, bringing a revelation of Lolth's divine will. Lolth will be served by priests and wizards alike, she says, as the Spider Queen spins the Demon Weave to replace Mystra's unraveled Weave. Danifae spurs the drow leaders to gather ancient knowledge to aid Lolth's continued ascent.

During this period, the drow are scouring the world for great relics, gathering artifacts once sacred to Mystra, and fighting for control of magical locations on the world's surface.

As the drow gather arcane energy and channel it to Lolth, the goddess's power grows. Her web extends to cover most of the world, forming a Demon Weave to replace the Sundered Weave that Mystra had maintained—a new fabric of arcane magic. Now the priests and wizards who serve Lolth have access to greater power than ever before, and their task is to use it.

Across the surface world, Lolth's servitors draw on the Demon Weave to create shrouds of darkness that cover league upon league of surface lands. Under this pall of darkness, the drow can move and fight freely

during what would normally be daylight hours. With this aid, they can complete Lolth's transformation and bring the world to ruin.

Drow society is strained to the breaking point by Danifae's revelation. The female-dominated priesthood doesn't care to hear her message, which would dilute their own importance and raise up male wizards as equals, or worse. They invent reasons to doubt Danifae's provenance as an avatar. Many reject her and her message, and try to brand her as a fraud and a heretic.

But wizards among the drow, and the priestesses of wizard-friendly houses (including Barrison Del'Armgo and Xorlarrin, among others) set about carrying out Lolth's plan. They intend to lay the foundation for a new Weave . . . and bring about the everlasting darkness that will cover the world above.

A campaign set in this era could focus on the surface raiding that facilitates Lolth's ascent to power. Player characters can form or join raiding parties with a clear objective: to acquire some element of magical power and then channel that power to Lolth.

Alternatively, the campaign could focus more on Menzoberranzan and the effects of Danifae's machinations. The increasing importance of wizards, and therefore of males, shatters the unity among the houses that was engendered during the Spellplague and leads to infighting between and even within houses. It also provides yet another opportunity for insurrection against the priestesses.

## THE COUNCIL OF SPIDERS

Arcane spellcasters across Menzoberranzan view the creation of the Demon Weave as an opportunity to elevate their social standing. A group of wizards drawn from several noble houses has dubbed itself the Council of Spiders, acknowledging the supremacy of Lolth even as it obliquely challenges the authority of the city's Ruling Council of priestesses. Their goal is to see wizards represented on the Ruling Council, overturning thousands of years of tradition—but remaining true to Lolth's will as she has expressed it through her prophet.

Various lesser wizards of House Xorlarrin and House Barrison Del'Armgo form the backbone of the Council of Spiders. These two houses are both known for the prominent roles of their wizards, and Xorlarrin in particular scandalously grants its prominent males near-equality with the females. A number of wizards from other houses are involved in the council as well, but as yet no house wizards or masters of Sorcery have given their full support to the council's agenda.

# SCHEMES IN THE SHADOWS

It's possible to run a campaign featuring drow characters much like you'd run any other *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* campaign, with the characters exploring the deeps, fighting monsters (and members of other civilized races), and interacting with the other residents of Menzoberranzan. At the same time, the City of Intrigue lends itself well to a campaign featuring a more intricate web of schemes, allegiances, and treachery that can dominate the action or add a fascinating twist to more standard adventuring.

Naturally, a campaign focused on flavors of political infighting or ideological scheming will be rich in opportunities for intrigue, but even if you've chosen a different flavor for your campaign, the relationship of the characters to the houses and factions of the city, and the interactions among those factions, can exert a strong influence over the campaign.

## Factions

Key to adding this level of intrigue to your Menzoberranzan campaign are the factions detailed in chapter 3, which include the major noble houses of the city as well as the three branches of the Academy, the mercenary company of Bregan D'aerthe, and a couple of factions opposed to the drow. As much as the player characters might try to remain independent agents, they're almost inevitably tangled up in the schemes of these factions.

When you're creating a Menzoberranzan campaign, it's best to choose a few factions—three is a fine starting point—that will be the major players in your game. The interactions among three factions are more complex than a simple dichotomy but not so complicated that they'll make your head swim trying to keep them straight. Picking three factions from chapter 3 gives you a ready supply of NPCs with their own goals, alliances, and rivalries, which you can then drop the player characters into.

Player character drow might be connected to the noble houses or other factions already—in fact, it's a good idea to encourage these sorts of connections. You can choose to limit the players' options to the three (or so) factions you've chosen, but you don't have to. When players choose different houses for their characters, it adds additional strands of potential conflict and alliances into the mix, but those houses can remain relatively minor players in the grand political game of your campaign.

**Characters and Factions** In an intrigue-laden campaign, it's important to keep track of each player character's relationships with the key factions

in your game. You can measure these relationships on a five-step scale: hostile, suspicious, indifferent, tolerant, or allied.

A hostile faction actively seeks the death of the character. The faction might send assassins after its enemy, arrange an "accident" in the Underdark near the city, or send thugs to assault the character in one of the seedier parts of the city.

A suspicious faction keeps its eye on the character, watching his or her every move carefully. The faction's members or leadership assume that the character is plotting against them, and are simply waiting for evidence to confirm it. They might send spies to follow the characters, intercept their communications, or otherwise keep tabs on their actions in the city.

An indifferent faction is either unaware of the character because he or she hasn't come to its notice yet, or it's uninterested in the character because his or her actions have no bearing on the faction's interests or goals.

A tolerant faction gives some favor to the character. The character might be able to pull some strings to get assistance from the faction, though not at the risk of anyone's life or standing. In another culture, a tolerant faction might be considered friendly, but the drow know that friends are friends only as long as one remains useful to them.

An allied faction regards the character as a member in good standing, affording the character all the privileges of membership.

As the descriptions above suggest, it's best to track each character's relationship to each faction separately. It's quite common for characters to perform side quests or minor missions on behalf of their houses that help their standing with their own houses but have no impact on the standing of the rest of the party.

To track each character's relationship to the factions in your game, use a system of pluses and minuses. Each time the character helps the faction in some way, give the character a plus for that faction. Each time the character crosses the faction, give the character a minus for that faction. For example:

- + The character completes a quest on behalf of a member of the faction.
- + The character performs an action that directly aids the faction's goals.
- + The character does something that harms a rival of the faction or interferes with a rival's goals.
- The character insults a member of the faction or refuses to take on a mission on behalf of that individual.
- The character directly harms a member of the faction or interferes with the faction's goals.
- The character aids one of the faction's rivals.

Pluses and minuses don't cancel each other out, so keep track of both. A character's relationship to the faction is determined by the total number of pluses or minuses and the difference between the number of each mark:

If a character has 4 or fewer marks of either sort with a faction, the faction is indifferent—the character hasn't risen to the faction's notice yet. All factions are indifferent to characters who are just starting their adventuring careers.

If a character has more than 4 marks with a faction but the difference between the number of pluses and the number of minuses is 0 or 1, the faction is indifferent as well. The faction can't decide whether to trust or hate the character.

If a character has more than 4 marks with a faction and has at least 2 more pluses than minuses, the faction is tolerant of the character.

If a character has no more than 3 minuses and at least 6 pluses, the faction is allied.

If a character has more than 4 marks with a faction and has at least 2 more minuses than pluses, the faction is suspicious of the character.

If a character has at least 6 minuses with a faction, regardless of the number of pluses, the faction is hostile.

## Intriguing Adventures

The player characters' relationships to the factions in your campaign becomes important when you weave those factions into your adventures. One way to do this is to have members of those factions offer or assign quests to the characters, either as a group or individually. For example, Gromph Baenre might hire the party to retrieve an artifact from a well-guarded shrine on the surface. Completing this quest earns each member of the party a plus with House Baenre. At the same time, when House Wizard Brack'thal Xorlarrin learns of this mission, he contacts a character who's affiliated with his house and orders that character to use the artifact in a specific way before delivering it to Gromph. If the character completes this task, he or she earns a plus with House Xorlarrin, but the other characters don't.

Those relationships can get complicated. If House Wizard Iltztran Melarn orders a character to do the same thing, the character earns a plus with House Baenre for retrieving the artifact, a plus with House Melarn for using the artifact, a minus with House Melarn for aiding a rival house (Baenre), and a minus with House Baenre for aiding a rival house! Remember that those pluses and minuses don't cancel each other out, so the mission isn't a wash—it just complicates the character's life.

Beyond this method of complicating adventures, you can build entire adventures on the foundations of faction intrigues and rivalries. These adventures

might involve the characters taking specific actions to influence the relationships among factions, or they might revolve around the characters' attempts to respond to or interfere with someone else's actions. Alternatively, significant interactions among factions might form the backdrop to adventures that aren't strictly about those interactions.

**Character Actions** Examples of character actions that can alter the political landscape of Menzoberranzan include:

**Espionage:** The characters might undertake a mission to learn about troop movements or defenses of a rival compound, steal information or treasure from a rival faction, or acquire incriminating secrets about rival factions.

**Bolster Defenses:** Aside from providing protection in case of an attack, putting effort into fortifying a faction's home compound or headquarters sends a clear message to allies and rivals alike: The faction expects an attack and is ready to deal with it. The characters might be charged with supervising construction (which includes defending the workers from attack and watching for spies), recruiting laborers or capturing slaves to do the work, or acquiring information about the plans of a potential attacker.

**Mustering Troops:** The flip side to bolstering defenses, mustering troops can send a signal that a faction is readying to make an attack against a rival. But such an overt signal is often unwise in the City of Spiders, since it puts rivals on their guard. If characters are involved in mustering troops for a faction, is the faction actually preparing for an attack or attempting to deceive a rival faction? The characters might be placed in charge of hiring mercenaries, training recruits or conscripts, or spreading misinformation about the purpose of the muster.

**Attack Rival:** A character with sufficient standing and a strong relationship with an allied faction can persuade the faction leadership to launch an attack against a rival. Alternatively, the characters might be ordered by their superiors in a faction to spearhead the attack or perform a special mission as part of the assault. The characters might also be hired as mercenaries to help with the attack.

**Backdrop Events** Significant events can form the backdrop for adventures, reinforcing the chaotic nature of Menzoberranzan and upsetting the established relationships among houses. Examples of such events include:

**House Annihilation:** A major noble house of Menzoberranzan successfully destroys a rival house. Perhaps the triumphant house is one of the major factions of your campaign, whose rank among the houses is improved as a result of this success. The



annihilated house could also be one of the major factions, leaving a hole you can fill with another faction. If the player characters are allied with the annihilated house, their own standing might suffer—or they might find themselves targets during the attack. On the other hand, perhaps two houses that play no more than a minor role in your campaign are involved, and the annihilation of a house is just the background to another adventure. A member of a faction allied with a character might ask the character to look for a specific item in the ruins of the destroyed house, for example, or assassinate a member of the triumphant house known to have been injured in the fighting.

**Change of Leadership:** The matron mother of a noble house or the leader of another faction is assassinated. Again, you can choose to make the affected faction one of your campaign's major players or a less important faction, depending on the impact you want this event to have on your players' characters and your campaign. A power vacuum at the top of a faction leaves room for a great deal of scheming both inside the faction and outside, as the faction's rivals assess its stability and strength in the wake of its leader's demise. It also presents an opportunity for player characters to affect the leadership of the faction, perhaps even stepping in to take charge.

**Monster Incursion:** Monstrous denizens from the Underdark invade Menzoberranzan. This incursion could be a minor nuisance or a full-scale assault against the City of Spiders. It could be an apparently random event, the result of some migration perhaps, but it might also be a deliberate attack by some external or internal enemy. The characters can certainly be called upon to fight off the monsters, but they might also be tasked with discovering the source of the incursion. Did something disturb the monsters' lair or encroach on their territory? Did a powerful wizard—from Menzoberranzan, from Eryndlyn, or from the surface world—magically summon the monsters and drive them toward the city? Is the incursion an act of treachery aimed at destroying the city or overturning its social order, or a distraction intended to cover some other subversive activity?

**Natural Disaster:** Menzoberranzan suffers a natural disaster, anything from a nuisance to a cataclysm. Minor events include landslides, minor flooding, and fire. Major events include earthquakes, plagues, and famine. As with a monster incursion, there's always a question whether a disaster is truly natural or a magical attack on the city. The characters might help the city recover from the disaster, try to help a faction benefit from the event, or investigate its cause.

**Supernatural Event:** In a city with a large population of spellcasters, it's surprising that magical mishaps are not more commonplace. Supernatural

events might take the form of monster incursions (a demonic invasion or a horde of restless undead) or natural disasters (a ritual gone bad), or they can be more overtly magical, such as a pocket of Spellplague or wild magic passing through the city, or the manifestation of Lolth before her priesthood. It can also have a social or political flavor: Perhaps the wizards of the city rebel against the matriarchal priesthood. The characters might be tasked with stopping the event, exploring its causes, or using it as cover for another action.

**Slave Rebellion:** Several slave rebellions have occurred since the city's founding, and while none have raged for more than a few days, the damage left in the wake of such insurrection is significant. Who instigated the revolt? Who profits from it? What secret activities happen unnoticed during the brief, raging chaos? The characters might help quell the rebellion, or they could come to the aid of the oppressed. The insurrection might present the perfect opportunity to launch an attack against a rival faction.

**Exotic Surface Dwellers:** A band of adventurers from the surface world has come to Menzoberranzan. So far, the houses have either allowed the adventurers to stay or haven't been able to defeat them. Do the characters view these heroes as potential allies or threats? Like any other event described here, the arrival of these surface dwellers introduces a little bit of chaos into the precarious balance of the city, and every faction in Menzoberranzan is aware of the opportunities these adventurers represent. As different factions try to make use of the adventurers to further their own ends, what happens if the surface dwellers are intentionally playing factions off against each other?



# MAKING THE CITY YOUR OWN

The three key decisions described in this chapter—your campaign flavor, the era of play, and the factions that will add intrigue to your game—are the most important steps toward making the city your own, customizing it to suit your campaign and the elements you want to highlight. All of the options described here assume that you want to cleave to the Menzoberranzan established in *FORGOTTEN REALMS*® novels and game products over the last twenty-five years.

There's nothing preventing you, however, from straying farther afield, truly making the city your own. The easiest way to do this is to make drastic changes to the factions of the city. Some relatively simple tweaks can alter the feel of Menzoberranzan without changing its essential nature.

One example is clear from looking at the other cities that lie beneath the lands of Faerûn. One of the key elements that distinguishes them from each other is the relative prominence of the Church of Lolth and other faiths in the city. In Eryndlyn before the Spellplague, beneath the High Moor, worshipers of Lolth stood in a tense rivalry with followers of Ghaunadaur and of Vhaeraun, with no one faction consistently holding the upper hand. A similar take on Menzoberranzan would make those three factions the key elements of the campaign.

Similarly, in Guallidurth (deep under the sands of Calimshan), scores of sects venerate Lolth in a different manner. In effect, each of its more than two hundred noble houses is a house and a church in one, and the struggle for control of the twenty-one-seat Ruling Council is a theological as well as a political one. You could use houses and other factions presented in chapter 3 more or less unchanged, but add a different take on Lolth's worship to each of the three factions that take center stage in your campaign to form an additional layer of depth in the intrigue of the city.

Sshamath, located beneath the Far Hills, is ruled not by priestesses but by wizards. Again, you could use the houses as presented, but the house wizards shown in each house entry hold positions equivalent to the matron mothers in Menzoberranzan. Sshamath is one city little affected by the events surrounding the creation of the Demon Weave, making it an interesting setting for a campaign focused on the wizards' role in channeling arcane power to Lolth.

You can tweak the city in subtler but equally interesting ways by creating your own noble houses or other factions, using the guidelines included in chapter 3. The goals and attitudes of the factions that anchor your campaign play a large part in determining the flavor and style of your campaign. What if

one house is controlled by an illithid mastermind posing as an advisor to the matron mother, but secretly dictating her every order? What if a house has forged an alliance with the Zhentarim on the surface world and directs more of its attention to the surface than to the intrigue of the city? Or perhaps a house views its sole purpose as the extermination of the race of elves from the surface world.

You can use other factions besides noble houses to complicate the politics of your city as well. What if the Red Wizards have established an enclave in or near Menzoberranzan and become a significant player in the city's politics? You could use a more distant faction instead, such as the dwarves of Mithral Hall. A player character might be a good-aligned drow who's willingly staying in the city as an agent of the dwarves, or an evil drow who's pretending to serve the dwarves while secretly working to undermine them from within. Or a character might be an enslaved dwarf who has found some way to communicate with Mithral Hall.

## Alternate History

The history of Menzoberranzan outlined in the previous section is the official history of the city, but it's not the only possible one. That outline already suggested some potential variations in that history that might give rise to an interesting campaign. Asking yourself "What if this were different?" is a good way to start making the city uniquely yours.

**The Founding:** What if House Baenre hadn't managed to unify the drow during their earliest civil war? What if, instead of the schism that led to the founding of Ched Nasad, the rebellious House Nasadra and its allies had formed a dissident coalition preventing House Baenre from cementing its rule? Imagine a Ruling Council divided between two rival coalitions, both honoring the Way of Lolth but forever vying for dominance in the city.

**The Time of Troubles:** What if Yvonnell Baenre's strike against Mithral Hall was successful and the dwarves were killed or enslaved? You might end up with a campaign in which the enslaved dwarves are a major faction striving for their freedom. And what happened to Drizzt when Mithral Hall fell?

**War of the Spider Queen:** What if Menzoberranzan fell to the invaders during Lolth's silence? The player characters might be members of houses that are subjugated under the ruling invaders, working to restore the city to drow rulership, while the Jaezred Chaulssin and House Agrach Dyrr vie for control and the Scourged Legion keeps the city under martial law.

These are just a few examples of directions you might choose to steer your campaign. Any of these options keeps the essential flavor of the city—a place of murderous intrigue, vice, and chaos—intact.

# The Way of Lolth

Few surface dwellers know the true nature of the drow. The obsidian-skinned elves with snow-white hair are the creatures of nightmare that creep from the hidden depths of the earth to kill, pillage, and enslave. Legends speak of huge cities that fill caverns lit by flickering eldritch light where the drow have created a decadent and proud civilization.

Those who have met the drow and survived tell of a terrifying matriarchy in which males of the race are expendable pawns. They say that the drow worship a demon goddess of spiders, and arachnids are revered by their cruel and treacherous society.

The elves of the surface world shudder and turn away when their dark kin are mentioned. Most will not speak of the drow, except as traitors to the Seldarine. The sages among the elves say that the drow suffer a fate they richly deserve, and for which they have only themselves to blame.

This chapter provides an overview of drow culture in Menzoberranzan, as dictated by the will of Lolth. It includes the following sections.

- ◆ **The Queen of Spiders:** A look at the role of Lolth, her worship in Menzoberranzan, and the system of justice that springs from the tenets of her faith.
- ◆ **All About Drow:** A discussion of the hierarchy of the drow—the females who tell the nobles what to do, the nobles who lord it over the commoners, and the non-drow slaves that keep the city running through their efforts (and often their lives)..
- ◆ **Commerce:** A look at the two main types of drow commerce, currency and favors, as well as the merchant clans that conduct trade in the city.
- ◆ **Leisure:** How the drow relax and enjoy the fruits of their status. Three times a year, Menzoberranzan is the site of elaborate festivals during which the drow celebrate themselves and their goddess.
- ◆ **Language:** When secrets are your stock in trade, being able to communicate in a number of different ways is vital. This section also includes a number of widely heard proverbs and adages, expressed in the drow tongue.



JESPER EJSING



# The Queen of Spiders

Menzoberranzan, like many drow cities, adheres to the tenets laid down by Lolth. These basic laws, under which her favored cities would live, established the dominance of the family network—kin bonded together (when it is convenient) under a matriarchal house for mutual protection.

## LOLTH

### Queen of the Demonweb Pits Chaotic Evil Greater God

Lolth, also known as the Demon Queen of Spiders, the Mistress of Lies, and the Lady of Shadows, is a cruel, capricious goddess who revels in betrayal and bloodshed. The Spider Queen demands absolute obedience from the drow, presiding over their manifold schemes and betrayals, and is sovereign over all arachnids. Lolth's favor is fickle; she manipulates those in her service and expends them without thought.

Lolth claims control over every aspect of drow society. Her particular areas of influence involve spiders, evil, darkness, chaos, and assassins. Around 1480 DR, she attempts to expand that portfolio to include arcane magic, trying to usurp the position of the dead deity Mystra.

Lolth favors the guise of a lithe drow woman dressed in a gossamer gown woven from spider silk. Her long, silvery hair frames a face of exquisite beauty and cascades down her back. This appearance is a deception, however: Lolth's true form is that of an enormous arachnid with a body bloated on the souls of her petitioners, and the torso and head of a drow.

Lolth's domain is the Demonweb Pits. Prior to the War of the Spider Queen, this location occupied two layers of the Abyss, but since that period it has been a plane or an astral dominion of Lolth's own. True to the deity's nature, the Demonweb Pits is a vast expanse of woven and tangled webs. Creatures, buildings, vessels, even chunks of land torn from various worlds are caught in the webs, dangling like trapped insects waiting for Lolth to feed on them or lying like empty husks already drained of life. There she is served first and foremost by the demons called yochlol, known as the handmaidens of Lolth. Though one can appear as a beautiful drow female, the true



form of a yochlol is a hideous mass of putrid slime with several ropy tentacles.

## Veneration of Spiders

Spiders of all sizes are everywhere in Menzoberranzan, constantly crawling underfoot and scuttling overhead. Webs hang from ceilings, drape down across walkways, and stream between buildings and towers.

According to surface-world folktales, dark elves venerate spiders so fervently that a drow will never harm one. That's a characteristically outsider misunderstanding of drow psychology. Actually, the drow of Menzoberranzan aspire to be like spiders—meaning that they remorselessly devour their own kind. Drow make no special effort to harm their eight-legged cohorts, but aren't above destroying them if they get in the way (though not in the presence of a zealous priestess or a superior drow who might use the act against them). Some drow ceremonially eat a spider at the beginning of each meal as a way of giving thanks to the arachnid goddess.

## DROW JUSTICE

The idea of drow justice is little more than a bitter facade instituted to supposedly stem the chaos that ensues when ruthless and ambitious drow fight each other. Might makes right in the city, and the law is little more than a mockingly ironic set of rules in which the only ones to get punished are those who get caught and don't have the wherewithal to evade justice.

The priestesses of Lolth determine guilt and mete out punishment in Menzoberranzan. A priestess, whether from the Academy or a house, leads every street patrol and administers justice immediately as she deems appropriate when the patrol arrests lawbreakers. There is no appeals process, but a priestess must be careful not to be too harsh on "criminals" who have high-ranking protectors. If she offends a superior, the priestess can expect retribution.

A claim of innocence is not the best defense against an accusation of wrongdoing. Having a connection to someone high in the hierarchy—in other words, someone who can cause the judging priestess serious harm—is the only reliable way for a defendant to avoid the scourging lash or a worse punishment.

Beyond the base tenets of the Way of Lolth, what precisely constitutes a crime becomes tenuous and random. Crimes of property (theft, burglary, vandalism) are illegal in Menzoberranzan, but street patrols do not hunt down stolen goods. If an owner cannot protect her property, then in the eyes of the drow the owner does not deserve to possess it.

Likewise, crimes of violence are technically illegal, but those who are attacked in the city are expected to defend themselves. The street patrols tend to violently punish anyone caught fighting, so all combatants commonly flee when a priestess arrives on the scene.

Menzoberranzan has no formal criteria for matching punishments to crimes. Instead, punishment for any offense is at the whim of the drow priestess administering justice, which means it is arbitrary, capricious, and almost always cruel. Sentences for various forms of lawbreaking include immediate execution, death by torture, mutilation, castration, torture without death, exile, imprisonment, whipping, servitude, and exorbitant fines that go into the priestess's purse. Whipping and torture are the most common penalties, because the priestesses enjoy delivering the sort of punishment they can inflict repeatedly.

### LOLTH'S CODE

Menzoberranzan's principal law is the Way of Lolth, a code of behavior known in detail by every high priestess, and administrated by the Ruling Council. Its tenets are:

- ◆ There is no god or goddess other than Lolth. Any who follows the dictates of another entity will be slain, preferably in sacrifice to Lolth.
- ◆ Ritual worship of any entity other than Lolth is forbidden within the city's vault. Non-drow who violate this tenet are fined and expelled from the city. Second offenders or any drow who do so are slain.
- ◆ Slaves have no rights, and there are no limits to the punishments or duties that can be set for them. Treatment of slaves is the affair of their owners. It is a capital offense for a slave to refuse any order from a drow of the house that owns the slave.
- ◆ A commoner or a student of the Academy who refuses to obey a priestess can be punished as the offended priestess sees fit, up to and including death. If the offender is the property of another house and the noble of that house is present and objects, the two must agree on a punishment (usually flogging).
- ◆ Any drow who falsely wears the colors of another house or who deliberately alters his or her appearance to masquerade as one of a different station will be slain.
- ◆ Any non-drow who adopts the appearance of a particular drow, a drow of a noble rank, or a drow of a house other than his or her own will be slain.
- ◆ If it can be proved that two or more houses attacked another house, all the houses that participated in the attack will be destroyed jointly by the remainder.

Sentences are typically carried out on the spot to serve as an example to others. Those sentenced to imprisonment are taken to the Pit Warrens near Donigarten's moss bed.

## DEITIES OF OTHER ERAS

Lolth is by far the most important god to the drow, but she is not the only drow deity throughout all of history. When Lolth (then called Araushnee, the Weaver of Destiny) first rebelled against her consort Corellon Larethian, she secured the aid of several other deities. These included her children by Corellon, Eilistraee and Vhaeraun, as well as the mysterious god Ghaunadaur.

During the three earliest campaign eras described in this book, drow worshiped five other deities in addition to Lolth:

*Eilistraee*: Goddess of song and dance, beauty and swordwork, and patron of good-aligned drow.

*Ghaunadaur*: God of oozes, slimes, jellies, outcasts, and rebels.

*Kiaransalee*: Goddess of the undead and vengeance.

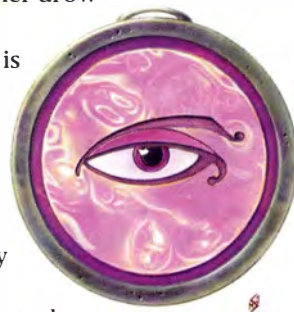
*Selvetarm*: God of drow warriors.

*Vhaeraun*: God of thievery, drow males, and surface raids.

**War of the Spider Queen:** After her transformation into a greater deity during the War of the Spider Queen, Lolth began exterminating the deities she perceived as her rivals for the worship of the drow (see "The Reckoning," page 12).

**The Spellplague:** By the time of the Spellplague, Lolth stood alone as the sole drow deity, though Ghaunadaur escaped her wrath and established himself as an independent deity rather than a drow god.

**Ghaunadaur** Even in the Spellplague era, Ghaunadaur remains a significant subversive force in Menzoberranzan and other drow cities. Also known as That Which Lurks, Ghaunadaur is an ancient, cowardly being tinged with madness who seeks only to consume the world. His followers believe that all creatures are fit to wield power if they can exert it over others, so they rebel against the tyrannical grip of Lolth's priestesses.



# All About Drow

Many horrible monsters lurk in the darkened depths of the Underdark, but few are as reviled and feared as the obsidian-skinned marauders known as drow. Physically, drow resemble surface elves with wiry builds and pleasing features, but their midnight-black skin sets them apart. Their heat-sensitive eyes are fiery red, and both genders wear their snow-white hair long. In general, the drow enjoy life spans stretching well over two hundred years, and exceptional members of the race measure their years by centuries.

Drow are born into darkness. From infancy, a drow child must be cunning. Children can expect no kindness, warmth, or compassion. Such expressions engender fatal weakness. Drow are cold parents, instilling self-reliance and independence in their offspring to make them strong enough to survive a bloody adolescence. Ill treatment reinforces the race's natural inclination toward evil.

From birth, drow are taught that they are superior to all other races—those who lack the strength to defend themselves deserve to be used as the drow see fit. Therefore, drow are arrogant and condescending in all their dealings until they are shown reason to respect their associates.

In the tongue of elves and fey, drow are referred to by several names: *tirl aukhbhet-ess*, *tuer lothnil*, *duiss aszbhar*, and *dhaerow*. It is believed this last ancient Elven moniker, which roughly translates to “traitor,” is the source of the term “drow.” Of course, the drow dispute this claim, saying the ancestral name of their kind is *duaral*, or “Hunters of the Crescent,” bestowed upon them by Lolth directly.

Most drow are singularly wicked. They are cruel in their interactions with others and treacherous among themselves. In the pursuit of strength, status, and Lolth's favor, drow houses compete with each other to amass wealth and enslave weaker races. The fickle whims of Lolth's priestesses demand absolute obedience, driving the race to further evil.

Drow understand the value of alliances and enjoy congenial companionship, but they regard any such arrangements as temporary. They learn at an early age to distrust love and camaraderie, because such relationships almost always presage betrayal. Therefore, drow always watch for treachery, expecting the worst in those they meet. Drow are never surprised when the knife appears, and make every effort to be the first to draw steel. They consequently rarely form lasting friendships.



*Sometimes, the power behind one's throne is a tangible thing*

Chaos is a predominant trait of the drow, a fault that has cost them potential conquests time and again throughout history. Infighting, backstabbing, and treachery are accepted facts of life in drow society. Yet there is a framework of order underlying the chaos, otherwise the drow would have been reduced to extinction long ago. This framework is specific and unyielding, and the penalty for overstepping one's bounds within it is meted out in typical drow fashion—without mercy.

Within Menzoberranzan, every person has a specific place in the social order. Matrons of the Ruling Council govern the city, supported by noble houses of lesser rank. Females in drow society enjoy the greatest favor and typically train to be priestesses. Drow males, regardless of station, typically warrant little more respect than slaves do. The most promising males commonly train as wizards or warriors, while those who display talent for neither are apprenticed to a merchant clan or a master tradesman. Non-drow in Menzoberranzan are almost universally enslaved, ultimately giving their lives in forced labor, gladiatorial spectacles, or outright sacrifice.

## THE MATRIARCHY

The supremacy of the female is deeply ingrained in drow culture. Females are seen as stronger, smarter, and more emotionally controlled than males, and—above all—more devoted to Lolth. Males are viewed as spiritually, intellectually, and physically inferior, primarily useful as unskilled labor and for breeding purposes. Even so, a male drow is seen as superior to a member of any other race, but still inferior even to a female drow of significantly lower status.

Male drow have little, if any, clout, but not all of them are mere property, even if most females see them as such. Some of the most skilled crafters, warriors, and arcane casters among the drow are male. The most successful males in drow society are those who are driven to overcome their subservient role by making themselves as useful as they can. Male drow can lay claim to little authority, and they are constantly at risk of being discarded by their female leaders, so only those possessed of skills and abilities that are not easily replaceable can be relatively confident of their positions. From a young age, males are taught not to look at the faces of drow females, or to speak to females unless bidden. This treatment teaches them their subordinate place in drow society.

### Ruling Council

In Menzoberranzan, the eight strongest houses rule the city, with the other fifty or so (the number fluctuates yearly) scrambling for position behind them. The matrons of those houses constitute the Ruling Council, which meets in a natural cavern on the Qu'ellarz'orl plateau. When the council is in session, the cave is lit by hundreds of sweet-smelling candles placed around its periphery. Any ruling matron can technically call a meeting of the council, but while Yvonne Baenre lived (through the Sable Years, ending in 1358 DR), this governing body was largely a sham, with House Baenre holding all the true power in the city. In recent decades, however, the Ruling Council has reclaimed much of the clout it lost during Yvonne's rule.

## NOBLE HOUSES

The Way of Lolth might be the primary driving force in drow culture, but it's not the only option. Standing beside the priesthood as equals on the political and social playing fields are the great noble houses. These monolithic institutions are the closest things the drow have to a formal government. Perhaps nothing in all of Menzoberranzan is as important to a drow as her house's rank—except her personal station, of course.

Noble houses are led by a matron mother, the senior female of the family. Her rule is absolute, enforced by the females beneath her (usually her daughters, since any siblings of an ascendant matron lose their noble status and are typically assassinated soon after). All lesser roles are decreed by, and can be changed at the whim of, the matron mother. Her reign ends only with her death, which often comes at the hands of her eldest daughter.

All females of the matron's blood, usually in order of age, follow the matron in descending order of their status. Usually, they wield little true authority until they complete their training at the Academy. The eldest daughter claims the title of first priestess and serves as advisor to the matron mother.

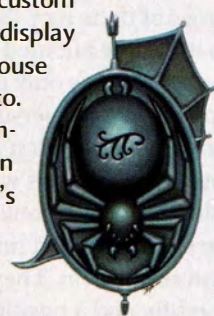
A daughter who is not in direct line to rule (due to having several older sisters) sometimes separates from her matron's house (with permission, of course) and forms a house of her own, with nominal loyalty to the "parent" house. In this way, drow houses spread their influence but also often create their own eventual rivals.

Below the daughters are the male officers of the house (in descending order): house wizard, house weapon master, and patron (current consort of the matron mother). Male heirs are also ranked by age: elderboy, secondboy, thirdboy, and so on. As a matter of tradition, the thirdboy is customarily offered to Lolth and the body secretly disposed of. Only one such sacrifice is required of each matron mother; it is considered a one-time test of her loyalty to Lolth.

Only the nobles of a house are typically allowed to use the name of their house as their own. Beneath the noble "blood" members and officials of house rank are the common warriors, crafters, servants, and slaves.

### HOUSE AND CLAN INSIGNIA

In the streets of Menzoberranzan, custom dictates that all persons openly display an insignia indicating the noble house or merchant clan they belong to. Each insignia is commonly fashioned as a black metal medallion stamped with the house's or clan's glyph. House insignias of the nobility are intricately sculpted and often imbued with magical traits.







*A house's matron mother passes judgment on an upstart male brought before her by one of her priestesses*

## COMMONERS

The majority of drow families in Menzoberranzan have not earned the favor of Lolth, and thus their members do not enjoy the privilege of nobility. These commoners are free citizens, but most endure nigh constant scorn and ridicule from their noble-born kin. Despite this prejudice, noble drow still view the dregs of their race as superior to any non-drow, no matter how talented or impressive a slave might be. A commoner's only avenue to elevated status lies in enhancing her personal esteem, typically through skill and reputation as a merchant, artisan, or mercenary. Commoners with exceptional skills are usually adopted by the noble house they serve, or, more rarely, by the first noble house to notice their skill and seize them. They receive the house name, sponsorship, and a position—albeit a precarious one, based on performance and the whim of the ruling matron of the house. At any time, their masters can choose to dispose of them. In the case of a male drow of great beauty appointed to the position of patron (consort to the matron), this statement is all too literally true, and most do not last long.

## SLAVES

Slaves make up the majority of Menzoberranzan's population. These lowly folk are non-drow that have either been captured in the Underdark or specifically bred into a life of service. No drow citizen of Menzoberranzan is ever officially the slave of another drow, but some are slaves in all but name—other drow taken as captives during a battle outside the city can be brought back and held openly as indentured servants.

Non-drow are typically referred to as *colnbluth*, or undercreatures, by Menzoberranyr. The most common kinds of slaves include goblins, kobolds, orcs, hobgoblins, and bugbears, though more exotic varieties certainly exist. Each slave is afforded a place according to its talents. Most are laborers, farmers, and house servants. Those with fighting skill end up as expendable first-line defenders in house armies.

# Commerce

Commerce in Menzoberranzan consists of two separate but intertwined systems of exchange, each specific to a certain social and political caste.

## CURRENCY

When someone procures goods or services from a drow of low station, such as when a house scion buys something from a vendor at the Bazaar, the transaction is carried out by the use of various coinage of silver, gold, and other precious metals.

The city has no universal currency. Instead, each of the noble houses of the Ruling Council mints its own coins. The prevalence of a particular currency in the city is a good indicator of the rank of the house that minted it. The currency an individual uses is a display of his or her affiliation; money changers do a brisk business as alliances shift.

The merchants of the city do not turn away any currency, no matter its source. Foreign coins are assigned value based on their weight and purity.

## FAVORS

The second type of commerce, common among noble drow, is the exchange of favors. This system creates a web of debts and obligations that binds one drow to another. For a drow, having too many obligations hanging over one's head is tantamount to social suicide. While she is indebted, a drow cannot afford to directly challenge anyone to whom she owes a great favor, for fear of that favor being called in and ruining one of her schemes. Despite their selfish nature, few drow would ever dare ignore a legitimate debt, out of fear that no one would do business with them (or worse, their house) in the future. Such a stigma would quickly be followed by a loss of favor with Lolth, leading to rival houses calling for the destruction of the offending faction.

## MERCHANT CLANS

Menzoberranzan is chock full of merchants: house agents, traders, and the more numerous independent commoners. These entrepreneurs (particularly those who travel the Underdark to other cities and trade sites) keep Menzoberranzan vital, important, and rich. Traders and crafters often band together to form companies or fellowships. In some respects, the larger merchant clans serve as a counterbalance to the haughty noble houses, but in truth, most of these organizations serve at the whim of the Ruling Council and can be dismantled at a moment's notice.

Noble houses most likely to ally with a merchant clan include House Druu'giir, House Hunzrin, and House Mizzrym.

Merchant careers in Menzoberranzan are dangerous and often short. To anger a matron or even a proud young house noble is to court death or disaster to one's livelihood. The danger of this lifestyle, coupled with the restlessness of many merchants (who at heart are happiest when traveling), makes turnover high among the city's mercantile roster.

The most prominent merchant clans in the city are described below.

**Black Claw Mercantile:** Once the most extensive and independent merchant fellowship in the city, the Black Claw soon came under the sponsorship, then the direct influence, of House Baenre. Over time, Baenre's control became an open secret, prompting rival houses to sponsor their own fellowship, the Brown Mushroom. The Black Claw has a virtual monopoly on drow goods flowing in and out of Mantol-Derith (page 104).

**Brown Mushroom Coster:** Funded by a cadre of noble houses, including Barrison Del'Armgo, Fey-Branche, and Hunzrin, this clan specializes in high-risk trade between Menzoberranzan and distant drow enclaves throughout the Underdark.

**Three Black Rings:** This lean, well-organized merchant company is unusual because it employs creatures of almost any race as laborers and caravan guards. The clan reinvests much of its profits into seeking new, alternate routes through the Underdark; selling maps of these routes and hiring out guides to other merchants has become a large part of its business.

**High-Handed Fellowship:** The High-Handed Fellowship is the primary importer of exotic foodstuffs from the surface world. Through its secret network of contacts, this clan keeps the larders of the matron mothers stocked with rare culinary treats from realms across Faerûn and beyond. Delicacies include blood wine from Aglarond and chocolate wafers from remote Lopango across the Trackless Sea.

**Xalyth's Company:** Menzoberranzan's merchants are chiefly drow males, but Mistress Xalyth enjoys playing against gender stereotypes. She rose from humble origins to dominate gem-dealing in the city. She is known as a fair appraiser (and an under-the-table fence of stolen goods), as well as a hard bargainer who always buys low and sells high. It helps that she has little competition, because she is the only steady source of spell components in the city.

# Leisure

Drow love parties. Their revels consist of wild music, dancing, the drinking of exotic beverages, and the inhaling of scented smoke. Houses, wealthy families, and merchant clans rent sumptuous mansions as neutral ground for entertaining, and a well-attended party can make a host's reputation. Parties often last most of a day, and excessively drunken attendees are dumped unceremoniously into the street. If the revelers are noble, matrons send escorts to protect the helpless scions and carry them home.

Drow of different houses meet each other at more formal dances called *illiyitrii*. These stately affairs offer opportunities to be seen and are rife with politics. Drow love to score social points in barbed conversation and engage in *charhyniss*, a game with the sole purpose of driving a conversational opponent into an open rage, proving the instigator to be the better manipulator.

In sharp contrast to the *illiyitrii* are the *nedeirra* of the younger and wilder drow. These wild, acrobatic "sweat dances" leave the participants drenched in perspiration after they dance to syncopated, driving rhythms of drums and pipes. Most *nedeirra* end in wild fighting, vandalism, fires, and debauchery.

The ultimate sensuous pleasure in life for a drow is a warm bath followed by a thorough body massage, typically while lying on a contoured couch. Massage houses are the favored leisure spots in Menzoberranzan, and they boast private rooms where those receiving services can chat, argue, or do business.

Drow theatrical productions feature slapstick comedy, singing, the use of masks and exaggerated costumes, the passing on of sly gossip, and imparting of the latest news. Plays are staged as the centerpiece entertainment at parties, but are also put on in rented warehouses near the Bazaar.

Noble drow enjoy going on hunts into the Underdark. Most are restricted to the Dark Dominion, but some go further afield in a true test of skill. Commonly, the hunters release monsters or slaves into the tunnels, giving the doomed creatures a head start. Even if the rules of a hunt restrict which weapons can be used, the members of a hunting party go out fully armed to ensure that a rival house won't strike while they are relatively unprotected.

# MENZOBERRANZAN FESTIVALS

The drow of Menzoberranzan celebrate three major festivals annually.

**Ceremony of Graduation (Feast of the Moon):** Graduation from the Academy is a time of wanton abandon when students and priestesses celebrate as equals. It is traditional for all houses that have members graduating to celebrate with a feast, accompanied by much dancing and drinking. Tradition and Lolth's will forbid any conflict between houses on the day before, the day of, and the day after the ceremony. At this same time, the houses allow most of their servants to have three days of leisure. Academy students and masters descend the great stairs from Tier Breche and visit their families. Visitors are not welcome in the city during this time, trade is forbidden, and the Bazaar is closed.

**Festival of the Founding (20th day of Ches):** Each year on the anniversary of the formal founding of the city by Menzoberra and the death of Many Eyes (see "The Founding," page 10), all Menzoberranyr celebrate their heritage by dining with a family with whom they do not customarily dine. At the meal, feasters toast Lolth, then Menzoberranzan, and finally the founders of whatever family is hosting the dinner. Participants tell tales of the exploits of their ancestors. While the dinner lasts only half a day, the entire day is one of leisure. No passing stranger is refused hospitality, since Lolth sometimes walks through the city on this day in the form of a mortal drow, listening and judging her people. Lolth rewards those who please her and strikes dead those who irritate her. The entire city takes heart if Lolth is seen. Any family lucky enough to host her at its party is honored and accorded respect for the rest of the year.

**The Open Days (23rd day of Flamerule to Midsummer):** This stretch of eight days serves the city as a sort of trade fair. Visitors are allowed into the city to wander freely—even into the compounds of the noble houses. Since anyone can enter, this event provides the citizens with as much of a spectacle as the visitors. The purpose of this time is to encourage trade, and establishments are always open for business while house agents set up meetings with visiting merchants to make deals.

During the Open Days, drow houses put on special demonstrations of magic and martial readiness to awe potential foes and rivals. House guards execute precision maneuvers in full battle armor, masters of Sorcere engage in spell-hurling competitions, and priestesses take turns weaving elaborate illusions of Lolth in the air above the city, making her appear in a succession of different forms.

# Language

Drow are as eloquent and musical in their speech as other elves, and are capable of readily reproducing the sounds of other languages. Most drow are good mimics; a drow who imitates the words and tone of an overheard bit of speech can be easily mistaken for the individual being imitated.

Most drow have little exposure to surface tongues (outcasts, slave traders, and adventurers being the principal exceptions). A citizen of an underground city who seldom ventures far afield will know two tongues: the everyday spoken language of the drow, also called Deep Drow (which varies slightly from community to community, in the same way that spoken Common has regional accents, phrases, and words), and the soundless language of gestures and expressions developed long ago.

This silent language of drow, sometimes called the hand code, is a language as detailed as the spoken word. Learning the nuances and combinations of the unspoken tongue requires months of concentrated tutoring.

Deep Drow is the everyday tongue of the drow, corrupted by passing fashion, trade-tongue jargon, and even words from other languages (notably Orcish, Dwarven, surface Elven, and human wizardly terms). It has a similar structure to the Common tongue, specifically to the dialect known as Undercommon, used throughout the Underdark. When written, its flowing letters resemble old Elven and freehand Thorass scripts, but a person familiar with both Elven and Common writing can puzzle out only a fraction of the general nature of a drow inscription.

Deep Drow is a living, changing tongue, and it varies from place to place in the Underdark, as well as over time (although drow speech, due to isolation and technology slowed by tradition and a rigid class-based society, does not change with the rapidity of surface languages). The DM is free to introduce new words and phrases at will—and might encounter words and phrases in other sources that are not found here.

Visitors to drow settlements might also sometimes hear High Drow, an archaic, rarely used dialect known by and heard chiefly among the clergy of Lolth (used in spell incantations, or between priestesses when they don't want lesser drow within hearing to understand their speech). High Drow incorporates some specialized gestures (part of the silent language), which drow not familiar with the hand code sometimes refer to as the secret signs.

Drow are usually silent in battle. If startled or in pain, they might call out to Lolth, or utter an oath.

A drow cursing another drow might say, "Ssus-sun pholor dos!" which means "Light upon you!" or merely, "Ssusan!" ("Light!"). If hurled at a non-drow,

the equivalent curse is "Oloth plynn dos!" or "Darkness take you!"

To rally comrades in battle or call for aid, drow might cry their house name. A drow of House Xorlarrin might cry, "Xorlarrin ulu usstan!" which means "Xorlarrin to me!" or perhaps "Xorlarrin ultrin!" ("Xorlarrin supreme!").

## Proverbs and Phrases

*Jal khaless zhah waela.* All trust is foolish.

*Oloth zhah tuth abbil lueth ogglin.* Darkness is both friend and enemy.

*Xun izil dos phuul quarthen, lueth dro.* Do as you are ordered, and live.

*Lolth tlu malla; jal ultrinnan zhah xundus.* Lolth be praised; all victory is her doing.

*Ilharessen zhaunil alurl.* (Matron) Mothers know best.

*Lil alurl velve zhah lil velkyn uss.* The best knife is the unseen one.

*Lil waela lueth waela ragar brorna—lueth wund nind, kyorlin elghinn.* The foolish and unwary find surprises—and among them, waiting death.

*Khaless nau uss mzild taga dosstan.* Trust no one more than yourself.

*Nindyn vel'uss kyorl nind ratha thalra elghinn dal lil alust.* Those who watch their backs meet death from the front.

*Ulu z'hin maglust dal Qu'ellar lueth Valsharess zhah ulu z'hin wund lil phalar.* To walk apart from House and Queen is to walk into the grave.

*Kyorl jal bauth, kyone, lueth lil Quarvalsharess xal belbau dos lil belbol del elendar dro.* Watch all about, warily, and the Goddess may give you the gift of continued life.

*Vel'uss zhaun alur taga lil Quarvalsharess?* Who knows better than the Goddess?

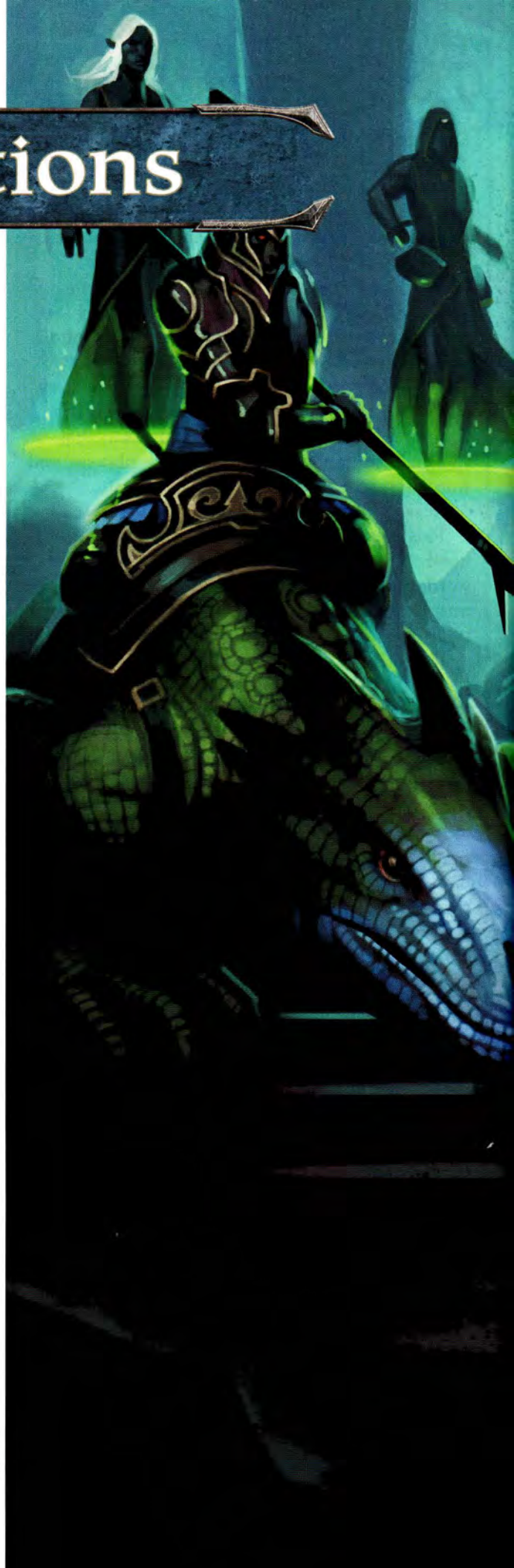


# Drow Factions

In a setting driven by intrigue, nothing is more important than understanding the various players in the political games of the city, the factions that might hire, manipulate, or oppose the player characters.

The most important factions in Menzoberranzan are the drow noble houses. This chapter offers details on six of the strongest houses in the city through the ages, plus other factions that exert their own special influence. It includes the following sections.

- ◆ **Understanding the Factions:** This opening section explains the terms and symbols used in the faction entries.
- ◆ **House Baenre:** The First House of Menzoberranzan has ruled the city for centuries.
- ◆ **House Do'Urden:** Few houses have risen more quickly or fallen more rapidly than the house of the famed Drizzt Do'Urden.
- ◆ **House Hunzrin:** This minor house improved its lot through control of trade in the city.
- ◆ **House Oblodra:** This house is notable for its psionic talent, ambition, and limitless cruelty.
- ◆ **House Melarn:** The union of two lesser houses produced a more significant power.
- ◆ **House Xorlarrin:** Notable for the prominent role held by its wizards, House Xorlarrin plays a key role in the events of the Demon Weave.
- ◆ **Other Houses:** Four of the many other noble houses are described more briefly here.
- ◆ **Tier Breche:** The threefold academy of Menzoberranzan includes Arach-Tinilith, where Lolth's priestesses are trained; Melee-Magthere, for its warriors; and Sorcere, for its wizards.
- ◆ **Bregan D'aerthe:** This mercenary company has unexpected influence despite the leadership roles played by male drow in this group.
- ◆ **Jaered Chaulssin:** These assassins seek nothing less than the dissolution of drow society.
- ◆ **Scourged Legion:** Formed from a band of demonic orcs, these enemies of the drow lurk in the Underdark while they gather strength.
- ◆ **Sept of Ill'Ghact:** A secret society of illithids whose agents have spread throughout the world.





# Understanding the Factions

The factions of Menzoberranzan fall into three general categories.

The noble houses control all aspects of the city, from enforcing its few laws to dominating trade. Menzoberranzan has no standing army. Instead, the house guard of each of the noble houses provides the military might of the city. Their compounds are heavily fortified castles. The eight greatest houses have places on the Ruling Council of Menzoberranzan. The council determines the fate of the city, from the ranking of each house to whether an errant house must be destroyed.

Drow factions that more or less uphold the social order of Menzoberranzan are the second category. These include the academy of Tier Breche and the mercenary company of Bregan D'aerthe. Their structure is different from that of the houses, and they lie outside the house ranking system (and thus have no say on the Ruling Council), but they are both influenced by the intrigue among the houses and exert a subtle influence on them in return.

The third group of factions consists of various internal and external forces opposed to the social order of Menzoberranzan. Three of those that dwell nearest to Menzoberranzan—the Jazred Chaulssin, the Scourged Legion, and the Sept of Ill'Ghact—are described at the end of this chapter. Of course, Menzoberranzan has enemies near and far, so this roster is far from exhaustive.

The information in this chapter includes these details about factions of Menzoberranzan.

## Name

In a society that places so much weight on house rank, a drow's surname means everything. After they descended into the Underdark, many dark elf clans altered their ancestral names. A famous example of this practice is clan Daermon N'a'shezbaernon, who later adopted the house name of Do'Urden. Many centuries later, the practice of invoking the ancient clan name in formal settings came into vogue. The practice was so popular that drow houses that arose long after the originals also adopted the practice by retroactively establishing a formal name.

The shaded box near the start of each faction entry shows the faction's name and other information.

## Glyph

In the ancient days when dark elf clans still lived in the sunlit world, they used runes to mark clan

territorial boundaries, to brand possessions, and as way-markers for travelers. Now the noble houses display glyphs, unique to each family, upon the insignia each drow carries. Defensive glyphs are common among the noble houses as well, protecting belongings and guarding homes. Magic woven into the rune will discharge whenever disturbed by a being who does not bear a house insignia, or who does not whisper the secret "word of passage." Each noble house's entry includes a depiction of its glyph.

## Traits

Each faction has at least two prominent traits that define it. These terms are used as shorthand to describe the factions succinctly.

**Authoritarian:** Brooks nothing less than absolute obedience from its members and allies.

**Avaricious:** Driven by the acquisition of wealth.

**Duplicitous:** Quick to betray allies and shift allegiances.

**Hedonistic:** Pursues the path of greatest pleasure and instant gratification.

**Militaristic:** Glorifies might and power.

**Sadistic:** Relishes the act of inflicting pain and suffering upon others.

**Secretive:** Paranoid and untrusting of others.

**Zealous:** Fervent in its adoration of Lolth.

## Power Rating

A faction's power rating is a general indication of its significance in the world. In the case of noble houses, it is also used as a modifier to determine how challenging it is for an individual to raise her Worth (page 120) within that house. The rating is a value between 3 and 15 derived by totaling the faction's Might, Favor, and Wealth scores (see below). The higher a faction's power rating, the more difficult it is to rise in status within the house—it's easier to advance within a lesser noble house, for example, than within a ruling house.

## Might

Might is an aggregate of a faction's military strength, determined by the number of slaves, soldiers, noble warriors, wizards, and priestesses under the house's command. Factions with the militaristic trait also tend to have greater Might. Might is measured on a scale from 1 to 5, shown in each faction entry using dagger icons: ✄

## Favor

Favor is a faction's standing with the Church of Lolth, measured by the number of priestesses within the faction and a noble house's rank. Factions with the zealous trait tend to have greater Favor. Like Might, Favor is measured on a scale from 1 to 5, shown

using spider icons: 🕸. Factions that are opposed to the Church of Lolth have 0 Favor.

## Wealth

Wealth is a simple measure of a faction's affluence. Wealth tends to correspond to a noble house's rank and favor. Houses with the avaricious trait tend to be wealthier, but houses with high might are usually less wealthy (it costs a great deal to maintain a strong military force). Wealth is also measured on a scale from 1 to 5, shown using gem icons: 💎

## Membership

This entry lists the membership of the faction in general or very specific terms. For houses, this information includes house nobles, soldiers affiliated with the house, and slaves.

## Headquarters

This entry names the faction's headquarters. Typically, this place is described in more detail in the text or a sidebar within the faction entry.

## Religious Affiliation

This entry shows the faction's association with a particular deity's faith or organized church, with a parenthetical notation indicating, in relative terms, how closely affiliated the faction is.

## House Rank

In noble house descriptions, this information appears at the start of a separate box in the longer, more detailed entries. The information in this box is specific to a certain era in Menzoberranzan's history, named in the entry. In shorter house descriptions, the two boxes are run together, but the house's rank is still particular to a specific era.

The status of the drow houses, like the status of specific drow, waxes and wanes over the course of years. How well a house manages to hold onto its influence depends in part on the personal successes of its members, but also on how it handles its interactions with the rest of society. Menzoberranzan has roughly fifty noble houses at any given time, and only the top eight earn a seat on the Ruling Council.

## Ranked Houses

The table below summarizes the twenty highest-ranked houses in Menzoberranzan during most of the eras discussed in this book. Because the Founding era covers such a large span of time and little historical record of the ranking of houses survives, it is not included in this table. The Sable Years, on the other hand, were a tumultuous time marked by the rise and fall of House Do'Urden, so two specific dates in the Sable Years are shown.

### HOUSE RANKS IN MENZOBERRANZAN

	Sable Years		Time of Troubles (1358)	War of the Spider Queen (1372)	Spellplague/ Demon Weave (1480)
	Birth of Drizzt (1297)	Drizzt's Exile (1328)			
1	Baenre →	Baenre →	Baenre →	Baenre →	Baenre
2	Barrison Del'Armgo →	Barrison Del'Armgo →	Barrison Del'Armgo →	Barrison Del'Armgo →	Barrison Del'Armgo
3	Oblodra →	Oblodra →	Oblodra ✘	Faen Tlabbar ↘	Xorlarrin
4	DeVir ✘	Hrost Ulu'ar ✘	Faen Tlabbar ↗	Xorlarrin ↗	Faen Tlabbar
5	Hrost Ulu'ar ↗	Hun'ett ✘	Xorlarrin ↗	Agrach Dyrr ✘	Mizzrym
6	Hun'ett ↗	Faen Tlabbar ↗	Agrach Dyrr ↗	Mizzrym ↗	Fey-Branche
7	Faen Tlabbar ↗	Xorlarrin ↗	Mizzrym ↗	Fey-Branche ↗	Melarn
8	Xorlarrin ↗	Agrach Dyrr ↗	Fey-Branche ↗	Tuin'Tarl ✘	Vandree
9	Agrach Dyrr ↗	Do'Urden ✘	Tuin'Tarl ↗	Duskryn →	Duskryn
10	Do'Urden ↗	Fey-Branche ↗	Duskryn ↗	Kenafin (Melarn) ↗	Druu'giir
11	Fey-Branche ↗	Mizzrym ↗	Srone'Lett →	Srone'Lett ✘	Hunzrin
12	Freth ✘	Tuin'Tarl ↗	Horlbar →	Horlbar (Melarn) ↗	Ixit'shii
13	Mizzrym ↗	Duskryn ↗	Kenafin ↗	Druu'giir ↗	Higure
14	Tuin'Tarl ↗	Srone'Lett ↗	Druu'giir ↗	Hunzrin ↗	Millithor
15	Duskryn ↗	Kenafin ↗	Hunzrin ↗	Shobalar ✘	Ignin'rl
16	Kenafin ↗	Horlbar ↗	Shobalar ↗	Ixit'shii ↗	T'orgh
17	Teken'duis ✘	Druu'giir ↗	Vandree ↘	Higure ↗	Despana
18	Symryvvin →	Symryvvin →	Symryvvin →	Symryvvin →	Symryvvin
19	Srone'Lett ↗	Hunzrin ↗	Ixit'shii ↗	Fathomlin ✘	Ousstyl
20	Horlbar ↗	Shobalar ↗	H'Kar ✘	Vandree ↗	Godeep

↗ : House rank improved from this era to the next.

→ : House rank stayed the same from this era to the next.

↘ : House rank declined from this era to the next.

✘ : House ceased to exist during or after this era.



## Leadership

For noble houses, this entry consists of five roles, specific to one era of play: the house matron mother (the dictatorial ruling female head of the house), first priestess (typically the matron mother's eldest daughter, who supervises the day-to-day operations of the house), house wizard (the leader of the house's arcane spellcasters), house weapon master (who trains and leads the house warriors), and patron (the favored consort of the matron mother, who holds the highest rank possible for a male drow). Dates shown in parentheses after the name of the matron mother indicate the dates of her rule, not of her life.

For other factions, this is a single entry showing the leader or leaders of the faction.

## Allies and Rivals

The Allies entry shows other factions that are formally or informally allied with the faction, while the Rivals entry indicates factions that compete or war with the faction. This information can shift (sometimes frequently), so it might not apply to all campaign eras.

## Adventurers

Most of the entries in this chapter include a section describing the typical characteristics and possible backgrounds of player characters and other adventurers affiliated with those factions. These backgrounds carry no rules weight, though you can decide to add bonus skills or other benefits as you see fit. Rather, they focus on character history and motivation as an aid to roleplaying. Some of these entries describe lofty positions that your character might aspire to rather than backgrounds for starting characters.

## Goals

The longer entries contain an extensive description of the faction's goals, which might or might not be specific to a particular campaign era. A faction's goals are key to determining its role in your campaign, particularly when the goals of different factions conflict with each other.

## Notable Personages

Longer faction entries include a description of some of the most important personages in the faction, typically specific to one or more campaign eras.

## Relationships

Non-house faction entries include a longer description of the faction's relationships with other factions and forces.

## Encounters

The entries for non-house factions also include suggestions for what an encounter with members of that faction might look like—where they're found, what a group of members might look like, and how an encounter might play out.

# Creating Your Own House

Menzoberranzan has dozens of noble houses, and little is known about most of them. For purposes of your campaign, it's a fairly simple matter to come up with a house of your own, as a new faction either to oppose your player characters or for a character to be a member of.

## Name

Making up the name of a drow house can be challenging. Fortunately, an abundance of houses are already named, with little other established information about them:

### KNOWN HOUSE NAMES

Known Minor House Names	
Auvryndar	Millithor
Bront'tej	Mlin'thabbyn
Celofraie	Nurbonnis
Elec'thiel	Ousstyl
Freth	S'sril
Freth ( <i>Homeland</i> )	Syr'thaerl
Godeep	Takandoys ( <i>Homeland</i> )
H'Kar	Teken'duis
Hekar ( <i>Starless Night</i> )	Thaeyalla
Maivert ( <i>Homeland</i> )	X'larraz'et'soj
Masq'il'yr	Zolond

Known Non-noble Families	
Asbodela	Ol'il'isk
Balartyr	Orlzz'Hune
Bluirren	Ouol
Chueth'duis	Ryrri
Dlaen' Del'Amatar	Shun Tahaladar
Fael Olyphar	Ssh'starm
Hael'Irin	Thadalix
H'tithet	Tirin
Illith'vir	Tuek'tharm
Ilueph	Uutar
Ilystryph	Urundlet
Klor'lbar	Vahadarr
Llarabbar	Waeth del'tar
Miliskeera	Yulaun'tlar
Neereath	Yune'duis

## Rank

You can choose your house's rank or roll on the following table. If you decide to create a major house or one on the Ruling Council, you might set your campaign during the Founding Years (when the ranks of these houses is not recorded), or else make an intentional change from what has been established in this and other sourcebooks.

### HOUSE RANK

d100	Rank
1-8	Ruling Council
9-30	Greater noble
31-50	Lesser noble
51-100	Common family

## Traits

Choose or roll on the table below to determine at least two traits for your house. You can also make up your own traits.

### HOUSE TRAITS

d8	Trait
1	Authoritarian
2	Duplicitous
3	Avaricious
4	Hedonistic
5	Militaristic
6	Sadistic
7	Secretive
8	Zealous

## Might

Use the formula below to determine your house's Might. Alternatively, you can choose a Might ranking (or roll randomly) and use that as a guide to determining the house's membership.

½ point per slave

1 point per house solider

2 points per noble warrior

3 points per wizard

4 points per priestess

5 points per high priestess

50 points for having militaristic trait

### HOUSE MIGHT

d100	Might Score
1-40	/ 0-299 Might Points
41-70	// 300 Might Points
71-90	/// 500 Might Points
91-98	//// 1,250 Might Points
99-100	///// 3,000+ Might Points

## Favor

This formula determines a house's Favor.

1 point per priestess

5 points per high priestess

10 points if a lesser noble house

25 points if a greater noble house

50 points if part of Ruling Council

50 points for zealous trait

### HOUSE FAVOR

d100	Favor Score
1-40	☼ 0-29 Favor Points
41-70	☼☼ 30 Favor Points
71-90	☼☼☼ 50 Favor Points
91-98	☼☼☼☼ 75 Favor Points
99-100	☼☼☼☼☼ 150+ Favor Points

## Wealth

This formula determines a house's Wealth.

10 points if a lesser noble house

25 points if a greater noble house

50 points if part of Ruling Council

25 points for avarice trait

10 points per favor score (1-5)

-5 points per might score (1-5)

### HOUSE WEALTH

d100	Wealth Score
1-40	💎 0-29 Wealth Points
41-70	💎💎 30 Wealth Points
71-90	💎💎💎 40 Wealth Points
91-98	💎💎💎💎 55 Wealth Points
99-100	💎💎💎💎💎 75+ Wealth Points

## Power

Add the ranking (1-5) for the house's Might, Favor, and Wealth to determine its power.

## Other Characteristics

Once these starting factors are determined, you can flesh out your new house with a headquarters, the names of its leadership, its allies and rivals, and its goals, using the examples in this chapter to guide you.

# House Baenre

*The autocratic ruling house of Menzoberranzan, head of the Ruling Council almost from the city's founding*

## House Baenre

**Traits:** Authoritarian, zealous

**Power:** 15



**Membership:** 63 house nobles (16 high priestesses, 31 priestesses, 4 warriors, 12 wizards), 2,600 soldiers, 700 slaves

**Headquarters:** Baenre compound; Qu'ellarz'orl

**Religious Affiliation:** Church of Lolth (strong)



Far older than most people realize, House Baenre has roots extending back past the founding of Menzoberranzan. The house was embroiled in civil war in the lost drow city of Golothaer, and its first families fled with Menzoberra on her exodus through the Underdark. As one of only seven families to stand with the Menzoberra at the founding of her city, House Baenre stood poised to reap many glories in the Spider Queen's name. After a cataclysmic explosion slew Menzoberra and obliterated all but two other families, House Baenre seized control of the City of Spiders and has never lost its vaunted position in the five millennia since.

Since then, House Baenre has remained the strongest and most envied house in Menzoberranzan. With sixteen high priestesses, few doubt the divine mandate bestowed upon the First House by Lolth. While not as prestigious, House Baenre's arcane prowess is impressive as well, with House Wizard Gromph holding the title of Archmage of Menzoberranzan, the highest-ranking mage in the city. House Baenre's elite warriors are second to none, well trained and equipped with the finest gear available in the city.

House Baenre's tendrils reach deep throughout Menzoberranzan, commanding the loyalty of more major houses than any other, as well as enjoying close ties with the masters and high priestesses of Tier Breche. Perhaps the First House's most cunning alliance is with the renegade mercenary band known as Bregan D'aerthe. Through that organization's spy network, House Baenre has been successful in ferreting out and eliminating numerous challengers to its rule.

## Baenre Compound

House Baenre occupies the highest tier in the main cavern of Menzoberranzan, at the eastern end of Qu'ellarz'orl. The compound is roughly oval in shape, three-eighths of a mile long and a quarter-mile wide, surrounded by a magnificent and magical fence that has the appearance of a silver spider's web wrapped around the general blue hues of the Baenre compound. Twenty feet high, this barrier is formed of iron strands as thick as a drow's arm, and enchanted so that anything touching it becomes stuck fast until the matron mother of the house wills it to be freed. Rumors suggest that not even the sharpest of drow weapons can put a nick in this Lolth-given gift. Entrance is gained through one of several symmetrical web-gates, the principal one being set between the outer compound's tallest two stalagmites, which spiral out, creating a circular gap.

The central structure of House Baenre is a glowing, purple dome, which covers a chapel large enough to seat all 2,600 of the house drow. Around its anchoring symmetry, twenty huge stalagmite mounds extend upward in a variety of shapes, some tall and slender, others short and squat, all interconnected with gracefully sweeping and arching bridges and parapets. These chambers are hollow, with their interiors providing living space for the house members.

Even more striking are the inverse structures of the thirty stalactites that loom over the compound. Not all are hollow like the stalagmite mounds, but each is ringed with balconies, curving downward like the edges of a screw. Some connect tip-to-tip with stalagmite mounds; others hang freely, except for stone skywalks linking them to other structures.

A thousand soldiers, adorned in their meticulous Baenre silver uniforms and displaying badges distinguishing their house and rank, are always on patrol along these skywalks and balconies. The largest garrison, forty-five elite female warriors, patrols the area around the central dome and the two stalagmite mounds immediately flanking it (where the noble family resides: females in the more elaborate structure, males in the lesser mound).

The great mound occupied by Matron Baenre and her daughters also houses its own inner garrison of fifty elite female warriors, twenty-five per shift, who patrol in groups of five.

Throughout the house's storied history, each Baenre matron mother has sat upon the same fearsome black throne—a wonder in whose gleaming depths writhe strange shapes rumored to be the spirits of House Baenre's victims.

## ADVENTURERS OF HOUSE BAENRE

*“Do not forget your place, or I will be forced to remind you who bears the favor of Lolth.”*

### Join House Baenre if you want to:

- ◆ Be a scion of the highest-ranked and most powerful house in Menzoberranzan.
- ◆ Play a paragon of drow privilege and birthright, favored of Lolth.
- ◆ Fight for every scrap of social standing to distinguish yourself from your siblings.

### BAENRE HOUSE PRIESTESS

As a house priestess, the course of your life has been laid out since the day you were born. Of course you entered the priesthood—it was your duty as a daughter of Baenre—and you expect to advance quickly.

Your duty to Lolth is important to you—almost as important as your duty to the matron mother. Consider every quest or endeavor you undertake equally in terms of how it benefits Lolth and how it advances House Baenre. The stronger your house grows in Lolth’s favor, the more you can ask of it in exchange.

React to others based primarily on their value to you. Your adventuring companions are vital to your survival, so don’t alienate them. Judge all individuals by how much influence they wield, and offer them respect accordingly. You do not revere life for its own sake, and you are puzzled by those who speak about the inherent value or dignity of living beings. Still, you are not a wanton murderer, but you have no compunctions about killing when it’s expedient or convenient.

You take pleasure in inflicting pain, as is your birthright.

You always watch the males in your house for treachery. The masters of Sorcere have long been rumored to convene arcane moots in which all manner

of traitorous rhetoric is repeated by bored males with too much ability for their own good. Matron Baenre has tasked you with infiltrating one of these mage gatherings and ferreting out the truth of their agenda. If Gromph is found to be complicit in any treason, you are ordered to find incontrovertible evidence of his crimes.

**Characteristics:** Bloodthirsty, cruel, disciplined.

**Prerequisites:** Drow (female only; male drow are never accepted into Lolth’s priesthood); member of House Baenre.

### BAENRE ELITE GUARD

No force in all of Menzoberranzan is as well equipped as the soldiers that serve in House Baenre’s elite guard. As a member of the elite house guard, you report up the ranks to the house weapon master, who in turn reports directly to Matron Baenre. Depending on your skills, you might be an archer, a foot soldier, a lizard rider, or a templar.

House Baenre’s slave force is not as numerous as those of other houses, so many menial burdens are placed upon guards of low rank. You try to avoid such work.

Most of your fellow guards are tasked with patrolling the Baenre compound, but you have been given special orders reserved for a select few—you have been tasked with assembling a reconnaissance force that has no overt ties to House Baenre. With this force, you will scout out the environs of the ruined City of Wyrmsadows and report on any Jazred Chaulssin activity in the vicinity.

**Characteristics:** Self-assured, short-tempered, experienced.

**Prerequisites:** Drow (primarily male, but the Baenre elite guard does host a battalion or two of female warriors); member of House Baenre.

## THE SABLE YEARS: YVONNEL THE ETERNAL

No drow living in Menzoberranzan during the Sable Years has known a time when Yvonnell Baenre did not rule as First Matron. In her centuries as head of the First House, Yvonnell established House Baenre as an indelible bastion of power with the unquestioned favor of Lolth.

Belying her sobriquet, Yvonnell died in 1358 DR after a life spanning more than two thousand years. Thus, most of the information presented here is applicable during much of the Founding era as well as the entirety of the Sable Years and the Time of Troubles.

### House Baenre in the Sable Years

**Rank:** 1st [Ruling Council]

**Matron Mother:** Yvonnell Baenre (-7 DR to 1358 DR)

**First Priestess:** Triel Baenre

**House Wizard:** Gromph Baenre

**House Weapon Master:** Dantrag Baenre

**Patron:** None

**Allies:** Bregan D’aerthe, House Agrach Dyrr, House Faen Tlabbar, House Xorlarrin

**Rivals:** House Barrison Del’Armgo, House Oblodra



Left to right: Bladen'Kerst, First Priestess Triel, Matron Mother Yvonnell, Vendes, Weapon Master Dantrag

Over the last few centuries, Yvonnell Baenre has eroded the power of the Ruling Council. Severely diminished, the council is little more than a gathering of puppet houses unwittingly enacting edicts that favor the continued supremacy of House Baenre. Having secured unprecedented control over the city, Matron Mother Yvonnell Baenre serves as the closest thing Menzoberranzan has ever had to a queen—a title she would surely claim, if such offices had not been forbidden by the Way of Lolth.

House Baenre's spy network is vast, and the matron mother is not the least bit hesitant to employ non-drow, including illithids and humans, to forward her twisted schemes. Yvonnell's chief advisor concerning matters beyond Menzoberranzan's borders is the mind flayer El-Viddenvelp, known as Methil. Matron Baenre has secretly delved a small hollow adjacent to the council chamber so that Methil can secretly monitor the thoughts of those participating in the proceedings.

As First Matron, Yvonnell has principal say in the disposition of surviving nobles and soldiers of defeated drow houses. To maintain appearances, Matron Baenre does not hoard all of these refugees, but it's no accident that the most promising and malleable ones find themselves among the ranks of House Baenre.

Of the other members of the Ruling Council, only House Barrison Del'Armgo and House Oblodra pose any threat to the supremacy of House Baenre. Yvonnell has set in motion decades-long plans to discredit both houses in the eyes of Lolth.

## Goals

Having risen to the zenith of political might millennia past, House Baenre achieved its greatest desires long ago. Yvonnell and her daughters appear content to serve Lolth and allow Menzoberranzan's chaotic story to unfold around them. Their complacency during this time period will lead to poor decisions, including an ill-fated invasion against the dwarves of Mithral Hall. Until that event occurs, House Baenre devotes its energy toward maintaining the status quo in Menzoberranzan, with itself secure at the top.

## Notable Personages

**Berg'inyon:** Yvonnell's youngest and favorite son, Berg'inyon trained at Melee-Magthere alongside Drizzt Do'Urden, to whom he always came in second. Berg'inyon has never forgiven Drizzt for outclassing him, and that hatred still runs deep.

**Bladen'Kerst:** The second oldest daughter of Yvonnell, Bladen'Kerst might have been assigned a minor house of her own, but she is so cruel and difficult to

control that she has been held back at House Baenre, put in charge of torturing captives. Lacking even the cold civility of the drow, Bladen'Kerst revels in causing pain. She is particularly contemptuous of male drow, whom she sees merely as test subjects for her latest techniques for inflicting agony.

**Dantrag:** Weapon master Dantrag is the house's principal military leader and its most skilled warrior. Dantrag has a curious code of honor for a drow, preferring not to attack unarmed opponents or to strike from behind. With the aid of magic bracers, Dantrag fights with amazing speed and acuity. His favorite weapon is the sentient and malign blade Khazid'hea.

**Liriel:** Born of the union between Gromph and Sosdrielle Vandree, Liriel was taken into House Baenre at a young age so that the archmage could cultivate her latent magical potential. After growing independent and restless because of the many restrictions at Arach-Tinilith, Liriel fled to the surface world for a life of exploration. Hunted by her house and her father, Liriel joined up with a human berserker and set sail across the Sea of Swords.

**Triel:** At just under five feet tall, Triel is smaller in stature than most drow females, yet she carries herself with such grace and gravitas there can be no doubt she enjoys the favor of Lolth. As Mistress Mother of Arach-Tinilith, Triel commands a voice in the city equaled only by the First Matron, but lacks the political acumen or quick wit to utilize her position to its fullest potential. Triel is content in her current role and has no designs on usurping her mother or stepping down to foster a lesser house. If she is irritated, Triel's cool demeanor quickly evaporates to reveal an incendiary temper.

**Vendes:** Another daughter of Yvonne, Vendes is sadistic and wicked. Like her sister Bladen'Kerst, Vendes enjoys the art of torture and goes about her assignments with a grim relish that has earned her the nickname Duk-Tak, from the drow words for "unholy executioner." Some of the few monuments to adorn the City of Spiders are the drow she has turned into ebony statues.

**Yvonne:** Older than any other drow known, Yvonne carries herself with an ease that reeks of cockiness. If she ever had any fears or worries, they have been long forgotten. Her youthful appearance faded centuries ago, though she sometimes uses elixirs to present the illusion of comeliness. Her true visage is crisscrossed with numerous deep wrinkles, and her hair has become thin and stringy, giving her a wraith-like appearance. Having grown tired of most physical pleasures, Yvonne devotes her time to political intrigue and psychological web-weaving. Her favorite toy is her prized spider wand, which she can use to entangle an enemy (or a disrespectful subordinate) in a sticky strand of webbing, or to deliver a poison-laced blow. She enjoys entangling victims and then listening to their screams as poison races through their bodies.

## THE SPELLPLAGUE ERA: DYNASTY DIMINISHED

The events of the last century have eroded the absolute power that House Baenre once enjoyed. In Baenre's struggle to maintain its position as the First House of Menzoberranzan, its weakened influence has brought about the restoration of meaningful authority to the Ruling Council.

Quenthel Baenre succeeded her sister Triel around 1383 DR, making this information applicable throughout the Spellplague era.

### House Baenre in the Spellplague Era

**Rank:** 1st [Ruling Council]

**Matron Mother:** Quenthel Baenre (1383 DR to present)

**First Priestess:** Sos'Umptu Baenre

**House Wizard:** Gromph Baenre

**House Weapon Master:** Andzrel Baenre

**Patron:** Velkryst Baenre (Xorlarrin)

**Allies:** Bregan D'aerthe, House Faen Tlabbar, House Xorlarrin, House Vandree

**Rivals:** House Barrison Del'Armgo, House Melarn

Favored by Lolth at a young age, Quenthel set her sights on the title of Mistress Mother of Arach-Tinilith and rose to the rank of high priestess faster than any before her. Before she could seize her prize, however, Quenthel was cut down by the renegade drow Drizzt. She languished in the Demonweb Pits for four years before being restored to the mortal realm. Soon after, Quenthel joined with a band of drow to investigate Lolth's silence, and later directly witnessed the rebirth of Lolth as a greater deity.

A decade after returning to the City of Spiders as a dark heroine to her fanatical people, Quenthel Baenre pushed her sister Triel into a confrontation with her that Triel couldn't hope to win. After delivering the former matron mother's soul to Lolth personally, Quenthel enjoyed a unique level of favor and intimacy with the Queen of Spiders. But as First Matron Quenthel was set to dissolve the Ruling Council, the Spellplague struck, irrevocably halting Quenthel's grand ambitions at forging a dark elf empire not witnessed since fabled Ilythiir of old.

Awakened to the new realities of life in the post-Spellplague era, House Baenre has moved to secure the city from external threats previously unknown to the citizens of Menzoberranzan. Over the last century, a more pragmatic Quenthel has proven to be a strong and even-tempered matron, though her insistence on keeping the title and duties of the Mistress Mother of Arach-Tinilith has drawn her attention away from the machinations of the Ruling Council.



Left to right: Tiago, First Priestess Sos'Umptu, Matron Mother Quenthel, Myrineyl, Aumon

## Goals

Quenthel's primary goal is to fulfill her role as matron mother of the First House by ensuring that Menzoberranzan is secure from outside threats during a time of ongoing chaos. To that end, she has increased patrols in the Dark Dominion (page 98) and has spies everywhere, alert to any news that might mean imminent danger to the city.

Her secondary goal is to make sure that House Baenre has and keeps the favor of Lolth—and its rightful place at the head of the Ruling Council. She is particularly displeased at House Melarn's new self-appointed role as the inquisitors of Lolth, and is trying to decide how best to obliterate this upstart house.

## Notable Personages

**Andzrel:** The epitome of discipline, Andzrel became weapon master of House Baenre after his cousin Berg'inyon joined Bregan D'aerthe and left the city. He is tall and slender, rarely seen without his signature blackened mithral plate armor and dark cloak. His expression is often direct and purposeful, an unusual trait in a drow of high birth.

**Aumon:** At age twenty, Aumon is currently completing his first year at the Academy. As elderboy, he is expected to replace Andzrel as weapon master when his studies conclude, but Aumon has other aspirations. The young male is being surreptitiously

coerced by the Jaezred Chaulssin to betray his mother and seize control of House Baenre.

**Myrineyl:** As Quenthel's firstborn, Myrineyl has been groomed from an early age to rule. In stark contrast to her aunt Sos'Umptu, Myrineyl is sadistic through and through. The young priestess harbors a bizarre fascination with surface elves, always keeping one as a personal attendant; such playthings rarely survive long and are quickly replaced. Myrineyl is equally adept at both divine and arcane magic.

**Quenthel:** Quenthel is the epitome of the noble drow priestess. She is arrogant, confident, and fearless; few drow would dare gainsay her least command. The First Matron is a tall, athletic, and graceful woman of great beauty. Though an accomplished high priestess in her own right, Quenthel lacks the gifts of patience and subtlety that marked her mother's long rule of the city. The circumstances of Quenthel's resurrection remain shrouded in mystery, and the First Matron does not speak of the event. Quenthel employs a scourge with five sentient snake heads, each with its own wicked personality and desires. These snakes have been known to exercise some influence over Quenthel's decisions.

**Sos'Umptu:** Quenthel's only remaining female sibling, Sos'Umptu is serving as the house's first priestess until Quenthel's eldest daughter Myrineyl graduates from the Academy. Since Myrineyl is in her final year of study, Sos'Umptu is prudently laying the groundwork for establishing a new house of her own. She

# House Do'Urden

*Aspiring to greatness, but brought low by the actions of one errant secondboy and his unusual conscience*

## House Do'Urden

**Traits:** Militaristic, sadistic

**Power:** 9



**Membership:** 21 house nobles (4 high priestesses, 8 priestesses, 7 warriors, 2 wizards), 350 soldiers, 350 slaves

**Headquarters:** Do'Urden compound; West Wall

**Religious Affiliation:** Church of Lolth (strong)



spends much of her time at the Fane of the Goddess in West Wall, a public cathedral constructed in no small measure through her own efforts. Sos'Umptu has Quenthel's height, but her reserved demeanor is more akin to that of her deceased older sister, Triel. She has a sharp, subtle mind, and keeps her calculated, deliberate maliciousness carefully held in check.

**Tiago:** Handsome and skilled with a sword, Tiago has inherited all the best traits from his grandfather Dantrag. Only a few years separate the elder Tiago and his uncle Aumon in age, and the two are fierce but friendly rivals. Currently, Tiago serves as Andzrel's first assistant, and is often seen riding his spectacular lizard mount Byok in the city. Tiago is having a very special sword and shield made in Gauntlgrym that he believes he will need to fend off Aumon and supplant Andzrel as weapon master.

**Velkryst:** Quenthel claimed Velkryst, a former Xorlarrin house wizard, as her patron at the turn of the century despite his family's protests. The two have birthed five healthy daughters and two males. In recent years, Quenthel has grown increasingly dissatisfied with Velkryst's affections, and he rightfully fears that his days are numbered.

## The Demon Weave

During the events surrounding Lolth's creation of the Demon Weave, Quenthel is torn. On one hand, Quenthel wants and needs to retain the favor of Lolth. On the other, the fact that Lolth chose the form of Danifae to bring her message to the drow feels like a slap in the face to Quenthel, who wanted the honor that Danifae stole from her. And she is not willing to share her power, or the power of the priestesses as a whole, with upstart male wizards. She feels as though she is balanced on a knife's edge, with the abyss of Lolth's disfavor on one side and the horror of losing her grip on power—of upsetting the entire Way of Lolth—on the other.

Quenthel's position is complicated by her brother Gromph, the head of Sorcere and the Baenre house wizard. For decades, Gromph has lurked in the shadows, steering the city according to his wishes and subtly undermining his sister's authority. Quenthel believes he must be deeply entwined in schemes to usurp her power, but she is unable to discern exactly what he's up to. Her spies have told her of a cabal of wizards calling themselves the Council of Spiders and seeking wizard representation on the Ruling Council, and she believes that Gromph must be involved in this treachery. So far, she has not been able to prove it.

See the sidebar on page 13 for more information about the Council of Spiders.

For centuries, House Do'Urden worked to crawl its way from a lesser house to a rising power perched on the cusp of true prominence. By the end of the Founding era, Do'Urden (or Daermon N'a'shezbaernon, its ancient and formal name) was the Tenth House of Menzoberranzan and clearly on the way to a seat on the Ruling Council. Whenever the name Do'Urden was spoken, Matron Baenre could be seen to give the slightest nod of approval, suggesting that Lolth's favor upon the house was great indeed.

To all appearances, House Do'Urden is a perfect model of the way the game of status in Menzoberranzan should be played. Always careful to weigh the favor of Lolth, the house has climbed the ranks of power by striking against more powerful houses that have lost the Spider Queen's favor. The house makes strong alliances, notably with House Baenre, and avoids making enemies needlessly. And its leadership has always been savvy in the subtler games of intrigue, securing positions of influence for even the younger daughters and sons of the house.

For all of House Do'Urden's devotion to Lolth and attention to the webs of intrigue in the city, however, its ultimate fate is a testimony to the fickle favor of the Spider Queen, easily lost and difficult to regain. Some peoples might look to the example of House Do'Urden and draw a lesson about the dangers of hubris, observing how easy it is for the proud and ambitious to meet a grim end. For the drow, however, House Do'Urden is a reminder of how important it is to be utterly ruthless and unfailingly true to the Way of Lolth. Matron Malice, it is said, knew the traitorous heart of her weapon master and former patron, Zaknafein. She knew that he questioned Lolth's ways



and despised his own race, and yet she allowed him to live, channeling his anger and aggression into training the house's soldiers, making them an elite fighting force that facilitated House Do'Urden's climb to the threshold of the Ruling Council.

This weakness, allowing an apostate to live, was the downfall of House Do'Urden, for if it were not for Zaknafein's soft heart, Drizzt Do'Urden could never have become the good-hearted, selfless, fair-minded abomination he is. Because of Zaknafein and Drizzt, House Do'Urden lost Lolth's favor, and Drizzt was only sixty years old when his house collapsed in ruin.

After the Sable Years, the houses of Menzoberranzan look to the ambition, the subtlety, and the cruelty of House Do'Urden as an example, but only while realizing that they must be more ruthless than House Do'Urden if they want to stay in Lolth's favor.

## Do'Urden Compound

House Do'Urden's residence is built into the great cavern's West Wall, rather than being inside stalagmites and stalactites as most noble houses' headquarters are. Two huge stalagmite pillars serve as anchoring posts for the compound gate and also house the slave and drow commoners attached to the family. Most members of the house, including all its nobles, reside in the two-level cave complex within the wall.

The first level is a virtual maze of tunnels and small residence halls, featuring a large dining area and a training ground. The house chapel looms at the back wall, two stories high and of similar design to House Baenre's.

The upper level can be reached only through the chapel balcony or the outer balcony overlooking the Do'Urden compound, and neither entrance has a staircase. The family drow use their levitation abilities to reach the balconies.

A long, straight corridor runs westward from the outer balcony. Seven side passages to the north lead to the small suites of the ruling family, the last belonging to Matron Malice, and the one before that serving as the matron mother's alchemical laboratory.

The south side of the upper complex holds a large dining hall, a two-room suite for Rikken (the current patron), and a three-room suite occupied by Weapon Master Zaknafein, including his private quarters, a small training area, and the house's war room.

At the end of the upper complex's main hall lies the most important chamber in the compound, the chapel anteroom. Malice and her principal priestesses gather there in times of war, directing their forces against enemy houses and factions. The anteroom connects to the chapel proper.

# THE SABLE YEARS: MALICE RISING

Fiercely ambitious, conniving, loyal only to Lolth, and ruthless in the extreme, Malice Do'Urden is by all measures the perfect matron mother. But will fate permit Daermon N'a'shezbaernon to ascend to the Ruling Council, or bring it crashing down?

The period of the Sable Years is defined by House Do'Urden. This era begins with House Do'Urden's attack on House DeVir in 1297 DR and ends with the destruction of the house in 1357. Malice was killed by her daughter Briza in 1337 in a futile attempt to regain Lolth's favor upon her house, but House Baenre violated its alliance with Do'Urden and destroyed that house on Lolth's orders in the same year. Vierna Do'Urden attempted to rebuild the house in 1357, but her death at Drizzt's hands put an end to that effort, leaving Drizzt the last surviving Do'Urden. This entry is most suitable for play during Malice's rule, any time between 918 and 1339 DR.

### House Do'Urden in the Sable Years

**Rank:** 10th until 1297, then 9th

**Matron Mother:** Malice Do'Urden (918 DR to 1339 DR)

**First Priestess:** Briza Do'Urden

**House Wizard:** Ozomar Do'Urden

**House Weapon Master:** Zaknafein Do'Urden

**Patron:** Rikken Do'Urden

**Allies:** House Baenre

**Rivals:** House Hun'ett, House Fey-Branche

House Do'Urden is clearly on the fast track toward the Ruling Council, having recently ascended to the ninth rank with one of the finest house eliminations ever carried out in Menzoberranzan against House DeVir. Matron Ginfae learned firsthand the penalty for falling out of the Spider Queen's favor when Zaknafein cut out her tongue with his whip.

On the same day that House DeVir was destroyed, a male child was born to Malice: Drizzt, a drow who would seal the fate of the Do'Urden family and, unintentionally, shake the foundations of Menzoberranzan in years to come. As the third living son, Drizzt was marked for sacrifice to Lolth, but his eldest brother, Nalfein, was killed in the DeVir assault (by his brother Dinin) and therefore the babe was allowed to live.

The might of House Do'Urden lies in the unquestioning fealty to Lolth of Matron Malice and her three eldest daughters, as well as the unrivaled instruction of Zaknafein, the House Do'Urden weapon master.

Malice is an expert in the game of intrigue within the city, placing her children in important positions

## ADVENTURERS OF HOUSE DO'URDEN

*"My house has many claims to greatness, and I will be one more."*

### Join House Do'Urden if you want to:

- ✦ Study with the greatest weapon master the city has ever known.
- ✦ Aid your house in seizing a position on the Ruling Council.
- ✦ Live secretly as a renegade apostate eschewing the Way of Lolth.

### DO'URDEN RENEGADE

Although thinking this way flies in the face of everything you've been taught since a young age, you see the Way of Lolth for the corruptive dogma it truly is. You know in your heart there must be a better way, if only it would present itself to you. Because you are being raised in a city where treachery and underhandedness are rewarded, it's only a matter of time before your apostate beliefs are recognized for what they are. However dangerous doing so might be, you strive daily to hold true to your principles. Until you can find trusted allies, you are resolved to keep your head down and avoid revealing your true beliefs.

To purge you of any lingering vestiges of compassion, a trait many priestesses of Lolth view as a heretical weakness, Matron Mother Malice has demanded that you undergo the Rite of Blooding, a coming-of-age ritual that involves traveling to the surface world with your brothers and slaying a faerie elf in sacrifice to Lolth. To maintain both your personal code and station within your house, you must somehow deceive your drow comrades and deliver what they believe to be a successful kill. If you fail to accomplish this task, your life

will be forfeit. Or will you betray your principles and execute the surface elf, reveling in the merciless glory of being a drow?

**Characteristics:** Honorable, secretive, self-reliant

**Prerequisites:** Drow (renegades can be of any gender, but are primarily disenfranchised males); member of House Do'Urden

### DO'URDEN WEAPON MASTER

You are the premier master-at-arms of House Do'Urden, chosen by Matron Malice to train and lead the warriors of the house in combat. You are quick, deadly, and everything a drow warrior strives to be. Tutored by the legendary weapon master Zaknafein, you are a paragon of self-discipline and a master of the twin-sword fighting style. As house weapon master, you have achieved a level of respect accorded to few males in Menzoberranzan society.

Having been recently promoted, you will be constantly tested by other drow warriors to see how your fighting ability compares to the legendary Zaknafein Do'Urden. You understand that it's only a matter of time before Malice demands that you challenge your former instructor to settle the matter definitively.

In the meantime, you've been tasked with marshaling new forces to strengthen the defense of the Do'Urden compound. Matron SiNafay Hun'ett has been making less than subtle threats against House Do'Urden, and Matron Malice believes an attack to be imminent.

**Characteristics:** Composed, deadly, proud

**Prerequisites:** Drow (weapon masters are primarily male—though a female can achieve the title, she would be accorded far less status than even a mediocre priestess); member of House Do'Urden

at the Academy or among prestigious troops patrolling the Dark Dominion. Every move Malice and her daughters make is carefully weighed by the most pertinent of all drow questions: Would it please Lolth, thereby elevating the station of House Do'Urden?

## Goals

One obsession alone has guided Malice's actions over the last century and more. With House DeVir destroyed, Matron Malice is now only one rank away from her long-coveted seat on the Ruling Council. With her youngest son growing into an exceptional warrior—his accolades at the Academy further enhancing House Do'Urden's standing in the city—attaining her ultimate goal seems all but assured.

## Notable Personages

**Briza:** First priestess of House Do'Urden, Briza is most notable for her intimidating presence. Not only

physically menacing, Briza has a sharp, angry tongue that gets her in trouble with superiors and strikes fear into those of lesser rank. Briza is always the first to punish her brothers or anyone else unfortunate enough to cross her.

**Dinin:** The second-born son of Malice, Dinin killed his older brother Nalfein the moment he had an opportunity, allowing him to rise to the status of elderboy. A skilled fighter, Dinin seeks to become the master of the Academy at Melee-Magthere.

**Drizzt:** As the third-born son of Malice, Drizzt was to be sacrificed to Lolth, but he was saved by the coincidental murder of his older brother Nalfein. Through his training at Melee-Magthere and his tutelage under Zaknafein, Drizzt has become an expert swordsman. His balance, speed, and agility are all superior to those of most of his opponents. Possessed of keen senses, Drizzt is almost unnaturally perceptive and nearly impossible to surprise. Drizzt's lavender eyes set him



Left to right: Drizzt, First Priestess Briza, Weapon Master Zaknafein, Matron Mother Malice, Vierna

apart from most drow, whose eyes are typically red. Though born into a society where treachery is the rule of the day, Drizzt endeavors to live with honor and integrity. Drizzt's most prized item (some say also his best friend) is a *figurine of wondrous power*—an onyx panther called Guenhwyvar.

**Ozomar:** Formerly of House Druu'giir, this promising Sorcere graduate gladly defected to House Do'Urden to serve Malice as house wizard after the murder of his long-time enemy, Nalfein.

**Malice:** Malice Do'Urden is the matriarch of House Do'Urden. She is a high-ranking priestess of Lolth, as well as a skilled alchemist capable of mixing various potions, elixirs, and salves. Her ability to bind a spirit-wraith, a process she performed on former house patron Zaknafein, frightens rival drow priestesses. She has lived for five centuries in the unforgiving City of Spiders, relying on cunning and treachery to see her through.

**Maya:** Little is known about the youngest of Malice's three daughters. She plays the proper, subservient role in family business, attendant to her mother's every whim. Briza and Vierna constantly vie for their little sister's attention, each of them trying to exert the most influence over her development.

**Rizzen:** Rizzen became patron of House Do'Urden after Malice stripped Zaknafein of that rank. The title

is largely, if not entirely, ceremonial, and Rizzen takes his orders from Briza as often as from Malice. A warrior and a former student of Zaknafein, Rizzen also has limited arcane talent—enough to make him useful to Malice and irritating to the first priestess.

**Vierna:** The second daughter of Malice, Vierna was expected to slink into the background, but she has ambitions of her own. Her mother charged her with the upbringing of her brother Drizzt when the boy was a toddler, and during the first five years of his life, Vierna instilled in her brother the rigorous evil of the dark elf matriarchy. When Drizzt entered Melee-Magthere, Vierna became a high priestess in her own right and a mistress of the Academy, and soon came to set her sights on her mother's throne. Vierna is as much at home in the wild Underdark as she is on the streets and within the mansions of Menzoberranzan.

**Zaknafein:** Arguably the finest weapon master in Menzoberranzan's history, Zaknafein of House Do'Urden is also Drizzt's father. Although Zaknafein has fought everything from demons to elementals in his nearly four centuries of life, he likes to kill drow most of all, especially priestesses of Lolth. Zaknafein prefers the twin-sword style of Melee-Magthere, and he passes that style on to his son, along with his distaste for drow customs.

# House Hunzrin

*A shrewd family of farmers and merchants still regarded with scorn even by lower houses*

## House Hunzrin

**Traits:** Avaricious, duplicitous

**Power:** 9



**Membership:** 12 house nobles (1 high priestess, 3 priestesses, 7 warriors, 1 wizard), 200 soldiers, 1,850 slaves

**Headquarters:** Hunzrin compound; Eastmyr

**Religious Affiliation:** Church of Lolth (weak)



Not all noble houses have the luxury of persisting on divine might and political intrigue alone. Lesser houses like Hunzrin must content themselves with pragmatic livelihoods in artifice or trade. Traditionally, this family of “stone head” farmers was notable for its near monopoly over agriculture within the city. Millennia past, Matron Ezka Hunzrin secured the parcel of land known today as Donigarten. The fungi farms, the moss bed, and the herd of deep rothé that sustain the citizens of Menzoberranzan all are property of House Hunzrin.

If it were not for House Hunzrin’s small number of priestesses, this agricultural powerhouse would surely hold a position on the Ruling Council. Much of the family’s early success stemmed from a mutually beneficial alliance with House Baenre. As long as the Hunzrins limited their political aspirations and focused on the agronomic needs of the city, House Baenre agreed to lend its aid in policing the farm

slave force and thwarting the occasional aberrations that rose from the depths of Lake Donigarten.

## Hunzrin Compound

House Hunzrin has many holdings—workshops, warehouses, and ranches—scattered throughout Menzoberranzan, but the family’s primary residence remains the ancestral estate in Eastmyr. The fenced compound stands about a stone’s throw from the West Braeryn Gate.

## THE SPELLPLAGUE ERA: MERCANTILE EMPIRE

House Hunzrin has control of the agricultural trade in Menzoberranzan, a fact that has led to the house being viewed as a bunch of “stone head” farmers.

The fortunes of House Hunzrin have accelerated over the last century, kick-started by the accession of Shakti as matron mother in 1412 DR. The entry below applies throughout the Spellplague era.

### House Hunzrin in the Spellplague Era

**Rank:** 11th

**Matron Mother:** Shakti Hunzrin

**First Priestess:** Charri Hunzrin

**House Wizard:** Xeva Hunzrin

**House Weapon Master:** Keptus Hunzrin

**Patron:** Barag Hunzrin

**Allies:** House Barrison Del’Armgo, House Mizzrym, Brown Mushroom Coster

**Rivals:** House Baenre, Black Claw Mercantile, Xalyth’s Company

## ADVENTURERS OF HOUSE HUNZRIN

*“I’d rather have a ‘stone head’ than a soft one filled with useless ideas.”*

### Join House Hunzrin if you want to:

- ◆ Ally with a merchant clan where hard work is rewarded over political intrigue.
- ◆ Play a drow commoner in a house that doesn’t turn up its nose at such humble origins.
- ◆ Be elderboy of an up-and-coming noble house.

### DROW TRADER

For centuries many a drow commoner has earned a living working as a sharecropper in one of House Hunzrin’s many farms. Particularly hardworking farmers can even aspire to join the merchant clan as a titled member of the family, earning slaves and additional perks along with the title. Tenant farmers that fail to

meet seasonal quotas, however, find themselves out of work or drowned in Lake Donigarten.

As a trader in one of Hunzrin’s many guilds—involved in agriculture, mining, carving, or metallurgy—you have recently learned that one of the Donigarten overseers has been extorting tolls from caravans passing into the city from the Eastways. The exorbitant percentage the overseer is demanding has stifled trade, with some caravan masters opting to meet with competing clans.

The decision set before you is this: Do you expose the overseer’s exorbitant skimming to your matron mother to curry her favor, or do you instead blackmail the overseer into cutting you in on the profits?

**Characteristics:** Hard-working, patient, shrewd

**Prerequisites:** Drow; member of House Hunzrin



Left to right: Matron Mother Shakti, her bodyguard Korokai, First Priestess Charri, House Wizard Xeva, Weapon Master Keptus

House Hunzrin is ambitious, but Matron Shakti wisely advances her intrigues more with shrewd business acumen than with tawdry back-alley assassinations. Since claiming the title of matron mother, Shakti has quietly amassed economic strength by subtly usurping control over many of the commodities upon which the city relies. She hasn't used this activity to force a rise in the house's rank, because she knows her house lacks the troops and the arcane might to survive such an attempt. Instead, she prefers to be recognized as a behind-the-scenes power, never enough of a direct threat to alarm the Ruling Council. With her new power base established, Shakti annulled her mother's alliance with House Baenre.

Shakti has long harbored enmity for the First House, whom she views as a poor steward of the city. In particular, the matron mother holds a long-standing personal grudge against Liriel Baenre, who once bested Shakti at *nai'shedareth*—ritual combat between two priestesses to determine who has the greater favor of Lolth. In recent decades, Shakti has channeled her displeasure into a fruitful alliance with one of Baenre's most hated rivals, House Barrison Del'Armgo.

## Goals

Slowly but steadily, Shakti has been building a coalition of lesser houses and merchants clans with collective influence rivaling that of the Ruling Council.

While the council members have been largely content to coast on their personal power, Shakti's secret consortium has been earning popular support among the citizenry. By securing food for the populace and dealing with the pragmatic day-to-day issues of city governance, Shakti is effectively attempting a bloodless coup for control of Menzoberranzan.

## Notable Personages

**Shakti:** Trained from childhood to rule, Shakti was subjected to the same sort of upbringing that any other drow heir apparent would receive in similar circumstances. Matron Kintuere pushed her daughter relentlessly to be smarter, tougher, and more ruthless than anyone around her. Even so, as a young child Shakti preferred to spend time among the mushroom fields and rothé herds of the family business, and she greatly resented the cultural necessity that tore her away from her passion and sent her to Arach-Tinilith. Now as a matron herself, Shakti better appreciates her mother's heavy-handed attitude toward her education, but she keeps herself apart from the chaotic desires for revenge and intrigue that plague other matrons.

Unlike many matron mothers who surround themselves with the pomp and ceremony of queens, Shakti is a more grounded leader. She keeps an oni named Korokai as a bodyguard and is rarely seen without the hulking brute, giving her an air far more like that of a merchant queen than a matron mother.

# House Oblodra

Known for its use of psionics in preference to other magic, it tried to take advantage of the Time of Troubles

## House Oblodra

**Traits:** Authoritarian, secretive

**Power:** 12



**Membership:** 32 house nobles (6 high priestesses, 16 priestesses, 4 warriors, 6 wizards), 450 soldiers, 600 slaves

**Headquarters:** Oblodran compound; Duthcloim

**Religious Affiliation:** Church of Lolth (weak)



The Third House of Menzoberranzan has a reputation for unpredictability, one that is well deserved because it makes and breaks alliances with abandon. House Oblodra's lofty place in the hierarchy of Menzoberranzan is built upon psionic power and the ability of the mind, talents that are foreign to the other Lolth-worshipping drow of the city. The Oblodrans do nothing to bridge this gap; they are intensely secretive, refusing to discuss their abilities or strengths with others.

From its founding early in Menzoberranzan's history, House Oblodra has been ruled by priestesses who also possess psionic talents. Perhaps aided by these unusual powers, House Oblodra slowly crawled its way up the house ranks. Although the house repeatedly teetered on the brink of extinction, wars with the Oblodrans were horrific, bloody affairs, leaving other houses loath to provoke them. By 1297 DR, Oblodra was the Third House of Menzoberranzan, with more than a dozen obliterated houses left in its wake.

In the Year of Shadows (1358 DR), Faerûn was gripped by the Time of Troubles, when the gods were stripped of their ability to answer prayers, and magic became dangerously unpredictable. Psionic ability was unaffected by the crisis, making Oblodra the most powerful house in the city, at least temporarily.

After determining that the seeming failures of spells and prayers wasn't a trick, Matron Mother K'yorl Odran attacked House Faen Tlabbar and killed her old rival, Matron Mother Ghenni'tiroth, by telekinetically ripping her beating heart from her chest. K'yorl then attacked the gathered Ruling Council, intending to wipe out all remaining opposition and claim rulership of Menzoberranzan.

But K'yorl had waited too long. Her petty vengeance against House Faen Tlabbar cost her the

advantage. Lolth made a deal with the balor demon Errtu, who sent demons to the aid of the Ruling Council and House Baenre. The demons drove K'yorl away and laid siege to the Oblodran compound, while obliterating its kobold army.

As vengeance for Oblodra's offenses, Matron Baenre called upon Lolth to banish K'yorl Odran into the Abyss, where she would be tortured for eternity by Errtu. Lolth manifested an enormous black tentacle that reached out of the Clawrift and pulling the entire house—compound and noble alike—into the chasm, dramatically ending the existence of House Oblodra.

## Oblodra Compound

House Oblodra occupies a small stalagmite and stalactite compound in the center of the city, between two "fingers" of the Clawrift. The compound is protected on three sides of the rift, and the west face is guarded by a contingent of no less than 25 soldiers armed with bows and short swords.

The compound is roughly diamond-shaped and very large. Because of the house's smaller number of inhabitants, the compound seems sparsely populated compared to those of other houses, especially House Barrison Del'Armgo. Oblodran nobles enjoy extensive suites and even lower-stationed drow have private rooms. The silent nature of the psionic power utilized by the Oblodran psionics gives the compound an eerie hush that is unnerving to visitors.

In an ancient network of tunnels and walkways extending deep into the Clawrift, House Oblodra keeps at least six hundred kobolds as fodder in the event of a war. Rumors in the city suggest that the tunnels could house tens of thousands of kobolds, and word of that possibility has dissuaded many houses from launching an attack against House Oblodra.

Half of the Oblodran soldiers and at least one noble daughter are out of the compound at any given time. Matron K'yorl has openly declared that should any house attack the Oblodran compound, this force will bring the battle to the aggressor's gates (while the noble daughter convenes the Ruling Council).

## THE SABLE YEARS: K'YORL'S BLUFF

House Oblodra plays a dangerous game. By all measures, it is weak—far weaker than many of the houses below it in rank. It maintains its position through intimidation, secrecy, and psionic manipulation.

House Oblodra held its position as Third House through the Sable Years until its destruction just after the Time of Troubles. The entry below is thus applicable throughout the Sable Years.

## ADVENTURERS OF HOUSE OBLODRA

*“You will never understand the secrets of my house, and what you cannot understand you will learn to fear.”*

### Join House Oblodra if you want to:

- ◆ Be a scion of the most feared and secretive house in Menzoberranzan.
- ◆ Play a psionist who uses mental powers in a city dominated by divine magic.
- ◆ Intimidate your foes through your reputation for insanity and mutual destruction.

### OBLODRAN PSION

Like many members of House Oblodra, you are gifted with unusual powers of the mind. These powers have made you and your house respected and feared in Menzoberranzan. Those weaklings in House Faen Tlabbar cower before your power, and they have held back from attacking your house for years for fear of it. Matron Mother Baenre is so terrified of your power that she now has an illithid advisor. Fool! The illithid will lie to her, exaggerating the power of psionics to the point where House Baenre will believe that the Oblodran psionists are capable of anything.

In your mind, the illithid is not far off the mark in terms of your power. You are not reliant on some petty goddess or hobbled to arcane tomes filled with the ramblings of ancient wizards. No—your power comes from the mind. It is what separates you from the animals, from the slaves, and from the teeming hordes that infest the streets of Menzoberranzan. Someday, these crutches of arcane and divine power used by the other houses will fail. When that day comes, the city will tremble at your power and that of House Oblodra.

Until then, you continue to hone your skill. Matron Mother K'yorl Odran demands secrecy, and you have

been commanded to keep your true ability hidden from those outside the house. If this concealment results in your death, so be it. Keeping the house's secrets is more important than a single psionist's life, and if you spread false information about your house and your powers in the process, so much the better.

**Characteristics:** Secretive, treacherous, fanatical

**Prerequisites:** Drow; member of House Oblodra who uses psionic power

### OBLODRAN FANATIC

House Oblodra is notorious for killing its own as often as killing its enemies. The house members' love for the near suicidal game of khaless (page 82) is testament of that fact. You have managed to survive such infighting and joined the ranks of the warriors. You know no fear and attack the enemies of your house relentlessly. Odds mean nothing to you. Only the weak fear death; you win through intimidation and a willingness to die while taking many enemies with you.

For you, danger is thrilling. It gives shape and meaning to life, and you seek it out at every turn. The more foolish and suicidal an objective is, the more you like it. The fact that other drow see you as insane doesn't bother you a bit. Because you are strong, and they are weak.

Other houses consider only their lowest-worth members to be expendable. But you know the truth—every drow is expendable. The only question is how much damage can you do before you're done. If you don't care about survival and your opponent does, then you have already won the battle.

**Characteristics:** Suicidal, unpredictable, fanatical

**Prerequisites:** Drow; member of House Oblodra

House Oblodra is a scheming, treacherous group that uses its mastery of psionics as a weapon against the other houses. The Oblodran warriors are savage and considered insane by those of most other houses.

The matron mother of House Oblodra has become the principal overseer of the many patrol groups scouting the tunnels in the Dark Dominion. She places her finest warriors in those patrols, which weakens her compound but puts her in a position to watch and strike at the noble children of rival houses.

Although the two houses have an alliance, Barrison Del'Armgo does not trust Oblodra. This is wise because Oblodra has no intention of honoring the alliance with the Second House. House Faen Tlabbar views Oblodra as the next step in its quest for ascension, and the two houses feud constantly.

## Goals

Like all noble houses, Oblodra wants to advance in rank and eventually become the First House of Menzoberranzan. Two houses stand in its way—Baenre and Barrison Del'Armgo. Of the two, Oblodra respects House Baenre far more. K'yorl is waiting for Matron Yvonnell to make a mistake and expose herself. K'yorl does what she can to encourage House Baenre into missteps by needling and provoking at every opportunity. Even if Yvonnell does not show any weakness, she is old, and K'yorl believes she will likely die soon. K'yorl also believes herself far superior to Triel, and House Oblodra will make its move once the succession occurs.

## Notable Personages

**K'yorl Odran:** Matron K'yorl is a small, seemingly weak drow. She wears simple robes and carries no



Left to right: Weapon Master Hazaufein, First Priestess Quavylene, Matron Mother K'yorl, Patron Tsabanor, Weapon Master Drizfryn

visible weapon, even when leaving the compound or attending meetings of the Ruling Council. Detection spells reveal no magic on her at all. The Menzober-ranyr whisper of this fact as K'yorl's Bluff—but so far no one has found the courage to call her on it.

K'yorl is cocky, arrogant, and openly hostile. She offers no pretense of friendliness toward anyone outside House Oblodra, and precious little to those inside the house. She is barely devout, often skirting the edge of blasphemy. It is amazing that she has survived, especially when she appears so vulnerable.

A sadist of the first degree, K'yorl enjoys tormenting her fellow matron mothers, flashing her signature wicked smile that tells the others that she is undoubtedly lying, she knows that they know, and she enjoys that they know.

K'yorl is dedicated to the pleasures of the mind. She mostly uses her psionic abilities to anger her rival matron mothers rather than for any real gains. She has a deep and abiding hatred for Ghenni'tiroth Tlabbar, because the unflappable Matron Ghenni resists intimidation and maintains her serenity.

**Quavylene:** K'yorl's eldest daughter, Quavylene, is the first priestess of the house and shares her mother's psionic talent. No matter how hard she tries, Quavylene cannot measure up to her mother's expectations, which change arbitrarily. She is often the target of her mother's telepathic tirades. She once conspired to murder her mother, but her thoughts betrayed her

### House Oblodra in the Sable Years

**Rank:** 3rd [Ruling Council]

**Matron Mother:** K'yorl Odran (961 DR to 1358 DR)

**First Priestess:** Quavylene Oblodra

**House Wizard:** Hazaufein Oblodra

**House Weapon Master:** Drizfryn Oblodra

**Patron:** Tsabanor Oblodra

**Allies:** House Barrison Del'Armgo

**Rivals:** House Baenre; House Faen Tlabbar

to K'yorl and she never dared try again. Centuries of abuse have ground the eldest daughter into a broken shell that trembles at her mother's glance.

**Hazaufein:** The position of house wizard is often overlooked among the Oblodra. Matron Mother K'yorl and her psionically endowed daughters have little respect for the arcane arts. The position is currently filled by Hazaufein, the elderboy. His role is to craft magical arms and armor for use by the house warriors. He is very good at this task, and he churns out quality items on a regular basis. Because of his skill at crafting, his brother Drizfryn facetiously mocks him for being part dwarf. Hazaufein accepts the warrior's jests with a wan smile, since they are easier to take than beatings.



**Drizfryn:** Drizfryn, the house weapon master, is a violent psychopath who is barely held in check by his mother. He is K'yorl's fourth son, but holds the position of secondboy because two of his older brothers have died—one while playing the dangerous game khaless (page 82), and the other sacrificed to Lolth. Drizfryn constantly looks for ways to test himself and his warriors. He is notorious for putting himself and them into seemingly impossible situations on patrol or in exercises. The dreadful casualty rate does not bother him or his folk—another reason why House Oblodra is thought of as mad.

**Tsabanor:** Tsabanor, House Oblodra's patron, is not very strong or handsome. Other houses joke that this fact makes him the perfect consort for the plain and unimpressive K'yorl. The matron mother chose him as her patron because of his latent psionic ability, which would increase the likelihood that their children would possess the trait. She did have his tongue cut out of his head when he tried to speak to her too often, however, making Tsabanor a pathetic figure in the compound. He was once a skilled speaker, but now he can manage little more than gargled mumbling. He knows that his life continues only at the whim of K'yorl, who taunts and torments him mercilessly. He regularly contemplates hurling himself into the Clawrift to put himself out of his misery.

## RELEASING THE DAMNED

At the end of the Time of Troubles, Lolth utterly destroyed House Oblodra and banished K'yorl Odran to the Abyss, where she is tortured to this day by Errtu, a balor of enormous strength. A rescue attempt could free the matron mother from her punishment. If Errtu is slain, K'yorl could flee the Abyss and return to the Underdark. Alternatively, if the offer were enticing enough, Errtu would not be above bargaining for the freedom of his prisoner. His hatred for Drizzt Do'Urden is legendary, and information on the renegade drow and a path for the demon to enter Faerûn would make excellent bargaining chips.

K'yorl will not be grateful for her rescue, but she is vindictive, and has a major axe to grind with House Baenre. If she was unleashed upon the house in its current weakened state, she might be able to destroy House Baenre, or at worst provide a tremendous distraction for another house to do so.

Minolin Fey-Branche has pondered this option for some time. However, K'yorl was damned for blasphemy against Lolth, so freeing her might anger the Spider Queen and cause Minolin to lose the goddess's favor. But Lolth damned K'yorl well over a century ago, and the Lolth is notoriously capricious. Perhaps if Minolin used pawns to free K'yorl, the high priestess's involvement would go unnoticed by Lolth.

# House Melarn

*The union of two families suspected of heretical leanings, turned into the fierce inquisitors of Lolth*

## House Melarn

**Traits:** Militaristic, zealous

**Power:** 11



**Membership:** 14 house nobles (3 high priestesses, 3 priestesses, 5 warriors, 3 wizards), 325 soldiers, 150 slaves

**Headquarters:** Melarn compound; West Wall (Lolth's Web)

**Religious Affiliation:** Church of Lolth (strong)



The youngest of the ruling houses by far, House Melarn was formed from a union of House Horlbar and House Kenafin a decade after the end of Lolth's silence. In years prior, House Horlbar (the Twelfth House by the Time of Troubles) was distinguished primarily by its two matron mothers, the two posts traditionally being held by sisters or first cousins. Productive agriculture, ambitious trade, and long-simmering resentment helped the house maintain its standing, just below the status of those on the Ruling Council. House Kenafin was the Thirteenth House during the Time of Troubles and vaulted up to Tenth House by the War of the Spider Queen. It was known for the complete and utter subjugation of its males as well as its unusually fanatical devotion to the Way of Lolth.

During the struggle for supremacy that followed the War of the Spider Queen, the daughter of Matron Mother Ker Horlbar, First Priestess Jhelnae Horlbar, was revealed to be a secret follower of Eilistraee. This revelation rocked Menzoberranzan, since the apostasy of a first priestess cast tremendous suspicion upon the entire house. Within days, House Tuin'Tarl took it upon itself to squash the heretic house.

House Horlbar had long shared a close alliance with House Kenafin, and Kenafin's soldiers came to the aid of House Horlbar. Their combined forces not only beat back House Tuin'Tarl's attack but counterattacked with lethal effectiveness, destroying the Eighth House. Even the two houses' success in this conflict didn't remove the pall of suspicion that had now spread to House Kenafin. Several other houses launched tentative attacks against one house or the other, but Horlbar and Kenafin survived them all. Soon the two houses, weakened by the constant fighting, united into a single house.

## ADVENTURERS OF HOUSE MELARN

*“You claim the favor of Lolth, but how have you served her lately? The zeal of my house cannot be questioned.”*

### Join House Melarn if you want to:

- ◆ Be a member of a house that stands alone in a city full of enemies.
- ◆ Play a devotee of Lolth who is constantly under suspicion of treason and blasphemy, and returns the favor with zeal.
- ◆ Prove that you can be as evil and wicked as any drow.

### MELARN ARACHNOMANCER

You are obsessed with spiders. They fill your dreams and your waking thoughts. You are fascinated by all of spiderkind, from the monstrous arachnids of the Underdark to the dreaded bebiliths that the priestesses conjure for the most profane rituals. Images and icons of spiders have always been part of your life, with society teaching you to venerate these creatures as the children of Lolth. Your house chose its name in honor of the Lady Penitent, who was a drow-spider demon. It’s no wonder that you became obsessed with spiders.

You threw yourself into the study of spiders, interacting with them and allowing them to pierce your flesh so that you could experience the ambrosia of their venom. You bent your Sorcere-gained magical knowledge to their study until you could mimic their powers and learn to make them do your bidding.

What began as idle curiosity—a preoccupation with the movements of their graceful forms, the intricate beauty of their magnificent webs, and the predatory effectiveness of their kind—has become your life’s work. You command the spider swarms that patrol the

compound and work with the driders that serve House Melarn. Your magic is a potent force in the defense of your house, capturing enemies in magical webbing or slaying them with poison.

**Characteristics:** Creepy, obsessed, selfish

**Prerequisites:** Drow (most arachnomancers are male); graduate of Sorcere

### DREAD FANG OF HALISSTRA

As a dread fang of Halisstra, you enforce the will of the priestesses of your house. The goddess favors you, filling your mind with her whispers and mutterings. You were trained at Melee-Magthere as most warriors were, but after your graduation the priestesses of House Melarn chose you for a special path of service brought to Menzoberranzan by the refugees from Ched Nasad.

You opened yourself up to Lolth in a way that other warriors of the city do not. After you underwent years of study and religious indoctrination, the mark of Lolth’s favor began within you as a faint whispering, but it soon became far more insistent. The whispers pushed you to the brink of madness, until you embraced them just as Halisstra embraced her role as the Lady Penitent.

You are now an elite soldier who fights for the priestesses of House Melarn without doubt or question. Like Halisstra, you have equal training in the ways of the warrior and the assassin. You have perfected the drow tactics of stealth, mobility, and surprise, and you can hold your own in a face-to-face fight, but you much prefer ambushing your enemies.

**Characteristics:** Mad, obedient, silent

**Prerequisites:** Drow (of either gender); graduate of Melee-Magthere

Determined to prove their loyalty to Lolth, the priestesses of the united house took the name of Lolth’s Lady Penitent, Halisstra Melarn. Their military success, proving Lolth’s favor, elevated the combined houses to a place on the Ruling Council (despite many objections). Since then, House Melarn has absorbed a trickle of survivors from the original House Melarn, which fell in the destruction of Ched Nasad, but Matron Mother Zhindia Melarn is the daughter of Matron Mother Jerlys of House Horlbar.

House Melarn’s drive to prove itself loyal to Lolth has led to a new role for its members. Matron Mother Zhindia has appointed herself the enforcer of the Way of Lolth, prying into other houses’ affairs (particularly but not exclusively the minor houses outside the Ruling Council) to ensure that no heresy to Lolth’s tenets lurks within. They hunt out the dark secrets of other houses—but unlike other houses, they do not hoard these secrets for future use, but quickly and publicly point out the ways in which the Way

of Lolth has been flouted and call for punishment. Matron Mother Zhindia believes that this behavior will increase Lolth’s favor upon the house and perhaps even open up a path toward the position of First House as well as the leadership of Arach-Tinilith. In truth, all that has happened so far is that House Melarn has earned the hatred and resentment of virtually every other house in the city.

## Melarn Compound

Located in West Wall in Lolth’s Web, the new Melarn compound is unique in Menzoberranzan—it rests in the crystalline webs that stretch between the great columns, stalagmites, and stalactites of that place, held aloft a hundred feet above the cavern floor. Its construction is due to the survivors of House Melarn from Ched Nasad, who brought with them the knowledge of how to craft the slender filaments of

magically calcified webbing that endlessly dance and flicker with the radiance of *faerie fire* spells.

The layout of the compound resembles a nautilus shell—a giant spiral with a shrine to Lolth at the center, surrounded by the family chambers. Slaves and soldiers live in the outer rings of the spiral. Guards, tamed spiders, and the dreaded driders patrol the paths of the webbing leading to it.

Numerous assaults have tested the compound, and it has held. The drow do not have the alchemical stonefire bombs of the duergar, but the Melarni are looking for solutions to prevent another fall like that of Ched Nasad.

## THE SPELLPLAGUE ERA: VIGILANT INQUISITORS

House Melarn of Menzoberranzan was born in blood, death, and suspicion. A hundred years later, those challenges have made them strong, just as Lolth promised.

The houses of Kenafin and Horlbar were united around 1383 DR, so the entry below is usable at any point during the Spellplague era.

### House Melarn in the Spellplague Era

**Rank:** 7th [Ruling Council]

**Matron Mother:** Zhindia Melarn (Rule: 1383 DR to present)

**First Priestess:** Kyrnill

**House Wizard:** Iltztran Melarn

**House Weapon Master:** Nar'dorltyrr

**Patron:** Sornafein Melarn

**Allies:** None

**Rivals:** House Baenre, House Fey-Branche, House Faen Tlabbar

The vicious drow of House Melarn must constantly prove themselves to a city that hates them for what they are and yearns to see them destroyed. As a result, Melarni are zealous in their efforts to uproot heresy and apostasy in other houses. They resort to violence in response to any slight, and back up their devotion to Lolth with murderous conviction.

House Melarn is a militant house, its warriors ready for an attack at any moment. They recruit new troops regularly to replace those fallen in the constant skirmishes with drow unwilling to accept the religious oversight of the Melarni. The house does not hire mercenary groups such as Bregan D'aerthe, however, because it doubts the loyalty of any outside the house, instead relying on its own personal might.

Recently, however, House Melarn made overtures to House Faen Tlabbar for an alliance. The two devout houses have much in common, and if the Tlabbaren accept the Melarni, other houses might do so as well.

## Goals

The primary goal of House Melarn is to eliminate any and all apostates among the drow. The very idea of noble houses harboring worshipers of Ghaunadaur or persisting in the worship of the dead drow gods is an unconscionable affront. And Melarn believes that such abominations are everywhere in the city, though that is certainly a gross exaggeration.

House Melarn's secondary goal is to continue to rise in the ranks of the houses. Zhindia has targeted the seemingly weak House Fey-Branche as the next step in her ascension, but the Sixth House has remarkable support, so a direct assault might be necessary to remove it.

## Notable Personages

**Zhindia:** At only 253 years old, Zhindia is the youngest matron mother on the Ruling Council. Due to her youth, she is often underestimated and disregarded by the other matron mothers, which irritates Zhindia no end.

Her true hatred is reserved for her cousin Jhelnae. Zhindia admired and even enjoyed the company of her cousin in their youth. When Jhelnae was revealed to be an apostate and fled the city, it was a betrayal that Zhindia could not forgive. She wants nothing more than to hunt Jhelnae down—if she is still alive—and make her feel the same pain of loss that Zhindia feels.

Because of the suspicion that Jhelnae cast upon her house, Zhindia believes that must show herself to be a more devout worshiper of Lolth than any of the other matron mothers. The pressure is intense, and Zhindia is wound as tight as a spring. She often flies

## DRIDERS OF HOUSE MELARN

House Melarn makes use of driders to an extent unmatched by any other house in Menzoberranzan. The Melarni believe that the drider form is not a curse but a blessing that reflects the new shape of the Spider Queen. After all, the Lady Penitent had the form of an immensely powerful demonic drider.

In the past, the priestesses sent the driders to the pits below the city, using tales of the creatures to terrify the drow into obedience. Now, the driders can be seen openly, climbing over the crystalline webs that support the Melarn compound. The sight disturbs many of the more traditional houses of Menzoberranzan, giving them one more reason to hate House Melarn.

nto a screeching display of temper when thwarted, and the entire compound trembles in fear when she is in a foul mood.

Her patron Sornafein can calm her down with a soft song and a caress, and she has come to love him over the years. She hides her true feelings, not for fear of how it would affect her standing, but for fear that other houses might strike at him to get at her. Perhaps she is not as ruthless as she appears.

**Kyrnill:** The first priestess of House Melarn is the former matron mother of House Kenafin. Kyrnill allowed Zhindia to claim leadership of the united house at the time, because Horlbar was more powerful and she assumed that the young drow would die in the fighting, leaving Kyrnill's claim uncontested. When Zhindia instead led the house to victory and recognition by the Ruling Council, Kyrnill could only watch. She fans Zhindia's hatred of Jhelnae and nurtures Zhindia's conviction that heresy is widespread in the City of Spiders, hoping that Zhindia will continue to alienate herself from the rest of the Ruling Council without bringing too much wrath upon the house as a whole.

**Iltztran:** The house wizard is a refugee from Ched Nasád and an arachnomancer. He is responsible for weaving the crystalline threads that support the compound. He takes this task very seriously and is terrified that the compound will fall, as his old home did. Iltztran constantly searches for a solution to the issue, and his current theory is to try turning the webbing into a substance unaffected by alchemical stonefire.

**Nal'dorltyrr:** Nal'dorltyrr ascended to the position of house weapon master ten years ago when the previous occupant, the elderboy of the house, was murdered at a party. Nal'dorltyrr's appointment caused a scandal in the city because he is a drider. No drider had ever been appointed to a position of authority in the city before, but Nal'dorltyrr's skill with weapons is without equal in the house. He has had to prove himself constantly, since no other weapon master in the city has been challenged as often as he has, but he has bested all comers so far.

**Sornafein:** The patron of the house is a handsome drow with fine hands and a beautiful voice. Sornafein is skilled with a number of stringed instruments, and has strangled rivals with most of them. Zhindia first saw him more than eighty years ago at a performance and decided that she must have him. Sornafein is very intelligent, exceedingly charming, and enjoys the notoriety of bedding such a controversial noble. His ability to mitigate the volcanic temper of the matron mother makes him the most popular male in the house.

# House Xorlarrin

*Mysterious masked wizards, suspicious and consumed by their spellcraft*

## House Xorlarrin

**Traits:** Sadistic, secretive

**Power:** 12



**Membership:** 36 house nobles (5 high priestesses, 9 priestesses, 1 warrior, 21 wizards), 250 soldiers, 5,000 slaves

**Headquarters:** Xorlarrin Spelltower; Qu'ellarz'orl

**Religious Affiliation:** Church of Lolth (weak)



House Xorlarrin is ancient and powerful, even though it defies drow convention in more than one way. It has held a position on the Ruling Council since late in the Founding Era, and in the centuries since the beginning of the Sable Years it rose from Eighth House to Third. This prominent position derives from more than its numbers—the true strength of House Xorlarrin is the role of its males, who are accorded an unusual (some might say heretical) level of near-equality with the females of the house.

Naturally, the priestesses of House Xorlarrin still hold the reins of power, and they are the ones who screen and steer young males. Those who display any aptitude for magic are drilled mercilessly in the arcane arts, while the rest are disposed of. Some are sacrificed to Lolth; others are sold to Bregan D'aerthe or into slavery.

Other houses, including Baenre and Barrison Del'Armgo, can boast of their arcane might, but even mighty Baenre keeps a wary eye on the wizards of House Xorlarrin. (It is no accident that Matron Mother Quenthel Baenre, in the Spellplague era, chose a Xorlarrin as her patron.)

Even among the fanatically secretive drow, House Xorlarrin is unusually reclusive. All the house nobles, whether wizards or priestesses, conceal their identities when they venture into public. A veil or a mask covers the face, and loose, flowing clothing disguises the physique and even gender of the noble. The family badge is worn prominently, as if to communicate that House Xorlarrin is present, though the identity of the individual is immaterial.

## Xorlarrin Compound

The family center is the Spelltower Xorlarrin, an elegant spire located in the center of Qu'ellarz'orl, in one of the most commanding locations in Menzoberranzan. The structure rises like a narrow spire from the floor of the cavern, far removed from any overhanging stalactites or other natural means of approach.

The walls of the tower are iron, reinforced with adamantine. A single, arched gateway allows access into the base of the tower. Arrow slits circle the tower, beginning about twenty feet above the ground, allowing archers (and more, important, wizards) a wide field of view to take down would-be attackers. The approaches to the tower are steep and smooth, polished to an almost metallic finish by the magic of Xorlarrin wizards, making them nearly impossible to scale without using tools or magic.

The ground floor of the tower is the audience chamber of the matron mother as well as a general council chamber and mustering hall for the clan. Several grand thrones stand on a platform at the center of the room, providing appropriately grand seating for the matron mother, the three highest-ranking priestesses, and the three most well-regarded wizards).

At the top of the tower, above the family quarters and troop barracks, are the laboratories of the house's wizards. Well stocked with tomes, scrolls, reagents, and mysterious ingredients, these chambers are famous for the role they have played in elevating House Xorlarrin to such a prominent place in the city. They are, of course, guarded by a host of magical traps as well as a coterie of guards trained in both magical and martial arts.

Beneath the tower lies its true heart, however, in secret chambers and caverns whose existence is unknown beyond the walls of the house. The most sacred altar of the house is in a huge cavern deep underground, warded by mazes designed to baffle intruders. A giant statue of the Spider Queen looms over the altar in this secret temple.

## THE SPELLPLAGUE ERA: RISE OF THE WIZARDS

When Danifae brought the message to Menzoberranzan that Lolth sought to spin a Demon Weave, House Xorlarrin was ready. Already the house had sent agents to the caverns around Gauntlgrym to explore the possibility of channeling the power of the primordial imprisoned there. Matron Mother Zeerith secretly hoped that Gauntlgrym, with the aid of that primordial's power, might become a new drow stronghold to rival Menzoberranzan, under House Xorlarrin's control. Danifae's message only intensified Zeerith's resolve.

The entry below focuses on the events surrounding the creation of the Demon Weave, but is largely applicable throughout the Spellplague era.

### House Xorlarrin in the Spellplague Era

**Rank:** 3rd [Ruling Council]

**Matron Mother:** Zeerith Q'Xorlarrin

**First Priestess:** Kiriy Xorlarrin

**House Wizard:** Brack'thal Xorlarrin

**House Weapon Master:** Jearth Xorlarrin

**Patron:** Tathas Xorlarrin

**Allies:** House Baenre

**Rivals:** House Faen Tlabbar, House Mizzrym

The secretive drow of House Xorlarrin are on the move, energized by a situation that promises upheaval in Menzoberranzan and poised to seize new power in the chaos. Danifae's declaration—that Lolth seeks to become the new goddess of arcane magic, filling Mystra's vacant seat—threatens to overturn the rule of Lolth's priestesses and give a newly important role to drow wizards. Although this new order would send most houses into tumult, it is nothing different from what House Xorlarrin has been doing for centuries.

The wizards of House Xorlarrin, like all wizards in Faerûn, were set back by the Spellplague. Their old, familiar ways of accessing magic, tapping into the Weave, failed them, and all the arcane knowledge of their libraries did little to aid them. However, the house boasts that its wizards were the first to emerge from the Spellplague, giving them a clear advantage over the other houses for a time. The promise of a Demon Weave under Lolth's control promises another upheaval in the ways of magic, but Xorlarrin is confident that its wizards will once again emerge stronger.

Although House Xorlarrin is nominally allied with House Baenre, Matron Mother Zeerith chafes under Baenre's rule. She believes that leadership of the city is the house's rightful position. Although the house has formal alliances with House Faen Tlabbar and House Mizzrym, Matron Mother Zeerith fears attack from either or both houses in the near future.

## Goals

Even before Danifae's arrival in the city, Matron Mother Zeerith had lifted her sights beyond Menzoberranzan. When she caught wind of Bregan D'aerthe's peculiar interest in the Neverwinter region, she sent a contingent of drow to investigate, led by her second son, Ravel. Besides the obvious advantages in trade and territory offered by a new drow city, the primordial within Gauntlgrym offers limitless potential for magical experimentation, promising to bolster the house's magical prowess still further.

## ADVENTURERS OF HOUSE XORLARRIN

*“With the help of its males, our house has risen to the Ruling Council. More drow should heed our voices.”*

### Join House Xorlarrin if you want to:

- ◆ Be a male drow who can command respect and wield authority, at least within your house.
- ◆ Play a mysterious and mighty wizard or priestess, shrouded in secrecy behind masks and veils.
- ◆ Range far and wide in search of arcane power to help Lolth spin the Demon Weave.

### XORLARRIN SPELLSPINNER

A wizard of House Xorlarrin, you have been trained in the arcane arts almost since your birth. You have worked as hard as you possibly could to excel—because you knew the penalty for lagging in your training was death or a life of slavery. House Xorlarrin settles for nothing less than the best in its wizards, so that is what you have become—the best.

As a male in House Xorlarrin, you are an anomaly in drow society. In gatherings of the family, arguments are

permitted, even disagreeing with the matron mother is rarely punished. Males are allowed to speak up, to voice opinions, even to disagree with females. This is a privilege accorded to few male drow, and you had best not forget that it is a privilege unique to your house. If you were to exercise the same freedom in your speech and manner in the presence of a priestess from another house, you would be flogged to within an inch of your life, if not beyond. If your adventuring party contains a priestess of another house, how will your relationship play out?

Your drive is simply to acquire more arcane power, for the glory of your house as well as your own personal worth. House Xorlarrin boasts a prominent place among the masters of Sorcere, and one day you might join that supreme council, perhaps even challenge Gromph Baenre for the title of Archmage of Menzoberranzan. Any knowledge, magic item, artifact, or secret that can help you reach that goal is more precious to you than gold.

**Characteristics:** Ambitious, outspoken, mysterious

**Prerequisites:** Drow (male only), member of House Xorlarrin.

In the wake of Danifae’s proclamation, Zeerith’s ambitions have grown still larger. She still seeks the power of the primordial in Gauntlgrym, but her agents are now spread across the North, seeking magical artifacts to bolster Lolth’s arcane power—and her house’s knowledge. If Lolth is to spin her Demon Weave and take control of arcane magic, House Xorlarrin intends to be the masters of the new magic.

## Notable Personages

**Zeerith:** Matron Zeerith is an unassuming drow female of indeterminate age. She carries herself with a dignified, almost regal, bearing—and this, more than any specific aspect of her appearance, is how other drow remember her.

Perhaps more than any other matron mother in Menzoberranzan, Matron Zeerith has learned the value of listening to those around her. She can be as cruel and ruthless as any drow, but employs such tactics for the fear they induce, not for the sense of pleasure that most drow derive from pure malice.

She is also unusually diplomatic in her approach to discussion, and has been successful in getting other drow to see her point of view. This utilization of dialogue instead of threats and intimidation, naturally, is regarded with a great deal of suspicion by other drow. Rumors persist that she is using a subtle form of charm magic that is disguised as ordinary persuasion.

Zeerith affects the surname Q’Xorlarrin, appending the Q prefix as an honorific, indicating that she is the paragon of House Xorlarrin.

**Brack’tal:** Before the Spellplague, elderboy Brack’tal Xorlarrin was the most powerful of Zeerith’s children and much favored by the matron mother. The Spellplague ruined him, however, leaving his magical ability severely diminished. He is now elderboy in name only, less favored than his brother, Ravel (who is also his son). He has experienced the excruciating pain of his mother’s disfavor many times since Ravel’s birth, and he fully expects to be displaced as elderboy before long. As a result, he is eager to interfere with Ravel’s plans whenever possible.

**Ravel:** The second-born son of the house, Ravel is the son of Zeerith and his older brother, Brack’tal. Born after the Spellplague, he took to the new ways of magic like a natural, becoming among the first of House Xorlarrin’s renowned “spellspinners,” whose casting resembles the dance of a spider. Though he is still young, he has a network of spies and allies throughout the city. Ravel led the contingent of drow, driders, and slaves to Gauntlgrym with his mother’s blessing (much to Brack’tal’s displeasure), and remains in the region near Neverwinter—safely out of his brother’s envious reach.

**Jearth:** The weapon master of House Xorlarrin is passionate and argumentative—attitudes that would have cost him his life by now in any house but Xorlarrin. He is the military authority of the family, and prides himself on his familiarity with all matters violent and combative. He commands the house companies, and he designed the mechanical and military aspects of Spelltower Xorlarrin’s defenses. Some part of him secretly yearns to see those defenses tested in battle—if only some lesser house would dare to attack.

# HOUSE BARRISON DEL'ARMGO

Physically and emotionally superior males armed with cold hard steel and warded by eldritch sorcery

## House Barrison Del'Armgo

**Traits:** Authoritarian,  
militaristic

**Power:** 11



**Membership:** 46 house  
nobles (2 high priestesses, 5 priestesses, 20 warriors, 17 wizards), 1,000 soldiers, 1,100 slaves

**Headquarters:** Del'Armgo compound; Qu'ellarz'orl

**Religious Affiliation:** Church of Lolth (strong)



Although home to fewer priestesses than the other ruling houses, Barrison Del'Armgo has collected a staff of male wizards and warriors second to none in Menzoberranzan. Mez'Barris Armgo seeks to use her influence with Gromph Baenre to achieve greater influence in Sorcere and establish her house as the preeminent force of arcane magic in the city.

At eight centuries old, Barrison Del'Armgo is the second-youngest house on the Ruling Council. How it came to achieve its high rank remains shrouded in suspicion and envy. Its most dramatic leap, from rank 47 to 16, was precipitated by the abrupt disappearance of House Bron'tej in 1226 DR, with only a pool of murky sludge remaining to mark the fallen house's passing.

House Barrison Del'Armgo had a cramped compound in Narbondellyn through the War of the Spider Queen era, but in the Spellplague era it erected a sprawling fortress estate on the Qu'ellarz'orl plateau. Its former compound is now a barracks, and it maintains a training facility in West Wall.

## House Barrison Del'Armgo in the Spellplague Era

**Rank:** 2nd [Ruling Council]

**Matron Mother:** Mez'Barris Armgo

**First Priestess:** Taayrul Armgo

**House Wizard:** Kaitain Armgo

**House Weapon Master:** Malagdorl Armgo

**Patron:** Tardax Armgo

**Allies:** None

**Rivals:** House Baenre, House Vandree

# HOUSE FAEN TLABBAR

Fanatical priestesses who employ seduction and guile to corner the information trade in Menzoberranzan

## House Faen Tlabbar

**Traits:** Hedonistic, zealous

**Power:** 12



**Membership:** 40 house  
nobles (5 high priestesses, 17 priestesses, 12 warriors, 6 wizards), 750 soldiers, 800 slaves

**Headquarters:** Faen Tlabbar compound; Narbondellyn

**Religious Affiliation:** Church of Lolth (strong)



The priestesses of Faen Tlabbar are among the most devout in Menzoberranzan. They are so extreme in their devotion to Lolth that even some of the matron mistresses of Arach-Tinilith are made uneasy by House Tlabbar's wild orgies with demons and mass sacrifices in the name of the Spider Queen.

Matron Vadalma seized control of Faen Tlabbar when a Jaezred Chaulssin assassin slew her sister Ghilanna during Lolth's silence. Today, Vadalma is a confident leader who has surpassed the exploits of her promiscuous and sadistic mother, Ghenni'Tiroth.

So favored is House Faen Tlabbar in the eyes of Lolth that its high priestesses are rewarded with divine rituals that greatly outshine the common blessings granted to most of those in other houses. Though mighty, these rituals require the combined effort of a circle of high priestesses to cast.

For all its depravity, House Faen Tlabbar has a reputation as a fair-minded and relatively non-treacherous clan. Vadalma is very accommodating to houseless drow who swear undying obeisance to Faen Tlabbar. However, she fervently despises the self-appointed inquisitors of House Melarn, and is the staunchest opponent of the new house on the Ruling Council.

## House Faen Tlabbar in the Spellplague Era

**Rank:** 4th [Ruling Council]

**Matron Mother:** Vadalma Tlabbar

**First Priestess:** Luafae Tlabbar

**House Wizard:** Relonkah Tlabbar

**House Weapon Master:** Pir'Oront Tlabbar

**Patron:** Kron Tlabbar

**Allies:** House Baenre

**Rivals:** House Xorlarrin, House Mizzrym

# HOUSE FEY-BRANCHE

An ancient house whose history of bad fortune and ridicule seems to bode ill for its future on the Ruling Council

## House Fey-Branche

**Traits:** Hedonistic, secretive

**Power:** 10



**Membership:** 12 house nobles (4 high priestesses, 3 priestesses, 2 warriors, 3 wizards), 300 soldiers, 400 slaves

**Headquarters:** Fey-Branche compound; Narbondellyn

**Religious Affiliation:** Church of Lolth (strong)



Fey-Branche is one of the longest-lived houses in Menzoberranzan, second only to House Baenre. Unfortunately for this clan, its history is not filled with triumphs and accomplishments. Although it now claims a seat on the Ruling Council, it's amazing the house survives at all given the forty-one centuries of bad luck that has plagued Fey-Branche. The house currently occupies the rank of Sixth House (slowly climbing from Eleventh House in the Sable Years), but many nobles expect that the fast-rising houses of Melarn and Vandree will soon risk an assault against the ill-fortuned house.

Rivals credit much of the longevity of Fey-Branche to having played the lackey to houses of higher station for so long. The house took orders from Baenre for many centuries—vassals in all but name—and could always be counted upon to side with the stronger house in any dispute, hoping to curry favor.

The dark cloud that has long daunted this clan has been reflected most often in the untimely deaths of its noble members. Some of these have fallen to freak accidents, while others have been slain in the course of duels or by assassination attempts.

## House Fey-Branche in the Spellplague Era

**Rank:** 6th [Ruling Council]

**Matron Mother:** Byrtyr Fey

**First Priestess:** Minolin Fey-Branche

**House Wizard:** Zeknar Fey-Branche

**House Weapon Master:** G'eldrin Fey-Branche

**Patron:** Calaghar Fey-Branche

**Allies:** None

**Rivals:** House Melarn, House Vandree

# HOUSE MIZZRYM

Wily and duplicitous black market smugglers with trade contracts throughout the Underdark and the World Above

## House Mizzrym

**Traits:** Avaricious, duplicitous

**Power:** 11



**Membership:** 14 house nobles (3 high priestesses, 5 priestesses, 3 warriors, 3 wizards), 300 soldiers, 450 slaves

**Headquarters:** Mizzrym compound; Qu'ellarz'orl (Overways)

**Religious Affiliation:** Church of Lolth (weak)



Having pacts with six of the seven other houses on the Ruling Council, House Mizzrym is quick to make alliances but slow to honor their commitments. In a city of black-hearted betrayals, Mizzrym is the most double-dealing, back-stabbing clan of the lot.

The majority of Mizzrym's treasure comes from back-alley dealings in the Braeryn and the Bazaar, far from the house's opulent compound in the Overways of Qu'ellarz'orl. Along with the trafficking of illicit magic items and reagents, House Mizzrym controls much of the slave trade in Menzoberranzan.

In an effort to increase trade revenue, House Mizzrym has negotiated private trade agreements with the enemies of Menzoberranzan—deals that are traditionally brokered only at Mantol-Derith. In one such pact, Mizzrym agents have agreed to provide information to the svirfneblin of Blingdenstone about rival drow operations in their vicinity, in exchange for rare gems mined by the deep gnomes.

The Mizzrimyr are accomplished in illusion magic, which they use to great effect against enemies and allies alike. Relonar, the Mizzrym secondboy, is the master of the School of Illusion at Sorcere.

## House Mizzrym in the Spellplague Era

**Rank:** 5th [Ruling Council]

**Matron Mother:** Miz'ri Mizzrym

**First Priestess:** Sabal Mizzrym

**House Wizard:** Courdh Mizzrym

**House Weapon Master:** Vuzirahc Mizzrym

**Patron:** Kelfein Mizzrym

**Allies:** House Baenre, House Xorlarrin

**Rivals:** House Tlabbar



# Tier Breche

Dominating the northern reaches of the city is an expansive stone stairway that ascends to the plateau of Tier Breche within a side cavern that overlooks the city. Any who dare approach the stairway must face deadly traps, an honor guard of two Melee-Magthere upperclassmen, and two 15-foot-tall jade spiders that animate to protect the location.

Built upon the plateau of Tier Breche is the Academy, the center of learning and source of drow justice in the City of Spiders. The Academy both serves and controls the matron mothers of the great houses. Young noble drow are sent there for training in one of its three branches: Arach-Tinilith for the priestesses of Lolth, Melee-Magthere for the warriors, and Sorcere for the wizards. Students in the Academy work and study year-round. Training is intense, and those who complete it are prepared for the cruel, cutthroat society of Menzoberranzan.

## History

At its founding, Menzoberranzan did not have Tier Breche and its Academy to teach the children of noble drow. Instead, each of the houses was responsible for the instruction of its next generation. One house in particular, the founding House S'sril, was concerned that this practice resulted in numerous differences in the interpretation of the Way of Lolth and weakened the city because it failed to produce devout priestesses, quality warriors, and adept wizards.

Devoid of any heirs, House S'sril was a dying house (perhaps the only house to die off of natural causes in the history of Menzoberranzan). The last of the S'sril elders created the Academy upon Tier Breche to train drow newcomers in the Menzoberranyr way of Lolth worship. Under their guidance, Menzoberranzan soon became a place of pride. House S'sril has since passed away, but its teachings laid the foundation for the curriculum of the Academy, and its lessons are still taught to drow students who attend it.

House Baenre has long extended its dominance in Menzoberranzan to the affairs of the Academy. For generations, its matron mothers have manipulated the Ruling Council to appoint Baenre nobles to leadership positions at the Academy. This practice has continued for so long that the Academy is commonly seen as an extension of House Baenre.

Triel Baenre took the unprecedented step of being matron mother of her house while being the matron mistress of the Academy. Quenthel Baenre, her successor, followed the practice and continues to hold both positions.

## Goals

The institutions in Tier Breche exist to train each generation of drow in the teachings of the Spider Queen while giving it the skills needed to survive in Menzoberranzan. Beyond that, the Academy is a nest of vipers with hundreds of different plots developing all the time.

The two most important factions in Tier Breche are both centered in Arach-Tinilith. One faction is solidly aligned with House Baenre and seeks to protect the Church of Lolth's political position through the First House. The second faction wants to separate the Academy and the Church of Lolth from House Baenre and make it an independent faction in the city. Lolth has not given any indication which side she favors, most likely waiting to see which side is stronger.

## Organization

Tier Breche is a sprawling organization that has ties at all levels of society. Because nearly all noble drow pass through its halls, its curriculum, philosophies, and biases spread throughout Menzoberranzan. Drow warriors fight using the techniques they learn in Melee-Magthere, drow wizards learn their spells and rituals in Sorcere, and drow priestesses chant the rituals and recite the prayers taught to them in Arach-Tinilith.

## Hierarchy

The members of the Academy fall into two categories: the students and the instructors (called mistresses and masters).

The students are grouped into classes according to age. Older students are superior to younger. The youngest students have it the worst, because everyone is their superior. Within each class, ranking is determined by competitions, such as the Grand Melee of Melee-Magthere.

The instructors at the Academy, the masters and mistresses, stand above the students. The instructors have near complete control over their students, up to and including killing them in the course of their education. Each of the schools has different styles of teaching. Sorcere relies on a mentor structure, Melee-Magthere uses lectures and demonstrations, and Arach-Tinilith uses small group instruction.

There is little hierarchy among the masters and mistresses except the ranking that defines drow society. The mistresses of Arach-Tinilith are of course more respected and powerful than the instructors of the other branches of the Academy, and the male warriors who teach at Melee-Magthere share some of the stigma attached to their gender and class throughout the city. The matron mistress of Arach-Tinilith is also the matron mistress of the Academy, and her position is second only to the matron mothers



*The great chamber of worship inside Arach-Tinilith dwarfs those who enter it*

of the Ruling Council—at least until Matron Mistress Triel ascended to the head of House Baenre, effectively consolidating the power of both offices into one.

## Recruiting

In theory, all drow, whether common or noble, are required to attend the Academy. It is possible for a house to keep one of its children out of the Academy, but such an act is rare and draws the attention of the Church of Lolth. Commoners who seek to avoid the Academy have a much easier time, since the church pays little attention to such insignificant drow.

Students' length of education is dependent on their gender and occupation. Warriors (who are mostly male) spend ten years at the Academy, wizards spend thirty years learning the way of magic, and female priestesses spend fifty years learning the rites and prayers of Lolth. The vast majority of a student's time is spent within a specific school; however, each student spends a portion of his or her last year at each of the other schools, gaining a basic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of those attending the other institutions.

## THE SELECT FEW

Nearly all noble drow attend the Academy, but not every character will be part of this faction. Most drow spend the ten, thirty, or fifty years necessary to graduate from their school in the Academy. They leave Tier Breche and take their places in their houses in the larger city below.

Only those drow who continue to be a part of Tier Breche after graduation are part of this faction. The primary attribute for a drow who is part of the Tier Breche faction is to be an instructor of other drow. Tier Breche is foremost an academy to pass on the lessons of drow society to the next generation of drow.

# Arach-Tinilith

The training ground for drow priestesses produces the cruelest of all drow.

## Arach-Tinilith

**Traits:** Duplicitous, sadistic, zealous

**Power:** 13



**Membership:** Scores of drow training at the Academy; thousands in the city in positions of leadership in the houses.

**Headquarters:** Tier Breche, a cavern on the north side of Menzoberranzan's great vault.

**Religious Affiliation:** Church of Lolth (strong)

**Leadership, Sable Years through War of the Spider Queen:** Triel Baenre

**Leadership, Spellplague Era:** Quenthel Baenre

**Allies:** House Baenre

**Rivals:** Jaezred Chaulssin



matron mother of House Baenre fills that role. When Triel Baenre, already the mistress of the Academy, ascended to the throne of House Baenre in 1358 DR, succeeded by her sister Quenthel in 1380, both positions were effectively united into one.

Under the leadership of the matron mistress, twelve high priestesses typically serve as instructors in Arach-Tinilith at any given time. Having a daughter who has served as a mistress in the Academy brings honor to a drow house, and having two daughters in that group is a great honor indeed.

## Notable Personages

**Minolin Fey-Branche:** The first priestess of House Fey-Branche is also a mistress of Arach-Tinilith in the Spellplague era. She handles much of the administrative work of the Academy when Quenthel is absent or consumed with other pressing matters. Quenthel considers Minolin a weakling and a fool, which makes her perfectly suited to her subordinate position in Quenthel's eyes. Minolin's honored status

Northernmost of the Academy buildings—and the most impressive—is the spider-shaped cathedral of Arach-Tinilith. Visitors rarely see anything more than a few small audience chambers near the entrance and the large upper chamber dedicated to worship of Lolth. The rest of the temple is largely shrouded in darkness. Anyone other than a Menzoberranyr priestess of Lolth is decidedly not welcome.

The mistresses of Arach-Tinilith constitute the Church of Lolth in the city. Their duties are to pray to Lolth and to make sacrifices to keep the city in her favor. They also serve on the street patrols to keep the peace and support the houses in times of war.

Female drow are sent to Arach-Tinilith at the age of forty to complete five decades of training in the cruel service of their demon goddess. Like the other branches of the Academy, students of Arach-Tinilith spend six months at the end of their terms in each of the other schools, learning the basics of magic and combat. The graduation ceremony includes demon summoning and orgies involving the new priestesses and the male wizards or fighters, reinforcing the subservient role of the drow males.

The matron mistress of the Academy resides here and serves both as head instructor of Arach-Tinilith and as leader of the Academy. Theoretically, she acts as the voice of Lolth in the city, but more often, the



A mistress of Arach-Tinilith and an inquisitor of Lolth

## ADVENTURERS OF ARACH-TINILITH

*"If by my service I can please the Goddess and bring honor to my house, I am content."*

### Join Arach-Tinilith if you want to:

- ◆ Follow the Way of Lolth and benefit from its matriarchal doctrine.
- ◆ Enjoy crushing your opponents beneath your heeled boot.
- ◆ Wield the power of a capricious and chaotic goddess.

### DROW INQUISITOR OF LOLTH

In chaotic Menzoberranzan, enemies and traitors abound. The drow have made many enemies among the other races of the Underdark. Some of these enemies are sly and cunning. They move against the City of Spiders using deception or mind control. These agents must be ferreted out and exposed to the righteous wrath of the priestesses of Lolth.

But the greatest enemies can be found among the drow themselves. Not all drow keep the Way of Lolth and serve the Spider Queen with absolute conviction. They stray from the Way of Lolth or plot against the great houses. Whether they are males seeking to overthrow the matriarchy or drow who have somehow developed a conscience, you must find these traitors and eliminate them.

It takes a keen eye to ferret out all the plotters and conspirators that wander the streets of the city. Blessed by the Spider Queen, you use your profane abilities to spy and eavesdrop on suspected traitors. If these talents are not enough, the hand of a skilled torturer will extract what you want to hear from prisoners.

**Characteristics:** Sadistic, perceptive, thorough  
**Prerequisites:** Female drow; graduate of Arach-Tinilith

### MISTRESS OF ARACH-TINILITH

You have survived fifty years of training at Arach-Tinilith. No, you have more than survived—you have thrived in the cruel, treacherous world of the drow priestesses. You have mastered the Way of Lolth and know the demands of your patron goddess. You have summoned demons in rituals, bound them to your desires, and mated with them for the power they gave you. You have climbed the social ladder of the Academy, using the bodies of your peers as rungs. Let all who look upon you know that you have the favor of Lolth.

With the exception of the matron mothers, no other group in Menzoberranzan wields more power than you and your sisters. You act on the will of the Spider Queen (and occasionally on your own whim), speaking her will to the drow of the city, and they are bound to obey. All around you, the common drow quail in terror and grovel before your wrath. Even the nobles fear your power and curry your favor.

Yet for all this power, the ones you fear the most are your fellow mistresses of Arach-Tinilith. They covet your position and favor with the Spider Queen. You must always be wary of betrayal, for only the foolish let down their guard. One slip and the fiends will be upon you, ready to tear out your heart and offer it to Lolth on her altar.

**Characteristics:** Proud, cruel, treacherous  
**Prerequisites:** Female drow; graduate of Arach-Tinilith

puts House Fey-Branche in Quenthel's debt and prevents more ambitious daughters of other houses from angling for the position.

However, Quenthel's estimation of Minolin falls dangerously short of the truth. The young priestess has an inner steel—the same strength and resilience that brought her safely through the War of the Spider Queen—that allows her to ignore Quenthel's relentless verbal and sometimes physical abuse. Recently, Minolin has found an ally and advisor in Gromph Baenre, who is eager to undercut his sister's authority in any way he can. Minolin hopes to use the old male to break the Academy free of House Baenre's control.

**Ardulrae Tlabbar:** The third daughter of Kyrnill Melarn has bullied her way into the ranks of the mistresses of Arach-Tinilith with the support of her house behind her. Though she is hated by all her fellow instructors, it is hard to deny that she effectively teaches young priestesses the Way of Lolth, punishing any violation (real or suspected) of the Spider Queen's dictates with her *whip of fangs*. She

makes no secret of her belief that House Melarn should control Arach-Tinilith. Her spies move constantly among the halls of the Academy, trying to unearth damning secrets she can wield against her colleagues in her struggle for power.



# Melee-Magthere

Home to the greatest drow warriors—and some of the most powerful males in Menzoberranzan.

## Melee-Magthere

**Traits:** Duplicitous, militaristic

**Power:** 13



**Membership:** Hundreds of students at Tier Breche; thousands in the service of the houses and independent operations.

**Headquarters:** Tier Breche, a cavern on the north side of Menzoberranzan's great vault.

**Religious Affiliation:** Church of Lolth (strong)

**Leadership:** Multiple masters holding a range of positions

**Allies:** House Barrison Del'Armgo

**Rivals:** Bregan D'aerthe



The easternmost building in Tier Breche is the unadorned stone pyramid of Melee-Magthere, the fighter's school for male drow. The pyramid is vast, containing armories, spartan sleeping cells for students and masters alike, sparring chambers, a few dungeon cells and torture chambers, and a handful of large war-council chambers and assembly halls. Many cellars and lower levels sprawls beneath the pyramid as well.

Male drow with no arcane aptitude enter Melee-Magthere at age twenty and spend ten years there, training in the ways of war. Beginning students spend their first fifty days under the tutelage of the Master of Lore, who teaches them the history of the drow and steeps them in rage and hatred for all surface races, particularly the other races of elves.

In the tenth and final year, students spend time studying at Sorcere and then at Arach-Tinilith to learn the ways of the wizards and the rites and rituals of the Spider Queen.

Early each year, the masters of Melee-Magthere hold a Grand Melee to determine the rank of students within each class. During this event, the masters set the students loose in a maze-like cavern outside the city with simple wooden poles as weapons. As each student is defeated, he is called out by an instructor to stand down. The last warrior standing wins the competition and earns the title of class champion for a year. Students are then ranked based upon their duration in the

melee—the champion claiming the first rank, the next best combatant taking second rank, and so on.

The masters of Melee-Magthere are some of the best warriors in the city and act as instructors to the students. Each has mastered a particular weapon and passes on that knowledge to interested students through unrelenting and exhausting training. Unlike in Arach-Tinilith, there is no single master in charge of Melee-Magthere, but a constant jockeying for power among the various masters. Also in contrast to Arach-Tinilith, house politics play little part in these rivalries, largely because most houses do not consider authority or influence over the city's male warriors important enough to fight over.



A master of Melee-Magthere (left) confronts a drow slaver

## ADVENTURERS OF MELEE-MAGTHERE

*“Be grateful that this time I only hit you with the flat of my blade—this time.”*

### Join Melee-Magthere if you want to:

- ◆ Play a warrior skilled in the graceful and deadly fighting styles of the drow.
- ◆ Thrive on the constant competition between yourself and your peers.
- ◆ Strive to succeed in a society where you are the underdog.

### DROW SLAVER

Menzoberranzan is built on the work of thousands of slaves. Every day, dozens of those slaves die from neglect, accidents, malnutrition, and punishment. To keep the slave pens full, the drow constantly mount raids on other races. Menzoberranzan’s soldiers form the primary force for these raids, but more powerful captives must be hunted down by skilled slavers.

You are one of these individuals. You scour the subterranean tunnels for marks that seem likely to fetch a high price. You are not interested in the common goblin or the stray orc. No, you seek the unusual, the strong, and the talented. Sometimes, you venture into the World Above to find exotic slaves for the markets of Menzoberranzan. Human artisans are often sought after for their skill and docility.

You are a tenacious hunter, capable of tracking creatures through the hard stone tunnels of the Underdark for days. When you get close, you take to the shadows, waiting for the right time to strike. The best marks are usually well protected, and you are an expert at avoid-

ing guards, traps, and defenses. Once you have captured your chosen mark, you spirit the slave back to Menzoberranzan, often with pursuit close behind. You rarely kill your quarry, since dead slaves have no value.

**Characteristics:** Diligent, merciless, ruthless

**Prerequisites:** Drow; almost all drow slavers are trained at Melee-Magthere

### MASTER OF MELEE-MAGTHERE

You are a master at Melee-Magthere. You trained for years at the school until you were recognized as one of the greatest warriors in Menzoberranzan. You have mastered every weapon, every technique, and every tactic available to the drow. Your deadliness on the field of battle is supreme.

Not being in line for a house weapon master position, you remained at the Academy as an instructor for the hordes of drow males that pour through its halls. You are responsible for separating the weak from the strong, and instilling in your charges the lessons they will need to survive in drow society. For the vast majority of your students, life is short, with most sacrificed in battle for the greater gain of the city, a house, or Lolth.

Within the Academy, your profession is scorned by the priestesses of Arach-Tinilith, who consider you disposable. You will never be anything more than a tool in their eyes, but you know the value of your skills. Your worth is proven in battle a thousand times over.

**Characteristics:** Vengeful, relentless, disciplined

**Prerequisites:** Drow (Melee-Magthere does not make distinctions based on gender, but most masters are male); graduate of Melee-Magthere

## Notable Personages

**Syr'daun Hunzrin:** A cousin of Matron Mother Shakti Hunzrin, Syr'daun is a master of Melee-Magthere renowned for his skill with the glaive. However, his origins in House Hunzrin diminish the respect he receives both inside and outside the Academy. Though no student would dare show open disrespect, his fellow masters call him “Syr'daun Stone-Head,” using the common and derogatory nickname for what is often viewed as a house of farmers. Syr'daun is determined to bring honor to his house and increase its standing through his martial skill, preferring the traditional means of advancing his house’s standing to the scheming of Matron Shakti’s secret coalition of merchant clans. He frequently lobbies his cousin Keptus, weapon master of the house, to persuade Shakti to attack a higher house.

**Hatch'net:** Hatch'net is the Master of Lore of Melee-Magthere through the entirety of the Sable Years into the Spellplague era, and he held that position for at least two hundred years before the birth of

Drizzt Do'Urden. He is a talented orator. His speech is almost hypnotic, with variations of inflection and rallying cries. He fills the minds of young drow with an endless stream of hateful rhetoric. The matrons of the ruling families understand the value of his practiced tongue, and he has more prestige in Menzoberranzan than nearly any other male drow and many of the females.

# Sorcere

*Secluded in their towers, the mage lords of Sorcere imagine themselves the equals of the priestesses.*

## Sorcere

**Traits:** Duplicitous, secretive

**Power:** 12



**Membership:** Dozens of students at Tier Breche; several hundred spread throughout the houses.

**Headquarters:** Tier Breche, a cavern on the north side of Menzoberranzan's great vault.

**Religious Affiliation:** Church of Lolth (weak)

**Leadership, Sable Years through Spellplague Era:**  
Gromph Baenre

**Allies:** House Barrison Del'Armgo, House Xorlarrin

**Rivals:** Arach-Tinilith



The sculpted stalagmite tower of Sorcere rises near the western wall of Tier Breche. The lower floors are lecture halls, laboratories, and libraries. Higher in the tower are the sanctums of the masters of Sorcere. The rooms and passages of the tower are often veiled, distorted, hidden, or altered by the wizards.

Drow (mostly males) who show a talent or inclination for magic are identified at a young age and groomed for Sorcere. At the age of twenty, would-be wizards begin a five-year apprenticeship with an older wizard to learn the basics of spellcraft. At twenty-five, they begin a course of study in Sorcere that lasts thirty years. The last year of their training is spent in Melee-Magthere and Arach-Tinilith, learning the ways of those institutions and the proper place of males in Menzoberranyr society—under the heels of the priestesses of Lolth.

Sorcere is supervised by the matron mistress of Arach-Tinilith to ensure that the wizards do not defy the rule of Lolth. The masters of Sorcere have orders to watch their students closely, and most realize that they too are being watched by the mistresses of Arach-Tinilith.

The masters of Sorcere are a mysterious, reclusive group of wizards with an awesome reputation. They have few ranks and titles, but many differences in influence, from positions such as teaching masters at the Academy to the student aspirants (house wizards-in-training) to the mighty mage lords.

The mage lords are the most powerful male mages active in the city. They are tough, twisted survivors who have risen to approach human archmages in ability, while overcoming far greater obstacles.

The Archmage is the head of Sorcere and the only one of its masters with a high public profile. His role is to advise and serve the Ruling Council. He also keeps time in the city by casting the spells that light up Narbondel (page 81). The Archmage is almost always a wizard of House Baenre, who uses its influence to place one of its own in the high seat.

## Notable Personages

**Gromph Baenre:** Gromph Baenre is the Archmage of Menzoberranzan throughout the Sable Years, the War of the Spider Queen, and the Spellplague era, as well as the elder brother and chief rival of Quenthel. The two have never seen eye to eye, and each has tried to kill the other over the centuries.



*A master of Sorcere and a house wizard*

## ADVENTURERS OF SORCERE

*“Prattle on about the Way of Lolth, little priestess. She will not save you.”*

### Join Sorcere if you want to:

- ◆ Find a route to power outside the matriarchy that dominates the city.
- ◆ Explore the deepest arcane secrets without concern of morality.
- ◆ Strike your enemies with blasts of arcane power.

### HOUSE WIZARD

You have trained at Sorcere and obtained the most powerful position available to a male noble—house wizard. Within your house, you hold the highest station a male drow can hope to achieve. The other males look upon you with envy, and the priestesses must treat you with a modicum of respect.

You are responsible for all arcane matters in your house. You create enchanted wards, craft magic items, and tutor the younger drow in the ways of the arcane. These chores fill your days since the matron mother always wants more magic items, more powerful wards, and more wizard apprentices.

You walk a fine line for survival. Do poorly, and your matron mother will deem you expendable. Do too well, and the priestesses will consider you an ambitious threat. Matron mothers prefer house wizards to be their own sons to ensure loyalty and to assert control over the sometimes stubbornly independent wizards.

Being a house wizard comes with many risks, because you will always be embroiled in the politics of the city. Rival houses will strike at you first, since your presence on the battlefield can change the course of a fight. Even away from the battlefield, your magic can shape the power of your house. For these reasons, you have to be constantly alert for assassination attempts.

**Characteristics:** Jealous, resourceful, hateful

**Prerequisites:** Drow (one of either gender can become a wizard in Menzoberranzan, but almost all house wizards are male); graduate of Sorcere

### MASTER OF SORCERE

After decades of study, you have finally reached the rank of master of Sorcere. You are one of the most powerful arcane casters in the city. The magical might you wield can devastate scores of enemies. Your ingenuity and magical talent make possible many of the luxuries found among the drow.

As a master, you have students and set duties within Sorcere, but beyond these interactions, you are likely a recluse, dwelling in the spell-guarded tower of Sorcere. You have orders from your matron mother to watch your students and fellow wizards for weaknesses that can be exploited. You would be a fool to assume that you are also not being watched. You have developed the habit of concealing what you're really doing from other wizards and from the scrying spells of the matron mother.

You are nominally under the authority of the mistresses of Arach-Tinilith, but your command of magic and your position in Sorcere has finally put you beyond the direct reach of the priestesses. However, the other masters present a broad spectrum of eccentric and nasty personalities, and Sorcere has its own intrigues, cabals, and betrayals.

**Characteristics:** Cold, devious, calculating

**Prerequisites:** Drow (one of either gender can become a wizard in Menzoberranzan, but almost all masters of Sorcere are male); graduate of Sorcere

Gromph is older than most of the matron mothers and has reached the zenith of power available to a male in Menzoberranzan. He is a cold, bitter, and calculating old drow. Although he could have seized control of Menzoberranzan during Lolth's silence, he prefers to lead from the shadows.

Gromph's current plot is to mold Minolin Fey-Branche to challenge his sister, Quenthel, for control of the Academy. If Minolin succeeds, Quenthel will be humiliated. If she fails, then the matron mother will be forced to kill one of her own allies. Either way, Gromph comes out the victor.

**Uhlsrysn Xorlarrin:** Uhlsrysn is a teaching master of Sorcere and secondboy of House Xorlarrin. His elder brother is a far more accomplished wizard, so Uhlsrysn remains at Sorcere as an instructor. Uhlsrysn is an expert on transmutation magic, and

any student attending the Academy is likely to come in contact with him because of it. He is particularly renowned for transforming goblin slaves into larger and more dangerous monsters.

Like all nobles of his house, Uhlsrysn wears a mask and formless robes when appearing in public. He has a prickly pride, however, due to the inadequacy he feels in comparison to his brother, and can be easily provoked.



# Bregan D'aerthe

*A mercenary band with remarkable freedom, and one of the best avenues for outcast or male drow to gain power.*

## Bregan D'aerthe

**Traits:** Militaristic, secretive

**Power:** 8



**Membership:** Approximately 150 members of various races

**Headquarters:** Many scattered hideouts in and around Menzoberranzan and Ched Nasad, all temporary

**Religious Affiliation:** Church of Lolth (weak)

**Leadership:** Jarlaxle Baenre

**Allies:** House Baenre

**Rivals:** House Hunzrin, Jazred Chaulssin



This infamous brotherhood of drow spies, mercenaries, and assassins is undeniably unscrupulous, but also unquestionably effective. Despite being an unlawful faction, Bregan D'aerthe has largely avoided the attention of the Ruling Council. This fact is due in no small measure to the close ties the criminal organization has long enjoyed with House Baenre. Yet even without the support of the First House, many noble families have enjoyed victories thanks to information or soldiers supplied by Bregan D'aerthe. Despite coin changing hands, however, at the end of the day Bregan D'aerthe owes its allegiance only to itself.

## Goals

Despite engaging in such illicit trades as assassination, espionage, smuggling, and kidnapping, Bregan D'aerthe remains first and foremost a for-profit enterprise. Although secretive, Bregan D'aerthe has been known to engage in open warfare if the payout is significant. In one famous engagement, the mercenary band even aided in an assault against a noble house, only to switch sides halfway through the conflict upon receiving a better offer from the besieged matron mother.

## Profits in Chaos

It is in Bregan D'aerthe's financial interest to sow instability and chaos throughout the city. Because where there is conflict, there is war, and wars are won through superior numbers and strength of arms—and Bregan D'aerthe supplies both. The most

lucrative ventures for the mercenary company are the inter-house conflicts between two noble families. Few know that many of these feuds were ignited at the whim of Jarlaxle himself, one spoken falsehood or incriminating document at a time.

## Organization

Bregan D'aerthe is led by an unusual male rake named Jarlaxle, an individual whom most in the city would name among Menzoberranzan's most powerful males. Through the organization's intricate network of scouts and spies, Jarlaxle is apprised of nearly everything that happens—or soon will happen—within Menzoberranzan or its environs. Few understand those conflicting gray areas of morality and pragmatism better than the eccentric leader of Bregan D'aerthe. Every week Jarlaxle changes his base of operation, and he seldom travels without a secret escort of at least six highly skilled and unquestioningly loyal lieutenants.



*A Bregan D'aerthe scout and a mercenary stand ready*

## ADVENTURERS OF BREGAN D'AERTHE

*"I'll follow Jarlaxle's lead, wherever he takes me. Better that than my sister's lashes."*

### Join Bregan D'aerthe if you want to:

- ◆ Play a wandering drow without a house or clan.
- ◆ Have the heart of a mercenary and the martial prowess of a weapon master.
- ◆ Enjoy the thrill of espionage and have the stomach for assassination.

### BREGAN D'AERTHE SCOUT

For decades, you have served as a scout for Bregan D'aerthe, tasked with everything from escorting caravans through the treacherous byways of the Underdark to assassinating elite dignitaries visiting Menzoberranzan from faraway settlements. You are attuned to your keen instincts and a master of Underdark survival.

In recent years, Bregan D'aerthe has become increasingly concerned with the encroachment of Jazred Chaulssin infiltrators within the city. While, as a male, you might sympathize with the patriarchal views espoused by the Jazred Chaulssin, you suspect that turning the city over to a band of zealous weredragons would be bad for business. Therefore, you've been tasked by Jarlaxle to scout out Menzoberranzan for signs of Jazred Chaulssin activity. If possible, you should gain the trust of any Jazred Chaulssin agents and report back to Jarlaxle with your findings.

**Characteristics:** Keen, cunning, stealthy

**Prerequisites:** Drow (Bregan D'aerthe maintains contacts and alliances with several non-drow factions, but only true-blooded drow are permitted to join its elite ranks)

### BREGAN D'AERTHE MERCENARY

As a mercenary, you serve among the front-line troops of Bregan D'aerthe. In addition to defending your own brothers, you are often called upon to wage war at the behest of the highest bidder. Although Bregan D'aerthe mercenaries are typically engaged in conflicts against threats external to the City of Spiders, it's not unknown for them to fight alongside house armies during a takeover of a rival house.

Recently recalled to Menzoberranzan after an extended tour serving Bregan D'aerthe interests in Luskan, you have had little time to acclimate yourself to the new intrigues of your motherland. Mere hours after you set foot back in Menzoberranzan, the hidden Bregan D'aerthe compound in the Clawrift was set upon by a cadre of spellscarred illithids. Although the invasion was ultimately repelled, the question remains of how the mind flayers uncovered the secret location of the base and what their ultimate purpose was.

With your wounds from the attack just recently tended, your commanding lieutenant has requested that you assemble a small reconnaissance force from outside the brotherhood to investigate the Clawrift for further clues.

**Characteristics:** Intense, deadly, regimented

**Prerequisites:** None (although predominantly composed of houseless drow males, Bregan D'aerthe has been known to accept exceptional non-drow recruits into its burgeoning mercenary corps)

## Hierarchy

Although he has temporarily turned leadership over to a trusted lieutenant in the past, as the group's founder, Jarlaxle undeniably sits at the top of the brotherhood's hierarchy. Six lieutenants serve below him, leading the many operations Bregan D'aerthe is juggling at any given moment. Beneath them is a cadre of warriors, spies, assassins, and informants, each blood-sworn to Jarlaxle and the brotherhood.

Even with the organization's reputation, few in the city could accurately guess its numbers. Every member of the brotherhood is sworn to secrecy and unquestionably abides by the decisions of Jarlaxle or his appointed captain.

## Recruiting

Bregan D'aerthe is crewed mainly by rogue male drow drawn from the lower ranks of the major houses and from the tattered remnants of destroyed houses. Jarlaxle has more respect for non-drow than

most drow nobles do, and the company's members also include hobgoblins and bugbears. With profit his primary concern, Jarlaxle doesn't let pride stand in the way of accepting a talented warrior, wizard, or tracker into his band.

New recruits are well equipped and train out of numerous hidden encampments in and around Menzoberranzan, including a hidden safe house in the depths of the Clawrift.

## Notable Personages

Although Bregan D'aerthe's membership is largely anonymous, very few in Menzoberranzan have not heard of the band's swashbuckling leader Jarlaxle.

**Jarlaxle Baenre:** As a young student at Melee-Magthere, Jarlaxle was recognized early on as a brilliant strategist and tactician, but he always preferred the stealthy dagger of an assassin to the flashing swords of his fellow students. For centuries he has felt something was wrong in the city of



Left to right: Valas Hune, Kimmuriel Oblodra, Jarlaxle Baenre, Rai-gy Bondalek

his birth, and he rejects the view that everything worthwhile in Menzoberranzan is the direct result of Lolth's will. Truly chaotic in nature, the rake always keeps his opponents and friends alike guessing.

Jarlaxle appears to be a handsome, flamboyant dandy, but his outrageous appearance is a carefully crafted decoy hiding a pragmatic, intelligent, and observant leader. His wild clothing and jewelry carry a wide array of enchantments, and Jarlaxle is seldom encountered without his signature wide-brimmed purple hat adorned with a large, flamboyant *diatryma* feather. The eye patch he wears—over whichever eye suits him—protects him from spells that could reveal his thoughts.

**Kimmuriel Oblodra:** One of the few survivors of House Oblodra following its destruction, Kimmuriel is a talented and dangerous psion. The *dimension doors* he creates allow Bregan D'aerthe agents to move across great distances with a single step, and when he is employed as an assassin, Kimmuriel is as creative as he is cruel.

As Jarlaxle understood when he allowed the drow psion to lead Bregan D'aerthe for a time, Kimmuriel does not covet power as other drow do. The psion's designs dwell in the realm of the mind, and he

prefers intellectual sparring with illithids to bargaining for position with the wretched matron mothers of Menzoberranzan.

Kimmuriel is an unusually patient drow with a sardonic, dry wit and an expressionless demeanor that Jarlaxle often describes as soulless. Kimmuriel does not attack with a weapon, but instead with the unfettered strength of his mind; one of the psion's most potent attacks allows him to possess the corporeal body of a victim.

Unknown to his brothers within the mercenary clan, Kimmuriel maintains contact with the Sept of Ill'Ghact (page 74).

**Rai-guy (Rai'gy) Bondalek:** Among Jarlaxle's lieutenants in Bregan D'aerthe is this incredible rarity among the drow: a male who is not only a powerful wizard but also a priest of Lolth. Hailing from Ched Nasad, he was unseated from his prominent position in that city in a coup orchestrated by Jarlaxle so that Bregan D'aerthe could benefit from his extraordinary talents. With his imp familiar Druzil, he provides significant magical support to the company through the Sable Years and into the Time of Troubles era.

**Valas Hune:** This drow rogue comes from the merchant family Ozzl'Hune in Menzoberranzan. After the destruction of his family by its rivals, he

joined Bregan D'aerthe, lending his considerable skills in stealth, scouting, and bladework to the mercenary band. During the War of the Spider Queen, he was chosen to accompany Quenthel Baenre in her quest to solve the puzzle of Lolth's Silence. In the wake of that terrible adventure he has returned to Bregan D'aerthe, staying as far away from Menzoberranzan as possible. Late in the Spellplague era, he is assisting Jarlaxle's operations around Neverwinter.

## RELATIONSHIPS

Information gathering is a key component of Bregan D'aerthe's spy network. As such, the group keeps tabs on its rivals and its allies alike.

**House Baenre:** To the consternation of many rival houses, the First House of Menzoberranzan maintains a close alliance with Bregan D'aerthe. Jarlaxle is a common visitor to the magnificent Baenre compound, and some whisper that he is more in Matron Baenre's eyes than a business partner. The truth—and a well-kept secret—is that Jarlaxle is in fact born of House Baenre.

As the third-born male of his house, Jarlaxle was set to be sacrificed to Lolth, as is drow custom. Inexplicably, as Matron Yvonnell thrust forth the sacrificial dagger to deliver the killing blow, the blade would not penetrate the flesh of the newborn Jarlaxle. Taking this turn of events as a divine omen, Matron Baenre hid the child away and has supported his endeavors in secret ever since.

**House Hunzrin:** Although the two organizations specialize in different commodities, Bregan D'aerthe views the rapid mercantile expansion of House Hunzrin with some alarm. Jarlaxle has most other merchant clans in his pocket, but Matron Shakti has thus far proved resistant to his charms.

**Jaezred Chaulssin:** Jarlaxle views the infiltration of this cadre of dragon-blooded assassins into Menzoberranzan society as the gravest threat to Bregan D'aerthe. Many disenfranchised males that would have traditionally been swept into his brotherhood of mercenaries are instead being lured to Jaezred Chaulssin by promises of a future male-dominated regime within the city. Bregan D'aerthe has made several attempts to infiltrate and spy on the Chaulssinyr, but each attempt has resulted in the agent's brutal murder.

## ENCOUNTERS

Agents of Bregan D'aerthe can be encountered in any corner of Menzoberranzan or the Underdark. Encounters on the surface are less common, but Bregan D'aerthe does maintain ongoing operations in several surface-world cities. During the Spellplague era, Jarlaxle squeezed coins and secrets from the Sword Coast city of Luskan, then turned his attention to Neverwinter. Wherever they are found, Bregan D'aerthe agents operate quietly without attracting attention. Even in Menzoberranzan where nearly everyone knows they exist, the members cover themselves in layers of secrecy to remain undetected.

When Bregan D'aerthe is contracted to provide mercenary services, brotherhood warriors integrate themselves so seamlessly with the hiring organization's troops as to appear indistinguishable, to the greatest extent possible. For the duration of the contract, Bregan D'aerthe mercenaries are unwaveringly loyal to their hiring sponsors.

A typical encounter with Bregan D'aerthe is unexpected, and at the behest (and coin) of a third party. More than likely, the mercenaries have no personal issue with the characters—it's just business. Grudgingly respected by drow in the highest positions, Bregan D'aerthe is not a foe to challenge unless one has serious intent and is willing to risk serious ramifications.

The mercenaries of Bregan D'aerthe do not attack in a haphazard fashion. Each drow knows his or her role in a fight and sticks to it. Warriors always move to flank, allowing rogues to sneak attack. These elite mercenaries use terrain to their advantage. When preparing an ambush, they learn every detail of the location and its terrain, and discuss what tactics their enemies might use and how those foes will try to use the terrain to their advantage.

## Expansive Network

As a result of Jarlaxle's wanderlust over the last century, Bregan D'aerthe's interests have widened considerably, taking the brotherhood far beyond the confines of Menzoberranzan. Bregan D'aerthe now has hidden cells in many of the larger drow communities of the Underdark. Although Jarlaxle remains the nominal leader of the overall organization, each cell operates largely independent of the others.

Outside Menzoberranzan, the brotherhood's greatest successes have come from operations in and around T'lindhet. The T'lindhet cell has been so profitable for Bregan D'aerthe that Jarlaxle is contemplating making a change in the roster of his captains. This change would bring in new blood and ideas to the brotherhood and grant Kimmuriel the freedom from leadership he has long desired.

# Jaezred Chaulssin

*Dragonblooded drow who seek to help the drow throw off the yoke of Lolth's dominion.*

## Jaezred Chaulssin

**Traits:** Authoritarian, sadistic, secretive

**Power:** 3 ⚡ ⚔

**Membership:** 140 drow, dragon-blooded drow, and shadar-kai

**Headquarters:** House of the Hidden Masters in Chaulssin

**Religious Affiliation:** Before the Reckoning: Vhaeraun (weak); after the Reckoning: none

**Leadership:** Patron Grandfather Mauzzkyl Jaezred

**Allies:** None

**Rivals:** Church of Lolth, Bregan D'aerthe



The Jaezred Chaulssin is a secretive, patriarchal order of assassins who claim descent from the ancient drow of Chaulssin and the shadow dragons that long ago enslaved them. After centuries of exile within the Shadowfell, the surviving lords of House Jaezred, reduced to a mere handful of dragon-blooded sorcerers and assassins, returned to Faerûn to challenge Lolth's crushing dominion over the drow. The shadowy city of Chaulssin (page 109), which exists in both the Shadowfell and the Underdark, serves as the base for this cadre of master assassins.

The Jaezred Chaulssin operated in the shadows, through infiltration and assassination, from the time of its return to Faerûn in 1136 DR until the War of the Spider Queen in 1372 DR provided an opportunity for a more overt attack on Menzoberranzan. Throughout the period of Lolth's silence, the Jaezred Chaulssin spurred revolt in drow cities across Faerûn, with some spectacular results—including the destruction of Ched Nasad. During the Spellplague, Chaulssin shuddered as the planar order shifted, and the members of the Jaezred Chaulssin found their shadow magic disrupted. The death of Vhaeraun during the Reckoning also dealt a significant blow to the order. As a result, the Jaezred Chaulssin withdrew from active strikes against the “spider-kissers” who worship Lolth, and spent much of the next century rebuilding their strength.

## Goals

Members of the Jaezred Chaulssin believe that to save the dark elves from the madness and tyranny of Lolth, drow society must be shattered. If cities fall and thousands of drow die to do so, then that fate must be borne, since misery and disaster will turn the drow away from Lolth and toward other deities. The assassins are willing to risk subjecting the drow to centuries of weakness, enslavement, and suffering to remove Lolth's hold over the race and raise up the Jaezred Chaulssin as the secret head of a drow society shaped to its liking.

## Sabotage Arach-Tinilith

Late in the Spellplague era, the Jaezred Chaulssin became more overt in its tactics, directly targeting



*A Jaezred Chaulssin infiltrator and a shadow agent*

## ADVENTURERS OF THE JAEZRED CHAULSSIN

*“Subject to the lash again, eh, brother? You are better than that—you know you are.”*

### Join Jazred Chaulssin if you want to:

- ◆ Actively oppose the Way of Lolth and its matriarchal doctrine.
- ◆ Play an assassin who has the drive to hunt down your quarry no matter how difficult the challenge.
- ◆ Be a drow with the blood of shadow dragons in your veins.

### JAEZRED CHAULSSIN INFILTRATOR

Long have your dragon-blooded kin lurked upon the periphery of Menzoberranzan observing the decadent “spider kissers” and their contemptible ways. A century past, your brothers, the Jazred Chaulssin, instigated a plan to overrun the City of Spiders with armies of duergar and tanarukk, yet fate intervened and the siege ended in failure. The sting of that debacle yet endures, but as a new generation of the Infiltrators, you seek the opportunity to remedy the missteps of your forebears.

Many evenings you have wandered Menzoberranzan, alternating guises as a common laborer or rakish noble as the opportunity presents. To the many disenfranchised males in your travels, you whisper subtle sedition against the Way of Lolth, sowing seeds of doubt among commoners and noble-born alike. You have little fear of retribution, because even if you were exposed for spreading heresy, your mastery of shadow would allow you to quickly and silently spirit yourself to safety.

You operate primarily out of the Jazred Chaulssin fosterage in Menzoberranzan, reporting to patriarch

Nimor Imphraezl. As an Infiltrator, you are Nimor’s eyes on the street, tasked with fomenting discord and doubt at every opportunity.

**Characteristics:** Calculating, furtive, patient  
**Prerequisites:** Drow

### JAEZRED CHAULSSIN SHADOW AGENT

You are a child of shadow, a harbinger of doom, and a scion of death. Long eons in the Shadowfell have shaped the shadar-kai into a grim people filled with loathing and self-contempt. Both cursed and blessed by your affinity with the Shadowfell, you have mastery over the art of stealth and subterfuge, but you must constantly work to channel the darkness within you, lest it utterly consume you.

To further the cause of the Jazred Chaulssin, you have permitted yourself to be taken as a slave and sold to a noble house within Menzoberranzan. Your exotic, tattooed skin and comely appearance have served you well. The matron of your adopted house has taken a special liking to you and set you on the path to power and prestige. Little does the foolish matron know that you foment dissent in her house with your every breath.

Before accepting this sleeper assignment, the anointed blade personally tasked you with a secondary objective in utmost confidence. As the opportunity presents itself, you are to encourage the matron mother to ally with House Nurindyn, whereupon you are to spy on Nimor Imphraezl and report his activities back to the anointed blade.

**Characteristics:** Charismatic, duplicitous, vindictive  
**Prerequisites:** Shadar-kai (half drow)

high priestesses of Lolth for assassination. In Menzoberranzan, the organization has its sights set squarely on the mistresses of Arach-Tinilith.

In the Year of Splendors Burning (1469 DR), Jazred Chaulssin sleeper agents posing as students at the Academy successfully disrupted the Ceremony of Graduation, unleashing a horde of demons within Arach-Tinilith’s walls. Before the demonic host was expelled, the Academy temple suffered severe damage, resulting in heavy casualties. With the success of this assault, the Jazred Chaulssin has become emboldened to attempt even grander attacks in the future.

### Foment Insurrection

The open attack on Arach-Tinilith aside, the Jazred Chaulssin’s primary methods are subtle and deceptive, designed to redirect suspicion toward a third party, if possible. At every opportunity, the Jazred Chaulssin seeks to foment cynicism and bitterness in Menzoberranzan’s male population. The organization’s ultimate aim is to ratchet up so much animosity

toward the city’s priestesses that it triggers a city-wide uprising. The Jazred Chaulssin is already well positioned, with opposition groups within Sorcere and Melee-Magthere. All it need to do now is to drum up popular support among the commoners and the lesser houses, believing that insurrection will then be all but assured.

### Organization

The Jazred Chaulssin is ruled by a council of eight patron fathers, led by the order’s founder, Patron Grandfather Mauzzkyl Jazred. These leaders are all shadow dragons whose mastery of shadow magic allows them to take on humanoid form and move unnoticed among the drow. Each of the seven patron fathers commands a minor noble house in a different drow city.

Reporting directly to the patron grandfather is the anointed blade, who technically stands higher among the Jazred Chaulssin than any of the other patron fathers. The anointed blade does not have authority

over a fosterage, but acts as an independent agent to carry out the will of the council—typically through infiltration, espionage, and assassination.

Beneath the anointed blade are several ranks of blades, from first blades to eighth blades. The number of operatives at each tier is limited, and advancing from a lower rank to a higher requires defeating a higher-ranking rival. No more than three first blades exist at one time, five second blades, seven third blades, and so on down to the fifteen seventh blades. The number of eighth blades is unlimited, but even the ranks of the seventh blades are not always full.

Dragon blood runs through many of the drow agents of the Jaezred Chaulssin, from the full-blooded shadow dragons who form the ruling council of patron fathers to a scattering of half-dragon drow in the upper ranks of the blades. Lower-ranking blades often claim draconic blood, but rarely have anything to show for it beyond an aptitude for shadow magic.

## Notable Personages

When dealing with the Jaezred Chaulssin, appearances are most certainly deceiving.

**Antrysn Barriath:** Antrysn held the rank of anointed blade of the Jaezred Chaulssin for many years before he was murdered by an ambitious rival, Nimor Imphraezl. Patron Father Xorthaul of Jhachalkhyn resurrected Antrysn, but kept his return to life a secret from the rest of the Jaezred Chaulssin. Following Nimor's demotion, Antrysn emerged from the shadows to reclaim the rank of anointed blade, much to Nimor's dismay. The two rivals continue to seek advantage over the other, and battle between them is inevitable. Antrysn is a half-dragon drow, the son of Patron Father Xorthaul of Jhachalkhyn, with a nasty temper and a sadistic streak. He appears as a muscular, hairless drow male with dark-scaled skin that is heavily scarred with arcane runes. He favors bloodred robes without ornamentation.

**Mauzzkyl Jaezred:** The patron grandfather of Chaulssin, Mauzzkyl cannot tolerate any person, organization, or even deity who would claim authority over him. This rebellious streak formed the basis of his hatred for the shadow dragons of Clan Jaezred, accounts for his differences with the patriarchs of the Church of Vhaeraun, and forms the core of his hatred of the Spider Queen. The patron grandfather is wholly committed to the ideals of the Jaezred Chaulssin, and he views House Jaezred as the living extension of his will. Mauzzkyl is an incredibly ancient shadow dragon, but he uses his drow form most of the time. In that form, he is a hale old dark elf with broad shoulders, a wide chest, and thinning hair forming a widow's peak.

**Nimor Imphraezl:** Once the most talented and deadly assassin of the Jaezred Chaulssin, Nimor suffered an embarrassing setback during the aborted

siege of Menzoberranzan last century. He has spent the last several decades working to regain his former glory and rank as anointed blade. Presently, Nimor is serving as patron of the Menzoberranzan fosterage under the guise of the rakish noble Nagyon Nurindyn. In this role, he appears as a slender, almost boyish drow male of striking good looks, with the easy grace and blinding speed of a professional duelist. As a half-dragon, Nimor is far stronger than he appears and has mastered many dark and deadly spells of the assassin's trade.

## RELATIONSHIPS

The Jaezred Chaulssin has courted an eclectic collection of allies since its founding, but patron fathers would gladly abandon each in furtherance of their long-term goals.

**Shadar-kai:** Over the past two centuries, many small clans from throughout the Shadowfell have been recruited by the Jaezred Chaulssin to serve as mercenaries and spies, observing the activities of Lolth-worshippers throughout the Northdark. Most serve in teams of three or more under the command of an individual Jaezred Chaulssin *velve*.

**Netherese:** Through the shadar-kai, the Jaezred Chaulssin has attracted the attention of Netheril. For the time being, the two groups share an uneasy amity, though the Jaezred Chaulssin is wise enough to know that it's only a matter of time before the Netherese try to forcibly annex the smaller organization into their empire. If the Netherese act on these desires, the patron grandfather has issued standing orders for retaliatory hits against the twelve Princes of Shade.

**Church of Lolth:** "Spider kisser" is a derisive epithet reserved among the Chaulssinyr for drow who worship Lolth, including pretty much anyone from Menzoberranzan. Despite numerous assassinations and acts of terror, the Church of Lolth remains largely unaware of the Jaezred Chaulssin, and the patron fathers prefer it that way.

**Bregan D'aerthe:** The Jaezred Chaulssin views Bregan D'aerthe as a crude tool and nothing more. Nimor placed several agents within Jarlaxle's brotherhood, but attempts to infiltrate the mercenary's inner circle have so far proven ineffectual. When the time comes for insurrection to rise in the streets, Jaezred Chaulssin plans to have plenty of coin on hand to purchase Bregan D'aerthe's loyalty.

**Council of Spiders:** During the events surrounding Lolth's attempt to create a Demon Weave, a group of wizards seeking to overthrow the rule of Lolth's priestesses have come together. Bringing Lolth's efforts to fruition can only aid these wizards in pursuing their own goals. The leadership of the so-called Council of Spiders consists of various lesser wizards of House Xorlarrin and House Barrison Del'Armgo, but one agent of

the Jaezred Chaulssin—a dragonblooded drow named Faraen Nuryndin—is steering the council toward outright rejection of the Way of Lolth.

## ENCOUNTERS

Greater blades (those of the first, second, or third order) are almost always encountered alone, with the majority of their victims unaware of who delivered the killing blow. Greater blades are the ultimate assassins, enjoying both the benefit of supernatural dexterity and mastery over shadow magic. Some of the half-dragons among them are aided further by shadowy wings.

Lesser blades (of the fourth order or lower) typically lead squads of three or more shadar-kai on scouting missions to spy on strongholds of Lolth. The blades require unwavering devotion and obedience from their shadar-kai agents, but they are by no means immune to the treachery so endemic in drow society.

Outside their base in Chaulssin, the Jaezred Chaulssin are most active in and around their seven fosterages.

## Jaezred Fosterages

To aid in their schemes, the patron fathers of the Jaezred Chaulssin decided to establish fosterages in the guise of minor noble houses in seven drow cities ruled by the Spider Queen's followers: Ched Nasad, Eryndlyn, Karsoluthiyl, Jhachalkhyn, Maerimydra, Menzoberranzan, and Sschindylryn. Of the seven, only Menzoberranzan initially proved resistant to infiltration, so the more distant city of Dusklyngh was chosen instead as the site of the seventh fosterage. In addition, six additional smaller fosterages were established in Underdark settlements where Lolth's followers were a minor faction but nonetheless drow could walk openly, such as Skullport and Sshamath. With their efforts in Eryndlyn and Ched Nasad spectacularly successful, the Jaezred Chaulssin tried once more to infiltrate the City of Spiders. This time it was successful, establishing a secret fosterage in House Nurindyn (rank 48), which masquerades as a lesser house of bounty hunters and slavers.

# Scourged Legion

*A horde of fiend-bred orcs might be the greatest military threat to Menzoberranzan.*

### Scourged Legion

**Traits:** Militaristic, sadistic

**Power:** 6  
★★★★◆

**Membership:**  
7,000 or more

**Headquarters:**  
Splendarrmornn,  
in the realm of  
Ammarindar

**Religious Affiliation:** Garagos

**Leadership, War of the Spider Queen:** Kaanyr Vhok

**Leadership, Spellplague Era:** High Warchief Ghiirvox

**Allies:** None

**Rivals:** Ched Nasad, Gracklstugh, Menzoberranzan



Ancient Hellgate Keep has been a center of evil in the North for centuries. During the Sable Years, the keep was ruled by a balor demon named Grintharke, whose forces pillaged and plundered the surrounding population in the High Forest and the Delimbyr Vale. A few years before the War of the Spider Queen (in 1369 DR), Hellgate Keep was destroyed and its forces routed. One half-demon leader of incredible charisma and power survived, however—Kaanyr Vhok, called the Sceptered One.

In the deep caverns and tunnels beneath Hellgate Keep and the Delimbyr Vale, Kaanyr Vhok brought together five clans of tanarukks (orcs with demonic blood) to recreate the feared Scourged Legion that had served Grintharke so well. Just a few years later, the Scourged Legion was powerful enough to lay siege to Menzoberranzan, with the secret backing of the Jaezred Chaulssin and the aid of the duergar of Gracklstugh.

After the failed siege, the Scourged Legion retreated back into the tunnels of Ammarindar. The following year, Kaanyr Vhok led his restless troops in an attack on the surface city of Sundabar. Ultimately, the siege was broken and the Legion was repelled, fracturing soon after when Kaanyr Vhok and his demonic consort Aliisza disappeared.

Before the band completely dissolved, the tanarukk warriors came under the leadership of one of their own, Warchief Ghaarzhvex. Over the intervening century, the tanarukk tribes multiplied and



## ADVENTURERS OF THE SCOURGED LEGION

“Drow’s good eatin’.”

**Join the Scourged Legion if you want to:**

- ◆ Enjoy playing a monstrous humanoid.
- ◆ Seek glory as a gladiator.
- ◆ Despise drow and see them crushed beneath your boot.

### SCOURGED LEGION BLOODREAPER

Peace is for the weak, honor for the foolish. Only cowards avoid conflict, and retreat is never an option. Battle lust is a gift from the Reaver; with it, the faithful find focus and clarity from the confusion and pain of the battlefield. You are a bloodreaver, champion of Garagos the Reaver—Master of All Weapons and Lord of Conflict.

As a bloodreaver of the Scourged Legion, you’re charged with inciting berserker rage in your allies and spreading the fear of Garagos to your enemies. Although you take orders from the high warchief, your true allegiance lies with Grand Bloodreaver Jervaan, the head of your divine order. At the last Blood Festival—a religious rite that involves feasting upon a freshly butchered sacrifice—Jervaan divined your current mission.

Non-drow races of the Underdark are not an uncommon sight in Menzoberranzan. In the drow’s estimation, orcs, goblins, and kobolds are all pathetic and inferior. As such, they are permitted to roam the streets unescorted, as long as they travel in small numbers. Knowing this, Jervaan has been cautiously smuggling bloodreavers into the City of Spiders, where they disappear into the slums of the Braeryn. You are one such operative, secretly orga-

nizing an insurrection that will rise up against the drow when the Scourged Legion invades.

**Characteristics:** Bloodthirsty, sadistic, ardent

**Prerequisites:** Orc or half-orc, though the occasional goblin or kobold joins the bloodreaver ranks

### SCOURGED LEGION GLADIATOR

You are a tanarukk, a demon-tainted orc bred for slaughter and pandemonium. As an elite warrior of the Scourged Legion, your orders are simple—kill or be killed. Your commanding officer is High Warchief Ghiirvox, whose word is law, and it was he who ordered you and your legionnaires far from Ammarindar to the remote warrens of the Shadowed Ways.

As captain of a squad of forward observers, your task was to observe and report drow movements throughout the Shadowed Ways. Suspiciously, a brief lapse in discipline during your last patrol led to the death or capture of all in your unit.

For the last eighteen months you have been living in Menzoberranzan as a slave, sating the bloodlust of its drow citizenry as a gladiator in the drinking pits of the Braeryn. Of your fellow tanarukks, you alone have survived to fight another day. Your prowess in the pits has not gone unnoticed, and you have been scheduled to compete in a showcase match at the Fane of the Goddess. The victor of the games has been promised freedom, though you shrewdly expect treachery should you win the day.

**Characteristics:** Ferocious, militant, crazed

**Prerequisites:** Orc or half-orc tainted by demon blood

took up the Scourged Legion name again. Under the command of the current commander, High Warchief Ghiirvox, the Scourged Legion endures into the Spellplague era as the elite defender of the horde’s headquarters at Splendarmornn (page 106).

Since its aborted siege a century past, the Scourged Legion has largely avoided the Shadowed Ways and the hated drow of Menzoberranzan. But circumstances have changed in recent decades. Under the leadership of High Warchief Ghiirvox, the Scourged Legion has remained cohesive and has strengthened its holdings in Ammarindar. This strength in unity is due in no small measure to the horde’s common faith. Introduced by the mysterious Bloodreaver Jervaan, the fervent worship of Tempus’s exarch Garagos has spread rapidly through the ranks.

## Goals

With Ammarindar largely under his control, High Warchief Ghiirvox has turned his attention toward the north. In the previous century, Kaanyr Vhok allowed

certain tanarukk tribes to escape into the Nether Mountains, to better consolidate the remaining tribes under his command. Ghiirvox now seeks to reclaim these lost tribes, which would create the greatest and most organized horde ever seen in the North. Ghiirvox plans to use these amassed forces to march upon Menzoberranzan. When the drow city lies in ruins, he will then turn his horde upon the surface world, first annexing the orc kingdom of Many-Arrows before sweeping through the Silver Marches.

## Organization

Before his disappearance in 1373 DR, a charismatic half-demon named Kaanyr Vhok led the Scourged Legion. A dozen or so other half-demons and fiend-blooded creatures served Vhok as officers, with Rorgak, a tanarukk of formidable size and ferocity, serving as his personal bodyguard. In the days prior to the siege of Menzoberranzan, Vhok’s tanarukk forces numbered approximately 1,200.

Currently, the Scourged Legion has swelled into a horde more than seven thousand strong, enough to



Left to right: Aliisza, Kaanyr Vhok, High Warchief Ghiirvox, Grand Bloodreaver Jervaan

make a significant mark on any target it chooses to strike. With much of the lost treasure and artifacts of Ammarindar at its disposal, the Scourged Legion might just have enough wealth and might to achieve Vhok's dream of forging a lasting demonic realm in the Underdark to rival Hellgate Keep at its height.

## Notable Personages

**Kaanyr Vhok:** Kaanyr Vhok is the demonic spawn of a marilith and a human father. Most observers see only his light olive complexion and silver-gray hair and believe him to be an aging half-elf due to his pointed ears—but beneath Kaanyr's rich clothes and cloak, his chest, upper arms, and legs are covered with deep green scales revealing his demonic heritage. Kaanyr is regal, bearing himself with an elegance and dignity that belies his chaotic blood. Though he seems cultured and polite, his charm is purely for show. Kaanyr uses his attractive looks and milder temperament to infiltrate rival groups. In battle, Vhok wields a wicked *abyssal spellblade* and the *Scepter Malevolus*, for which he is known as the Sceptered Lord.

Vhok headed the Scourged Legion throughout the era of the Time of Troubles and led the siege of Menzoberranzan during the War of the Spider Queen, but disappeared during the siege of Sundabar in 1373 DR.

**Aliisza:** The daughter of a succubus and a mortal man, Aliisza serves the Scourged Legion as commander of Kaanyr Vhok's personal guard. Calculating and cold, Aliisza never seems to do anything without planning six steps ahead. She smiles often,

usually to manipulate observers, though her sense of humor is as dark as her hair. Her sea-green eyes seem inviting to those she charms, but they flash a deeper green when she is denied or spurned. Not one to reveal her demonic nature unless necessary, Aliisza adopts many different shapeshifting forms under which she hides her wings.

**Ghiirvox:** Far more reserved and calculating than most tanarukks, Ghiirvox is the fourth high warchief to head the Scourged Legion since Vhok's disappearance. A veteran of twelve bloody Underdark campaigns, Ghiirvox stepped up to command when his predecessor succumbed to the Araumycos dream madness. Ghiirvox's skin is violet-blue, an uncommon coloration for a tanarukk that suggests an unusual demon in his ancestry. Ghiirvox rightly suspects that Grand Bloodreaver Jervaan will soon move to supplant him as high warchief.

## RELATIONSHIPS

**Araumycos:** Beneath the High Forest in the Upper Underdark lives the largest single life form on Toril. Araumycos is a sentient fungal colony encompassing hundreds of square miles. The Scourged Legion has waged numerous campaigns against this alien entity and its innumerable myconid minions.

**Drow:** Now that Menzoberranzan has reestablished trade with Ched Nasad within the last decade, drow caravans are once again intruding into the

tunnels of Ammarindar. At present, Ched Nasad is still largely in ruins and is hardly worth invading. The City of Spiders, on the other hand, represents a juicy target for the glory-seeking high warchief.

**Dwarves:** The neighboring dwarves of Old Delzoun are largely ignorant of the atrocities the Scourged Legion is exacting upon their buried kin in Ammarindar. Using unearthed artifacts of the dwarves' own manufacture, Grand Bloodreaver Jervaan is summoning the ghostly spirits of fallen Ammarindar warriors to fight alongside the Scourged Legion.

**Cult of Garagos:** Grand Bloodreaver Jervaan brought the fervent worship of Tempus's exarch Garagos, traditionally an entity worshiped by humankind, to the Scourged Legion. Since the introduction of this faith, a rare tanarukk is born every generation with an extraset of arms. These *targaat*—chosen ones—are believed to be the blessed spawn of the Reaver himself.

## ENCOUNTERS

Although they are occasionally hired as mercenaries, the members of the Scourged Legion are most commonly encountered in the ancient dwarven tunnels of Ammarindar. Adventurers exploring in this region are considered looters and trespassers.

Of the nine tanarukk tribes once trapped beneath Hellgate Keep, four of them abandoned Kaanyr Vhok to settle in the Nether Mountains. The five tribes that still swear fealty to the Scourged Legion include the Hungerknives (the largest), the Gorytusks, the Scaleskulls, the Balorclaws, and the Bonefires.

**Tanarukks:** Descended from orcs and demons, tanarukks are short, stocky humanoids with razor-sharp teeth and prominent tusks that jut out from their lower jaw. When Hellgate Keep was ruled by demons (882 DR to 1369 DR), a breeding program between demons and orcs guaranteed a steady supply of soldiers for the keep's garrison. After centuries of mixing bloodlines, tanarukks now breed true among themselves or with orc mates. Although they are more intelligent than common orcs, tanarukks still respect only strength. When they perceive a leader as weak, challenges result until the leader either maintains his position or lies dead at the feet of his successor.

# Sept of Ill'Ghact

*A secret society of mind flayers—slavers, predators, and breeders.*

## Sept of Ill'Ghact

**Traits:** Duplicitous, secretive

**Power:** 4



**Membership:** 23 illithids, 79 thralls of various races

**Headquarters:** Phanlinksal

**Religious Affiliation:** Ilsensine (weak)

**Leadership:** Galgast El-Venken

**Allies:** House Baenre

**Rivals:** House Oblodra



The Sept of Ill'Ghact is a sinister force in the Underdark that operates in near total secrecy. Few know about this hidden society of illithids, and fewer still know its reach and ambitions. Keeping its secrecy is vital since the illithids in this faction have many foes throughout the Underdark. In particular, the drow of Menzoberranzan would crush the sept if they knew of its existence. So the illithids move in secrecy while they gather their strength. Their psionic ability is a growing menace that could one day threaten the City of Spiders.

## History

El-Viddenvelp (also known as Methil) founded the Sept of Ill'Ghact during the Year of the Lion (1340 DR, late in the Sable Years) in the wake of the destruction of the elder brain at his home city of Phanlinksal in the previous year. Methil was in Menzoberranzan, serving as an advisor to Matron Mother Yvonnell Baenre at the time, and escaped the fall of his city that claimed so many of his fellow illithids. Methil vowed to rebuild the city and restore the elder brain.

For the next eighteen years, Methil slowly built the sept while continuing to serve House Baenre. He recruited other illithids and dominated new thralls to serve them. He chose the ruins of Phanlinksal as his base, but purposely left the city's appearance as an abandoned ruin. Working deep within the city's bowels, he started creating new illithids and preparing the briny pool for a new elder brain.

Methil accomplished one goal toward re-creating the elder brain when an ulitharid arose from an illithid tadpole implanted in a drow psion from House Oblodra. This more powerful form of an illithid gave him a foundation for the elder brain.

In the Year of Shadows (DR 1358), the sept nearly collapsed. Methil was grievously injured in the attack

## ADVENTURERS OF THE SEPT OF ILL'GHACT

*"My will is not my own—I do what my lord and master commands."*

Join the Sept of Ill'Ghact if you want to:

- ◆ Be free of any responsibility for your actions.
- ◆ Serve horrific alien creatures who aim for nothing less than the subjugation of all the Underdark.
- ◆ Become a powerful psionist by learning from the ultimate psions.

### MINDPLAGUED THRALL

You are a thrall of the Sept of Ill'Ghact, but probably don't even know it. At some point in the past, the mind flayers kidnapped you and whisked you away to a secret laboratory. There, the illithids implanted powerful mental controls deep in your mind. They then returned you to Menzoberranzan with a colorful cover story for your absence.

Your life continues as it always has. Your friends don't notice anything different. You don't notice anything different, except in your vivid and horrible dreams where soulless, milky-white eyes look down on you from an alien head, while a mucus-covered tentacle strokes your face. When one of the tentacles slips inside your ear, you awaken screaming.

Someday the illithids will call upon you. You don't know when, and you don't know for what. But when they do, you will not be able to resist their commands.

**Characteristics:** Any (the illithids have need of thralls with a wide variety of abilities)

**Prerequisites:** Mindslaved by an illithid

### MENTORED PSION

You have always had incredible potential with the power of the mind, but recently a stranger approached you and made an enticing offer. With his face hidden inside a deep hood and his body swathed in voluminous robes, you were rightfully suspicious of him, but his offer was too good to refuse. He would tutor you in the ways of psionics and teach you power beyond your imagination. In return, you would be an obedient student and undertake tasks for him from time to time. Lacking any other instructors in Menzoberranzan, you agreed.

You quickly discovered that your instructor was an illithid. This did not surprise you. Illithids are not unheard of on the streets of Menzoberranzan, and they are renowned for their psionic might. Lately, you have begun to suspect that this illithid is part of a larger organization, but you don't know its numbers or its intentions.

Your mentor has been good to his word. He has revealed many psionic secrets to you, and your power has grown immensely. The tasks he asks of you are trivial in comparison to what he is offering. He has not asked you to betray your city, your house, or Lolth, but your suspicions have grown. Illithids are not known for their generosity.

You are right to be doubtful of the open hand of the mind flayers. They intend to harvest you as a host for an illithid tadpole at some point in your future. When your psionic power reaches a desirable level, the Sept of Ill'Ghact will come for you, and they will come in force. And if you're unlucky, shortly thereafter, a new illithid will join the ranks of the sept.

**Characteristics:** Treacherous, haunted, ambitious

**Prerequisites:** Character with psionic power

on Mithral Hall, and he vanished into the Underdark. The sept slid into several decades of listless passivity until the ulitharid Galgast came into full control of its abilities. This creature now runs the organization.

## Goals

The Sept of Ill'Ghact intends to re-create the elder brain of Phanlinksal that was slain years ago. This process is long and laborious, but the illithids are patient. They have created the ulitharid. When they have enough illithids of sufficient ability in the sept, the members of the elder council will join their minds with the ulitharid to create a new elder brain.

Until the elder brain is created, the sept has three main goals that can all be met by capturing more thralls: to serve the illithids, to provide a steady supply of brains for illithid consumption, and to create more powerful illithids to strengthen the sept.

The final task is proving to be the greatest challenge. Methil believed that the chance for creating an ulitharid relies on the psychic power of the host.

With the destruction of House Oblodra, he was unable to gain subjects for further experimentation. Today, Galgast attempts to encourage psionic use among the drow. He has offered training in the power of the mind to several of the lesser houses in Menzoberranzan. None have accepted his offer, but a few are tempted.

## Organization

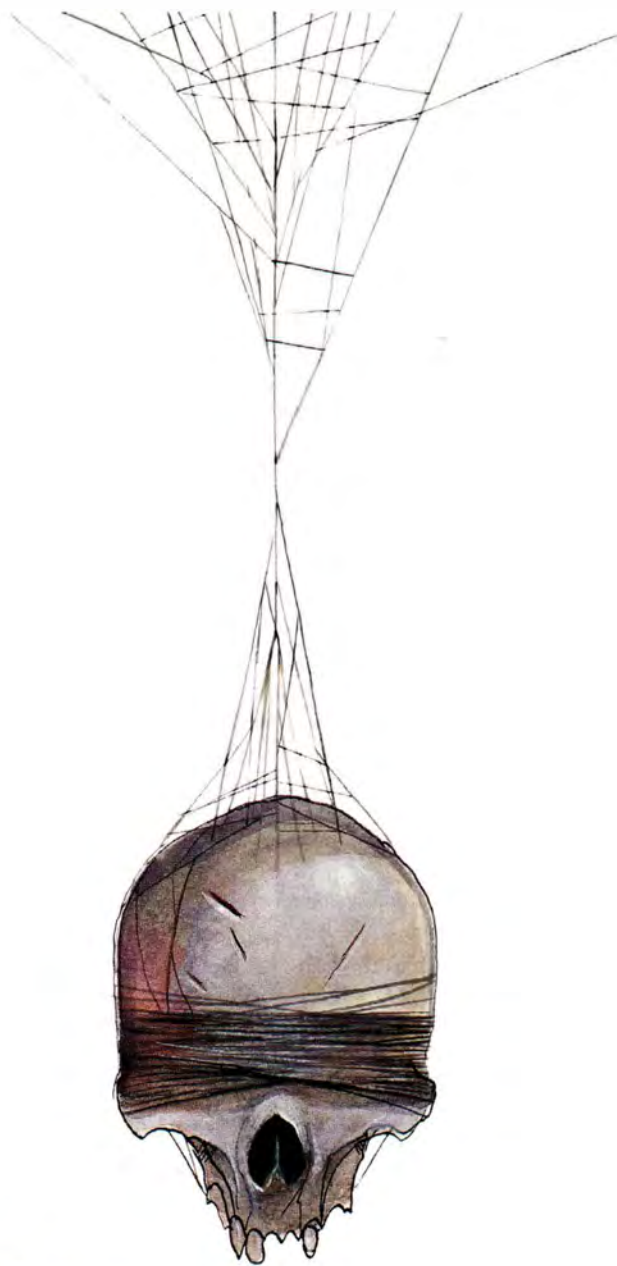
The Sept of Ill'Ghact is based out of the ruins of Phanlinksal (page 112), but it has agents both in Menzoberranzan and on the surface world. An elder council of five illithids leads the sept. El-Viddenvelp steered the council when he was alive, but with his loss, Galgast the ulitharid has taken over.

The sept also increases its membership by creating illithids from drow hosts, a process known as ceremorphosis. The rest of the sept is composed of mentally dominated thralls or charmed sleeper agents in nearby communities.

## Notable Personages

**El-Viddenvelp (Methil):** Methil was born in Phanlinksal from the host of a human sorcerer. He quickly rose to become one of the most influential illithids in the city. When the drow of House Baenre threatened the illithid settlement, Methil agreed to return to Menzoberranzan as an advisor to Matron Yvonnell Baenre in exchange for sparing his city.

After decades of service to House Baenre, Methil was severely injured in the failed siege of Mithral Hall. Suffering from a severe head wound and bereft of his sponsor after the death of Matron Mother Yvonnell Baenre, Methil left the drow behind and wandered the Underdark in blinding and delusional pain for years. His ultimate fate is unknown, but he is almost certainly dead by now.



**Galgast:** Galgast is an ulitharid, a rare and especially formidable form of illithid. He was born from the host of a drow psion of House Oblodra. He rose to power in the wake of El-Viddenvelp's loss in the Underdark. Galgast is determined to pick up the goals of the sept where Methil left off and finish the completion of the elder brain.

Galgast's abilities greatly outstrip those of other illithids. While Methil considered the elder council more or less as equals with the same goal, Galgast treats the other illithids as subordinates to use as he sees fit. The highly lawful illithids see this relationship as only natural. He is an ulitharid, and only an elder brain is greater in their society.

**Uluruela Drael Tuabbar:** This female drow is the main agent of the sept in Menzoberranzan. Uluruela owns a business in Duthcloim where she sells travel goods. This profession is the perfect cover, since she often deals with outsiders or drow leaving the city. She buys most of the supplies for the sept, which she delivers to couriers sent to the city by the sept mind flayers.

Uluruela was trained as a priestess of Lolth in Arach-Tinilith but graduated low in her class. She has since learned the techniques of a warrior. The illithids' mental control of her guarantees that she will never reveal their existence or their goals in Menzoberranzan.

## RELATIONSHIPS

Illithids do not have allies. They view the rest of the world as thralls or potential food. When an illithid treats a creature of another race as anything other than something in one of those two categories, it is a pretense. However, the illithids respect the strength and numbers of the drow. They move cautiously with the dark elves, seeking to remain an elusive threat that the Menzoberranyr have little desire to hunt down.

**House Baenre:** While Methil El-Viddenvelp was alive, the Sept of Ill'Ghact had a tenuous alliance with the First House of Menzoberranzan. In fact, with the exception of Matron Mother Yvonnell Baenre, the drow of House Baenre were never aware of the sept's existence. Yvonnell Baenre used El-Viddenvelp as an advisor for psionic matters. She also utilized his mental abilities to give her an advantage in drow house politics. At the same time, Methil exploited his relationship with the matron mother to study the drow and their city. The information he gleaned over the decades is invaluable to the sept or any other enemy of Menzoberranzan.

With Methil's loss after the defeat at Mithral Hall, the alliance between the sept and House Baenre evaporated. The illithids have not approached Quenthel, the current matron mother of the house, believing her to be more a religious zealot of Lolth and less a pragmatic opportunist as her mother was.



*Left to right: Galgast El-Venken, Methil El-Viddenvelp, Uluruela Drael Tuabbar*

Instead, the sept now works independently of House Baenre.

**House Oblodra:** The drow of House Oblodra have incredible psychic talent, which the mind flayers consider a threat. For much of its history, the sept sought to destroy the house at all costs. When Methil El-Viddenvelp discovered that using powerful drow psions as hosts for illithid tadpoles greatly increased the possibility of creating ulitharids, the sept's view of the house completely shifted. Instead of eradication, the Sept of Ill'Ghact seeks to capture the scions of House Oblodra for implantation. The illithids consider the destruction of the house at Lolth's hands as either a tragic waste of potential hosts or a deliberate act by the Spider Queen to prevent the sept from gaining more influence.

## ENCOUNTERS

The illithids of the Sept of Ill'Ghact prefer to remain in the safety of their fortress at Phanlinksal. However, their constant need for brains to feed upon draws them forth into the Underdark for raids and ambushes. They also need supplies and specialized equipment that they and their thralls cannot make, which is found in places like the Bazaar in Menzoberranzan.

When illithids leave their fortress cities, they take numerous thralls along for protection. The illithids choose their thralls based on the needs of the mission. A trade delegation has bodyguards, scribes, and interpreters, while raids for thralls and brains resemble war parties.

Sometimes, the illithids entrust their missions to reliable and thoroughly dominated thralls. Thralls without an illithid overseer are usually composed of members of the same race to avoid suspicion.

# City of Spiders

Menzoberranzan. The very name is enough to invoke trepidation among even the hardiest folk of the Savage Frontier. To the drow who live there, the City of Spiders is a nest of treachery and intrigue, yet a welcome sanctuary from the even greater horrors of the Underdark.

This chapter provides a primer on the City of Spiders; everything a native-born drow should know to survive in the dangerous streets of Menzoberranzan. It includes the following sections.

- ◆ **Vault of Spiders:** An introduction to the natural splendors to be found inside Araurilcaurak, the great pillared cavern that houses—among other things—the City of Spiders. Some of those “other things” are Donigarten, a lake that has been used as a crypt for drow notables; Narbondel, a centrally located column of rock that serves the city as a timekeeping device; and the Rifts, three gaping crevasses in the cavern floor that lead everywhere and nowhere at the same time.
- ◆ **City Life:** A glimpse of the sights and sounds of life in Menzoberranzan, from the rough-and-tumble city streets to the breathtaking architecture.
- ◆ **The Districts:** The six districts of Menzoberranzan are the occupied neighborhoods where citizens live, work, and die. The districts range in disposition from the extremely crowded and squalid slums of the Braeryn to the wondrously lavish manors and gardens of Qu'ellarz'orl. Several of the locations in each district are fleshed out with details about those places and their proprietors.
- ◆ **Dark Dominion:** Menzoberranzan claims as its domain more than just the volume of the Vault of Spiders, enormous though that cavern is. A labyrinth of narrow passages, known as the Mantle, leads away from the walls of the cavern. The drow have navigated all these tunnels and the small side caves that lead off them from time to time, and they regularly send patrols out into most of the Dark Dominion . . . but there are some places here where even drow do not desire to tread.





# Vault of Spiders

Menzoberranzan fills a large vault, formerly a giant spider lair and beholder lair known by its dwarven name, Araurilcaurak (Great Pillar Cavern), because of Narbondel—the great natural rock pillar at the vault's center that joins floor and ceiling. Menzoberranzan's cavern is roughly shaped like an arrowhead, with the pool of Donigarten at its tip, and stretching two miles across at its widest point. The ceiling rises a thousand feet high, and the floor is studded with many stalagmites and lesser columns.

Two areas rise above the rest of the city: Tier Breche, the side cavern occupied by the Academy where most drow citizens are trained for adulthood; and the larger Qu'ellarz'orl (or House-Loft), a plateau that is home to many of the city's mightiest noble houses, separated from the lower city by a giant mushroom forest. From either of these heights, a surveyor can view the city. The view shows row upon row of carved, spired stone castles, their salient points and sculpted highlights lit by the soft, tinted flows of permanent *faerie fire* lights.

With few exceptions, not a stone of the city's construction has been left in its natural shape—everything has been worked into a smooth, unbroken, unjointed expanse of rock shaped toward drow sensibilities.

## DONIGARTEN

Donigarten is a natural lake that fills the smoothest, lowest end of the city's great cavern. Its chill waters are vital, feeding nearby farmlands and providing fish and eels for the slaves to catch from their poled rafts. At first appearance, it seems as if the city's primary water supply comes from Donigarten. Although the lake water is used for irrigation and is potable enough to slake the thirst of the city's domesticated animals (and slaves), few drow would ever think of drinking from Donigarten's fetid waters. Most of the city's drinking water is instead taken from a natural aquifer deep within the Mistrift.

Early in Menzoberranzan's history, it was the custom to consign the bodies of matron mothers of the Ruling Council and drow heroes favored by Lolth to the waters of Donigarten. The corpses were dressed and adorned in finery, warded with magic to prevent divination spells from locating their treasures, then lashed to a stone spar and sunk to the bottom of the lake.

Nowadays, it's common knowledge in Menzoberranzan that dark things reside under the usually still waters of Donigarten. One of the games slavers play is to make the goblins and orcs swim from the isle to

shore, to see if any of them are pulled down to their deaths.

Donigarten is surrounded by vast fields of tilled earth worked by orc farmers. Slaves pour water into carefully irrigated dung fields, renewing and expanding the fields with wagonloads of excrement brought in from the city proper. The soil is moist and rich in nutrients, making it excellent food for the countless varieties of moss, algae, mold, fungi, and lichen that thrive in that environment. One large bed along Donigarten's western shore yields moss eaten by noble drow as a delicacy. North of the lake stands a grove of giant edible mushrooms, carefully cultivated by drow horticulturists.

## Isle of Rothé

A smaller moss bed covers the island at the center of the lake, known as the Isle of Rothé. This vegetation feeds a herd of deep rothé confined there by the surrounding lake. The rothé are watched by orc slave-shepherds. Small pens on the shore allow the orcs to tend other animals, such as sheep or edible monsters brought back by drow raiding bands.

Closely related to the cattle of the same name herded by surface-dwelling ranchers throughout the North, deep rothé are Underdark herd animals that stand three to four feet tall at the shoulder. Unlike their surface-grazing cousins, deep rothé have the ability to conjure magical light that they use to communicate simple concepts within a herd. These hardy beasts are also inured to the harmful effects of fungus and mold. Drow are fond of deep rothé meat, which many maintain to be more tender and less gamey than that of surface cattle.

## KYORBBLIVVIN

Translated loosely in the drow tongue as “to play with lurking spiders,” Kyorbbliivvin is the forest of mushrooms separating the Qu'ellarz'orl plateau from the rest of the vault, and many consider it the most striking natural feature in all of Menzoberranzan. The forest plateau is carpeted in a fantastic labyrinth of lichen and fungi ranging from common-sized varieties to titan-sized monoliths.

More spectacular than the towering fungi are the clouds of brightly phosphorescent spores drifting lazily throughout the forest, filling its overgrown depths with a soft prismatic radiance. A few, exotic varieties of fungi glow with their own soft light in slowly shifting colors.

Kyorbbliivvin is used for meetings, picnics, and games, yet no prudent drow enters it unarmed. Innumerable spider colonies nest in the forest, and a stray ettercap or two is occasionally found lurking within. Perhaps worse, House Baenre and other houses use



*As another day dawns, the base of Narbondel begins to glow*

magic or spies to eavesdrop on drow in the mushroom forest as a matter of course.

Most of the vegetation in the forest is supple and spongy, though some varieties have sharp, dagger-like edges that easily slice flesh. It's a crime punishable by a heavy fine or even death to willingly damage (or cut, for eating) any growing thing in the forest. Without such enforcement, Kyorbblivvin would long ago have vanished, as have most of the mushrooms that were growing in the main vault when Menzoberranzan was founded.

## NARBONDEL

An immense natural rock column looms at the heart of Menzoberranzan, joining the floor and ceiling of the city's great cavern. Known as Narbondel, this pillar serves the community as a gigantic timepiece. At the end of each day, the Archmage of Sorcere (or a master of Sorcere, in the rare instances when the Archmage is dead, otherwise occupied, or absent from the city) magically heats the base of the column.

The heat rises from the base of Narbondel to the top over the course of twelve hours, and then it cools over the same duration. Through this hot, glowing tower of rock, the Menzoberranyr mark the passage of time in the sunless Underdark. The midnight hour of the surface world is known locally as "the black death of Narbondel."

Although the natural shape of the column has remained unaltered since its discovery, the surface of Narbondel has been engraved in a spiraling mosaic of images depicting everything from great battles to etchings of Underdark creatures long extinct.

## OVERWAYS AND UNDERWAYS

Tunneling into the rock above or below the city can be difficult dangerous, and magical wards prevent digging that might cause a collapse or cave-in. Nevertheless, some of the city's greatest feats of architecture are the Overways wound into the cavern ceiling and the Underways beneath.

The Overways include not only caverns nestled in the rock in the cavern ceiling (such as the compound of House Mizzrym), but also the carved, worked, hollowed-out stalactites that hang over much of the central vault and particularly over Qu'ellarz'orl. They are linked to the main city below by a hundred leaping, railless, stone bridge spans, by spiraling staircases rising hundreds of feet, and by passages within the cavern walls.

The Underways include only a few tunnels and diggings aside from the small cellars beneath almost every building in the city. After a few major disasters arising from extensive mining in the city's early days, hard restrictions on tunneling below the city floor.

### The Cistern

Originally the home of the giant spider that laired in the cavern and its numberless brood, this vaulted gallery has long served as the primary water supply for a majority of Menzoberranzan's twenty thousand residents. Roughly the length of the Narbondelny district, the cistern was originally intended for use only by noble drow houses, but as the waters of Donigarten became increasingly stagnant over the centuries, public wells were dug for commoners.

### Bone Locker

The dead in drow society are most often taken to a charnel house to have the corpse sanctified to Lolth in purifying flame. After the cleansing ritual, the bones are moved to a funeral ossuary for long-term storage. The Bone Locker is the colloquial name of the largest and oldest such site in the city. The

ossuary itself is a sprawling catacomb delved just below the street level of West Wall, and it descends downward an indeterminate number of levels deeper. The ossuary's largest vaults serve as mausoleums for the great houses of the city. The bones of drow commoners have no special resting place; they are simply stacked one atop another in rough-hewn chambers until the stack can support no more weight. At such times, duergar slaves are brought in to expand the catacombs. Junior-level priestesses of Arach-Tinilith are tasked with clearing the Bone Locker of vermin, as well as deterring drunken nobles from any mischief or vandalism.

## THE RIFTS

The cavern floor is broken by three major rifts and many smaller ones. The larger, named rifts of Menzoberranzan are virtual abysses—vast, empty voids of incredible depth that appear bottomless. Few who have fallen into these rifts have ever been seen again.



## KHALESS

Khaless, the drow word for trust, is also the name of a game played above one of the city's three large rifts. In preparation for the game, a globe of darkness is hung in the open air above the drop point, and the area is also enchanted with a magical silence. The challenging drow levitate themselves and are pushed into this dark and quiet globe by the referees, using long catch poles called kheel. The rules are simple: the first drow to come out of the darkened area, either by floating down and calling for a pole, or by hanging beyond the duration of her levitation abilities (thus falling to her death) loses. A drow willingly coming out of the globe does not automatically lose, however. If the challenging drow, oblivious to the other's surrender while among the darkness and silence, remains in the area too long and falls, the survivor wins.

Two or more drow can play khaless (it gets really wild when a dozen or more go up into the globe!), with even younger drow invited to play and given levitation spells by the house mages. (Of course, these ignorant young drow have no idea how long the wizard's spell might last.) Winners are accorded a vacation of pleasure (slaves or drow of lesser station of their choice included) in the luxuries of the first family's house; losers (if they survive) must spend a month cleaning the kobold caverns. Of course, there is often no winner.

The game was first practiced by members of House Oblodra, but the popularly insane sport has spread throughout the city in recent decades. Some male nobles even use khaless to settle grievances in something akin to a duel.

## Clawrift

This claw-shaped chasm is one of three that mar the surface of the City of Spiders, but the Clawrift has the most storied past and most frightening reputation.

The former Third House of Menzoberranzan, House Oblodra was once located in a huge and luxurious compound between the first and second "fingers" of the Clawrift. After a prolonged war with House Baenre, Oblodra was dragged into the seemingly bottomless crevasse by Lolth's own monstrous claws.

Now a breeding ground for kobold slaves and one of many safe houses for Bregan D'aerthe mercenaries, the Clawrift stands as an enduring symbol of House Baenre's strength.

## Mistrift

This long gorge at the city's center earned its name from the rolling clouds of steam that forever billow up from below. A number of subterranean streams flow out of the Mistrift's vertical walls, their icy waters



*Deep inside a rift, forces vie to take control of a bridge without destroying it*

cascading into the darkened void below. Half a mile down, the runoff collects in an ancient aquifer, its waters superheated by an adjacent magma flow.

Drow ingenuity has led to the engineering of several arcane watermills that collect water from the plunging falls. The siphoned water is then stored in the city's grand cistern that runs through the Underways.

## Westrift

The newest of the city's large clefts, Westrift appeared three centuries past, swallowing three noble houses and a score of lesser dwellings as the scar opened its yawning maw. No natural phenomenon, Westrift's creation is widely rumored to have been perpetrated by high priestesses from House Duskryn. Although destruction within the city at such a scale is severely frowned upon, House Duskryn conveniently used the event to move up several ranks within the city's nobility.

## SPIDERFANGS

This large east-west line of stalagmites north of House Barrison Del'Armgo serves as a bulwark and command post against hostile incursions from the Eastways. At short notice, House Barrison Del'Armgo can have five-hundred drow soldiers positioned within the Spiderfangs to rain fiery death down upon invaders passing into the city. In days past, similar death has been visited upon the citizenry of the Braeryn when the dregs of that district dared incite rebellion.

# City Life

Menzoberranzan is a thriving, vibrant city. Dozens of drow houses are scrambling for status. Their intrigues, their secret wars, and their wealth fuel the restless, seething danger ever present in the city. Visitors from hundreds of difference races throughout the Northdark walk its streets to trade or to plot. Thousands of slaves labor in constant misery to keep the city functioning. Most importantly, Menzoberranzan is home to many. It's a place where people live, laugh, and die—arrogant, cruel drow, but people nonetheless.

## CITY STREETS

The streets of Menzoberranzan are dimly and weirdly lit by the vivid phosphorescent hues of fungi, magical fields, and extravagant use of permanent *faerie fire* spells. The eldritch flames line most buildings in the city, creating a constantly flickering montage of soft blue, green, purple, and orange hues. The effect is beautiful if otherworldly.

Rather than growing wildly, vegetation is pruned by slaves and shaped to grow in pillars, arches, and shaped clusters.

The streets are solid rock, worn smooth through centuries of use. Rocks are scarce to deprive slaves of ready weapons.

Arachnids are ever present in the City of Spiders. Small ones scurry underfoot, while larger ones spin webs between buildings, in the corners of rooms, or in the eaves. To mistreat an arachnid except in prescribed ways is frowned upon, and many drow believe that Lolth spies on them through the eyes of the spiders.

The vault that holds the city is damp near the Donigarten and dry elsewhere. The decay of rotting plants and fertilizer at the eastern end of the cavern creates a large amount of heat, which causes gentle breezes to waft around the cavern. The air is scented with the spicy but unpleasant musk of fungi spores.

Sounds within the city caverns are dimmed, due to long-term silence spells placed on the hanging stalactites by the wizards to prevent endless echoing. This practice has reduced the noise in the city to an endless murmur of movement on stone, dripping water, and the hissing and chatter of speech, which is highlighted here and there by the soft piping of drow music and the occasional high scream of pain.

Loners are targets in Menzoberranzan. Drow move about in families or in armed groups. Bands of bugbears, orcs, gnolls, and other hirelings march through the thoroughfares. In the city's better areas,

non-drow are less common and tend to be accompanied by an overseer or guide.

Nobles move through the street traffic the way large ships displace smaller craft in a crowded harbor. Male nobles ride lizards, while females use lizards with couches or litters carried by slaves (litters having a grander status). House matrons use silently drifting drift disks, flanked by heavy escorts of house troops and high priestesses on foot.

## City Patrols

By order of the Ruling Council, the Academy of Menzoberranzan mounts constant street patrols in the Bazaar and along the main thoroughfares of the city. These patrols enforce the Way of Lolth and contain the constant street violence from exploding into full riots.

An Academy patrol, called a “hand,” consists of eight to twelve warriors led by an Academy instructor from Melee-Magthere. Patrols are commanded by a priestess from Arach-Tinilith and sometimes accompanied by a wizard from Sorcere. Patrols in the Bazaar, where things can quickly get very wild, are larger than normal. A typical Bazaar patrol consists of three “hands” in an open formation.

In addition to the Academy patrols, house guards roam the streets. Each house regularly patrols the streets near its compound to impose its influence over those who live nearby and to watch for any incursions from other houses. These patrols are structured similarly to the Academy patrols, but vary with the resources of the patrolling house.

### FEAR OF THE LAW

Law enforcement in Menzoberranzan is feared. The priestesses leading a guard patrol have the legal authority to whip, torture, and execute for the slightest provocation, and they use it. Most Menzoberranyr head in the other direction when they see a street patrol. Those who can't slip away keep their heads down and pray that they don't attract attention. For more information on law enforcement in Menzoberranzan, see “Drow Justice,” page 20.

## VISITORS TO THE CITY

Menzoberranzan receives countless visitors from near and far. Most non-drow (called *colnbluth*) found in the city are either slaves or hirelings of the various houses. Although the Ruling Council does permit non-drow into the city for the purposes of trade, free movement is generally restricted to the northern districts of Duthcloim, Eastmyr, and the Braeryn; elsewhere, non-drow must be escorted by a permanent drow detachment.

In truth, the drow cannot be bothered with checking or rationing the number of visitors in their city. Instead, they rely on the brutal justice of the street patrols and the natural predatory nature of the city's citizenry to ensure visitors behave.

Illithids are allowed into the city, but the houses watch them carefully. Duergar are permitted free rein, unless they gather in significant numbers. Humans are considered weak and ripe for enslavement, but influential or wealthy humans are tolerated in the city as long as they pay lip service to Lolth and don't cross the priestesses. Any elven or half-elven visitors are seized by the drow and sacrificed to Lolth unless the elf has a high-ranking sponsor protecting him or her. Svirfneblin are tolerated in the city, but a deep gnome visitor who is not a slave is very rare. Less common and more dangerous creatures, such as beholders, dragons, and neogi, are occasionally allowed into the city with an armed escort.

Within the city, non-drow are expected to follow the tenets of the Way of Lolth (no matter how distasteful or repulsive), just as is expected of any drow. Similarly, all outlanders must at all times display the insignia of the house or merchant clan who sponsored their entry.

### Menzoberranzan Architecture

The poorest dregs of the Braeryn shelter in structures called "cairns"—a sad construction of bone poles and hides, serving as entryway to a shallow dug-out cellar. A dozen or more creatures can be packed within a cairn without the slightest vestige of privacy.

A standard drow commoner of Eastmyr resides in a sparsely furnished apartment within a limestone tenement, most of which stand four or five stories tall and are six times as long as they are wide. Small courtyards between tenements contain a common well for drinking and washing.

The merchant class of Duthcloim enjoys better accommodations, with most living in three-story, single family tallhouses constructed from magically hollowed and molded stalagmites. Although a wealthy merchant might rent or own a second home to escape business pressures or to use for secret

meetings, liaisons, and the like, almost all merchants live in the same fortified building that houses their shop, to better guard their stock and wealth.

West Wall and Narbondelwyn are home to beautifully carved, spired stone manors and villas, increasing in size and grandeur with the wealth of the owner. The most ostentatious of these structures emulate spider webs or arachnids in their design and are adorned with glittering filaments that endlessly dance and flicker with the radiance of faerie fire spells.

Partly to compete with the merchants, many noble houses have constructed rows of shops along the walls of their compounds, which they rent out. These shops are constructed of stone and made to look a part of the central fortress. Anyone trying to tunnel from a shop into the wall of the castle beyond typically finds a grim warning once they pierce the shop's back wall, furnished by the priestesses of the house: a drow skeleton, which if touched animates and attacks.

Finally, shrouded behind a forest of giant mushrooms on Qu'ellarz'orl stand the grand estates of some of the most powerful houses in the city. Sitting upon a bluff overlooking the rest of the city, the Baenre Compound is easily twice the size of the next largest estate. At the heart of the great fortress stands a huge, circular, domed temple to Lolth—an amphitheater dominated by an image of the Spider Queen that shifts endlessly from one of her forms to another.

Many of the city's largest dwellings, especially the compounds occupied by noble houses, were created by linking stalagmites together with magically raised and melded stone.



# The Districts

Each of Menzoberranzan's six districts shares customs and traits with the larger city, but it also has distinct characteristics and personality traits. Brief descriptions of the districts follow.

**The Braeryn:** A decrepit slum, home to the lowliest non-drow residents of Menzoberranzan. Life in the Braeryn is desperate and cutthroat, with a pervasive feeling of hopelessness on every corner. Only the ruthless and the cunning survive these rough streets for long.

**Duthcloim:** The middle-class, mercantile heart of the city, home to many well-to-do commoners. Duthcloim also hosts the Bazaar, a bustling labyrinth of stores and markets where nearly anything imaginable can be procured for the right price.

**Eastmyr:** A lower-class neighborhood of struggling merchants, lesser tradesfolk, and mercenaries. Numerous workshops and drinking establishments fill the cramped tallhouses in this sordid district.


**Narbondellyn:** A fashionable neighborhood of elegant manor houses, eclectic artisans, and rising socialites. Many of the city's prominent theatres and arenas are found in this district, marking Narbondellyn as the place to see and be seen.

**Qu'ellarz'orl:** The grandest district of the city, home to the greatest noble houses of Menzoberranzan. There is a subtle sense of spirituality here, as if the very earth has been sanctified to Lolth. Commoners and outsiders are absolutely forbidden to trespass there.


**West Wall:** A quiet district of "old money" and hidden intrigues. Its streets are quiet and soulless. Houses in this area exude opulence, but show none of the extravagant vulgarity found in Narbondellyn or Qu'ellarz'orl.


## Places of Business

Menzoberranzan enjoys a wide range of shops and marketplaces where adventurers and city folk can procure just about any desire. To help the Dungeon Master gauge the relative value and expense of these establishments, each business is graded according to a scale established in the last century by the famed human mage and explorer Volothamp Geddarm (Volo for short).

**Price:** In a city full of grifters and cheats, a high price tag doesn't always equate to a quality product. Price is measured on a scale from 1 (cheap) to 5 (expensive), shown in each business entry using stacked-coin icons: 

**Quality:** Not every merchant or craftsman sells goods of the highest quality. Quality is measured on

a scale from 1 (worst) to 5 (best), shown in each business entry using star icons: 

**Threat:** Some establishments seem to draw an unsavory clientele. Characters frequenting these shops are advised to watch their backs. Threat is measured on a scale from 1 (unsafe) to 5 (deadly), shown in each business entry using skull icons: 

## THE BRAERYN

### The Braeryn

#### "Stenchstreets"

A decrepit slum, home to the lowliest undercreatures of Menzoberranzan, the Braeryn is little more than a suffocating cesspit of filth and desperation.

**Population:** 500 drow (infirm or fugitive), 6,000 non-drow (transient populace of kobolds, bugbears, goblins, orcs, hobgoblins, quaggoths, and minotaurs). Population fluctuates greatly due to frequent outbreaks of disease, internecine strife, and capricious noble hunts.

**Noble Houses:** None. No drow houses of importance or reputation dwell in the Braeryn.

**Trade:** Individuals flashing enough coin can easily secure poisons, narcotics, or slaves. Assassins, kidnappers, and thieves openly sell their services in drinking pits throughout the district. Individuals with underworld connections can broker an audience with the Wan Hag, information broker and boss of the Braeryn's most prominent thieves' den.

**Security:** Drow guards make a show of patrolling the district's main thoroughfare in large numbers, but few ever step foot into the alleys and byways that constitute the heart of the Stenchstreets. Many residences align themselves with tribal gangs for protection—the most influential being the Skortch-claw Horde (orc) and the Blue Shackle (hobgoblin).

Extending north from the western end of the Spiderfangs are the dark alleys and hovels the Braeryn. This is Menzoberranzan's slum, home to sick and outlaw drow, goblins, orcs, bugbears, and other non-drow who are sometimes hired for odd jobs (such as heavy loading or digging) by Menzoberranyr, or for guard or mercenary pillage-raid duty. Some are even stupid or desperate enough to try their luck in the city as thieves or kidnappers.

Not all residents of this filthy district are outsiders. The Braeryn also serves as the final home for drow undesirables, including criminals, beggars, half-breeds, and survivors of fallen noble houses.

The mercenary band Bregan D'aerthe maintains contacts in the district for those wanting to hire the group. Certain aged drow dwelling in the district also



*The collection of creatures to be found in Stenchstreets is as motley as their surroundings*

concoct and sell poisons, drugs, and love philters. Some also sell information, but seldom live long, once they become widely known.

One such crone, city lore swears, was once revealed as the Spider Queen in disguise—when the goddess shed her rags to blast a priestess who treated her cruelly. Rumors persist that Lolth keeps watch over (or even, in disguised form, dwells in) the Stenchstreets. Such beliefs gain support from the numerous spiders of all sorts and sizes that scuttle and lurk about the area, despite the many attempts by outsiders to slay them or drive them off.

## The Wan Hag

**Information Broker** 🕸️🕸️🕸️ ★★★ ☠️☠️  
 During the Time of Troubles era and the beginning of the War of the Spider Queen, an information broker named Smylla Nathos operated in the Braeryn. A human, she captured the attention of a drow slave raid on the surface world and returned to Menzoberranzan as something more than a slave and less than an honored guest of House Faen Tlabbar. For a time, she used her skill as a sorcerer and diviner—as well as her drowlike poise, charm, and ruthlessness—to serve as advisor to Matron Ghenni'tiroth. But when she fell

## THE HUNT

Even the most hardened street toughs give pause when the brazen trumpeting of horns echo throughout the Braeryn. The wise scamper quickly into their darkened hovels or face the sporting cheers and slashing blades of noble drow on the hunt—slaying every wretch within sight. This “lighthearted” blood sport is a thankfully infrequent but celebrated tradition in the Braeryn, often spurred by boastful young blades after an evening of too much drink.

ill, and healing magic failed to offer remedy, her sickness was viewed as a curse inflicted by Lolth.

Escaping assassination by her former benefactors, Smylla fled to the Braeryn to eke out a new life among the dregs of drow society. Although her illness left her withered and weak, the Wan Hag, as she came to be known, employed her eldritch talents to cobble together a formidable web of informants and spies. However, by the beginning of the War of the Spider Queen, her illness had robbed her even of her divination talents, and she was soon killed by Ryld Argith.





*A cloaked figure en route to a dark destination.*

## Slave Markets

The heavily patrolled southern ghettos of the Braeryn serve as pens and holding facilities for thousands of wretched souls sold into slavery. Drow slavers peddle their wares around the clock in the markets. Slaves that don't "make it to market" are simply wheeled away and dumped into Lake Donigarten.

## Quaggoth Drool

### Tavern



The Stenchstreets is notorious for its déclassé "drinking pits"—those crude establishments where drow of every station go to forget about caste and rank for a few hours, guzzle raw spirits, and watch lesser

creatures slaughter one another in bloody contests. One such place is the Quaggoth Drool. As is common in such pits, revelers must surrender all weapons when they enter the tavern. Then they can get as drunk as they want, shout, argue, talk, and have a good fight. Priestesses often use magic to eavesdrop in such ruinous places, listening for treachery, plans for attacks on houses, or other business being discussed. The entertainment focuses on the sunken arena at the center of the common room where patrons wager heavily on brutal and often lethal pit matches.

## DUTHCLOIM

### Duthcloim

#### (Manyfolk)

The middle-class and mercantile heart of Menzoberranzan, Duthcloim is home to well-to-do drow of common standing, as well as a sizable population of wealthy non-drow.

**Population:** 8,000 drow, 10,000 non-drow.

**Noble Houses:** Oblodra, Vandree

**Common Families:** Bluirren, Klendara, Drael Tuabbar, del'Hluanter, Darnruel, Do'llisharr, Quel'tlarn, and del'Ygana.

**Trade:** Duthcloim sees the greatest amount of trade in the city outside of the Bazaar. Business is conducted from any of the innumerable street-level, family owned shops that line the narrow boulevards.

**Security:** Drow patrols are frequent enough to deter most open criminal activity.

Duthcloim (or Manyfolk) is by far the most colorful, interesting, and tolerant district of Menzoberranzan. As its informal name implies, it is a melting pot of middle-class drow commoners and wealthy merchants of varying species. This large district is home to the majority of the shops and businesses of the city, running the gamut from small collapsible kiosks to large multi-story outfitters.

Menzoberranzan is not friendly with most of its neighbors in the Underdark, but the Ruling Council does recognize that a modicum of trade with the lesser races is necessary to maintain the city's decadent standard of living. This reality necessitates a certain amount of restraint on the part of the drow living in Duthcloim to treat peaceably with the non-drow citizenry. Of course, all outsiders must abide by the city's traditions—even those they find distasteful or repulsive. Non-drow quickly learn to keep their heads down since they can be attacked with impunity by any noble-born drow. Shrines dedicated to deities other than Lolth are not permitted in the city,

and outsiders are encouraged to keep their beliefs to themselves.

Of the small number of nobles that dwell in this district, House Oblodra (depending on the time period) is the best known—its bizarre compound clinging to the cliff face between two fingers of the Clawrift. Most noble houses outside the district also maintain a secondary or secretive “safe” residence in Duthcloim.

## Adventuring Headquarters

Manyfolk is an ideal district for Dungeon Masters seeking to insert businesses, inns, and drow houses of their own creation. As the characters in your campaign will likely be allied with different houses and organizations, it might make sense for the adventurers to establish a common base within the city. Initially it might be at a local tavern, but as the characters accumulate wealth and status, it could be more prudent for them to purchase a compound. Rebuilding from the ruins of House Oblodra would be one cheap alternative, but the characters would have to be vigilant against kobolds and other dangers rising up from the depths of the Clawrift.

## The Cathlyre

**Exotic Bird Aviary** ☹☹☹☹☹ ★★★★★

Anchored to a sweeping battlement of stalactites along the Clawrift’s easternmost perimeter is a spectacular latticework enclosure crafted of basalt support beams and a mesh of calcified webbing. Within the free flight structure soar countless types of avians from the World Above, including many exotic species (among them the namesake peacock-like cathlyre). From the large shop, perched along the ledge of the Clawrift, the birds are sold as pets, live targets, or roasted alive before the customer’s eyes—a hot meal seasoned and done to order.

## Rhauvais’ Arms

**Munitions Supplier** ☹☹☹☹☹ ★★★★★

Proprietor Rhauvais del’Ygana, a tall and strong female drow, specializes in discreet manufacture

### PIWAFWI

A piwafwi is a magical cloak woven from spider silk. These garments are incredibly popular in Menzoberranzan, and all patrols both inside the city and out use them. When the hood is drawn over the head, the wearer becomes almost invisible to normal sight, including to creatures that can ordinarily see in the dark. Many piwafwis hold additional magical enchantments, such as protecting their wearers from fire.

and sale of exotic, high-quality ranged weapons and ammunition for her noble clientele. Specialty armaments of her design include “the spinagon” (a repeating hand crossbow), “the kocrachon” (a hovering, envenomed, dart-like projectile that strikes upon a triggered condition), and “the hamatula” (a basilisk-hide bandolier that magically recalls any dagger thrown from its pockets); all are named after devils of the Nine Hells.

## THE BAZAAR

The ever-changing, never-sleeping Bazaar is the commercial heart of Menzoberranzan. This circle of bare bedrock about 750 feet in diameter is a crowded, untidy labyrinth of stalls and hagglers. The ongoing trade fair attracts merchants and goods from all over Faerûn, and the drow go there to buy and sell almost everything imaginable.

Warriors training at the Academy patrol the Bazaar heavily. The patrols are performed to keep a lid on the violence, but they do not interfere with haggling, arguments, or fraudulent dealing. The merchants suffer the patrols to keep the house nobles in line. The Ruling Council maintains the patrols to prevent giving the merchants a reason to hire large numbers of guards that could grow into private armies.

By decree of the Ruling Council, the Bazaar contains no permanent structures. No stall can remain in one spot longer than 66 days. The law is intended to keep the Bazaar from dwindling away as permanent buildings replace the stalls. Also, the constant shuffling forces buyers to tour the Bazaar, searching for favored stalls or merchants.

Fights and covert sabotage are common, since vendors jostle for more space for their booths or try to avoid being relegated to a bad location. While merchants are not allowed to openly sell their space at the Bazaar, wise merchants arrange to trade spots with other established vendors for favors.

Merchants of all races and lands are welcome in the Bazaar, and shoppers can get almost anything they desire in its curtained booths and stalls, given enough patience and money. The stalls carry goods and services that range from the mundane to the wondrous. Tailors, potters, and crafters of every stripe can be found in the twisting paths of the Bazaar. Surgeons, potions, and herbal medicines can also be found there by those who want to avoid seeking healing from the priestesses of Lolth. Some vendors even sell wines, cheeses, and other exotics from the surface lands, and one is able to send and receive messages to and from the World Above.

Living commodities can also be purchased in the Bazaar, and many drow go there to hire mercenaries and outlander wizards. While slaves can be bought



*A typical day in the Bazaar: How much for that dagger in the window?*

there, most purchasers looking for such goods go to the Braeryn to fill those needs.

## Bhaelundryn's Bestiary

**Underdark Hostler**      🐛🐛🐛 ★★☆☆

Heavily guarded by a dozen drow guards and gnoll overseers, this stall provides pack lizards and riding-lizard mounts, including the harnesses, goads, lead lines, and carrying frames for the creatures. Vhurn Bhaelundryn, an old, fat, affable, and heavily scarred drow warrior, always has one of each sort of lizard harnessed and ready, but the cost is astronomical. The fee does include immediate help from the overseers, however, in delaying pursuit, patrols, and anything up to angry high priestesses. In addition to beasts, Vhurn sells “underdark packs” for adventuring in the Underdark, and is knowledgeable about places to buy other gear and weapons.

## Dhode's Fine Piwafwis

**Tailor and Clothier**      🐛🐛🐛🐛 ★★☆☆

Dhode Lu'orz is a tailor who sells all manner of clothing cut in drow fashions, but he specializes in making piwafwis. He staffs this stall with six apprentices who he treats as little more than slaves. Dhode has a

number of contacts in Sorcere willing to add enchantments to a piwafwi if the price is right.

## Quild's Mobile Parlor

**Information Broker**      🐛🐛 ★★

This stall is little more than a bench and a cart full of cheap trinkets. Quild, a wiry, muscled male drow, moves his cart and bench regularly to follow shifts in traffic around the Bazaar. He engages non-drow and other males with nonstop chatter while he works, but is quiet and submissive before female drow. Quild is an excellent source for rumors and gossip, and he can give directions to most locales in and around the city. Of course, generous tips greatly enhance the accuracy of the information.

### HAGGLING

Among the drow, haggling happens only when the buyer and the seller are roughly of equal station. Otherwise, the drow of higher station states the price she will pay for the goods and the lower-status drow must accept. For this reason, drow merchants always keep their best wares hidden from view, out of fear of a powerful drow noble taking a liking to something and offering a fraction of its worth.

## Sense of Sensuous Scents

### Perfumery



The mixture of scents wafting on the light breeze of Menzoberranzan ensures that shoppers smell this stall long before they see it. Rauva Zoldyth, a female drow, sells a wide variety of incense, from bricks that burn in braziers to sticks that smolder slowly. She also sells oils and candles, most of which are treated to burn with a low eldritch-colored flame that won't hurt sensitive drow eyes. Rauva notes which priestesses buy what incense and how much, and discreetly sells this information to those who might be interested in knowing what houses are preparing certain rituals.

## Shimmerdark's Decanter

### Vintner & Alchemist



Named for its handsome, charming (and smart-mouthed) young drow proprietor, this stall stocks rare and fine potables from all over the Realms. Daelein Shimmerdark carries a wide selection, from fortified wines of the Sword Coast to hard liquors made by the dwarves. Daelein offers love potions and sleep poison to rich and discreet shoppers. For a small fee, he will also provide directions on the best places to sell stolen goods.

## Whispers in the Dark

### Courier



A human wizard named Fethlorn Kelapanch set up shop in the Bazaar late in the Spellplague era, specializing in delivering messages around the city. Young drow commoners, especially orphans, camp outside his stall, waiting for a chance to run a message and make a few coins. Fethlorn also has connections with many caravan masters and can arrange for messages to be delivered to far-off locations in the Underdark or even to the surface. He can also arrange for messengers to run the missive directly, but this is ruinously expensive. A number of spells and rituals for magical communication are at his disposal, allowing him to contact virtually anyone in Faerûn, including in the World Above.



## EASTMYR

### Eastmyr

#### "Mere East"

The lower-class neighborhood of struggling merchants, lesser tradesfolk, and mercenaries.

**Population:** 5,000 drow, 3,000 non-drow.

**Noble Houses:** House Hunzrin, House Kenafin (until the Reckoning)

**Common Families:** Asbodela, Dlaen Del'Amatar, Fael Olyphar, llystryph, Uluar, and Zalyzryn.

**Trade:** Artisans making common, necessary items, such as pottery, tools, furniture, boots, and clothing, as well as barbers and massage parlors.

**Security:** Drow street patrols regularly sweep through the neighborhood's main avenues, but not as frequently as in the other more prosperous parts of the city. House Hunzrin patrols near its compound, and their forces respond to calls for help from their underlings.

Those not successful enough to dwell in Manyfolk live in the poorer, less esteemed neighborhood of Eastmyr. In many ways, Eastmyr is a neighborhood in decline. The ruins of House Freth are home to squatters and escaped slaves. Shortly after the War of the Spider Queen, when House Kenafin merged with House Horlbar to form House Melarn, its former compound fell into the same state. The empty shells of the former houses cast a pall over Eastmyr as examples of defeat and despair.

After the departure of House Kenafin, the only noble house of any standing in the district is House Hunzrin, but most noble drow would argue that Hunzrin is not of any consequence. Below House Hunzrin in status are six families that seek to rise in status, taking Hunzrin's place. None of these families have the resources to challenge the house for dominance, but they constantly bicker and feud among themselves. Yune-duis used to be among their number, but Dlaen Del'Amatar destroyed the family nearly ten years ago.

Beside the seven noble houses and six common families of note, the narrow, shabby streets of Eastmyr are the home of lesser tradesfolk, mercenaries, and non-drow of no significant wealth or power.

## Battered Beholder

### Arms and Hardware



The inside of this weapons shop is almost as battered as the beholder (said to be Many Eyes) on the sign at the store front. The inventory varies widely from day to day, and the shop fences goods with no questions asked. A male dwarf named Olask Dhauluin runs the Beholder.

Olask came to Menzoberranzan shortly after the War of the Spider Queen and remains there throughout the Spellplague era, which is a good indicator of his caution and deviousness. Olask lives in the floors above the shop, using monsters to guard it during non-business hours, when they are allowed to roam freely.

## Calask's Hands

### Hairstylist ★★★★★

This hair salon is named for the male human who founded the business during the Sable Years—Myrlyth Calask. His shop survived him, passing to a male drow commoner named Filraen after the War of the Spider Queen. The clientele claims that Filraen's delicate drow fingers are much better than Calask's, but Filraen keeps the name because of its novelty, which attracts customers. Filraen is secretly a spy for Bregan D'aerthe. He relays messages to other agents and reports on what he overhears. He never takes any action that could expose his cover.

## Darkled Depths

### Tavern ★★★★★

Located across from the abandoned House Kenafin compound is the Darkled Depths, one of the most popular taverns in the city. The Depths is a higher-class establishment than the drinking pits, though it does admit non-drow. It is renowned for its glowing drinks made from phosphorescent lichen and a wide variety of stuffed mushrooms. The tavern fills four floors carved from the interior of a stalagmite. One wide winding stair connects the floors, but several open locations allow drow to levitate from one floor to another. In addition to music and singing, the Depths features shadow plays performed on an illuminated canvas. The owner is a commoner drow female named Kialara, who oversees an almost entirely male staff.

## Dylchanta's Furfeathers

### Massage House ★★★★★

The best massage house in Eastmyr, Dylchanta's Furfeathers regularly hosts massage parties for large groups. The parlor is run by Dylchanta, a female drow commoner, who is assisted by a staff of a dozen masseuses evenly split between genders. Dylchanta has no aspirations for nobility, only for the wealth a successful business can bring and the influence that wealth can buy. Some in Eastmyr whisper that she ensures that Furfeathers remains the only good massage house in Eastmyr through threats and violence, but nothing has ever been proven. Her principal clients are members of House Hunzrin, but on any given day, members of any of the lesser houses and common families can be found there.

## Narbondel's Shadow

### Rooming House ★★★★★

Narbondel's Shadow is one of the two surviving rooming houses that cater to non-drow visitors in the city. Narbondel's Shadow is very expensive, but the service is excellent. Rates include all meals, basic drink, stabling, and a private room with a magical light source. A human adventurer named Morl founded the rooming house shortly before the Time of Troubles. He left the place to his son, but in the late Spellplague era it is run by a halfling named Dalfred Noakes.

Dalfred had a violent encounter with a young Hunzrin noble, which left him scarred and without his left ear. He has never forgotten or forgiven the noble. To this day, he makes full use the rooming house's prime location overlooking the Clawrift, and a connected small cave system that does not join up with Dark Dominion, to smuggle goods and hide people fleeing angry drow nobles. Dalfred also has contacts throughout Eastmyr and Braeryn for clients looking to discreetly hire or purchase needed magic, healing, weapons, and other gear. He plays a dangerous game that will likely get him killed in the near future.

## Ruins of House Freth

House Freth was all but destroyed by House Teken'duis in the Year of the Fallen Throne (1319 DR). Unfortunately, three noble children remained alive to accuse the Teken'duis of the attack, and that house was destroyed in turn by decree of the Ruling Council.

Matron Baenre fostered the three Freth children within her house, but they were too young to know the secrets of their former compound. As a ranking noble house, Freth had amassed much treasure, which was said to be hidden in excavated levels beneath their compound. These delvings could still be there, waiting for discovery. Finding the entrance to the dungeons is only the first step. Cunning traps, puzzles, and guardians most likely protect the secrets and wealth of the Freth.

# NARBONDELLYN

## Narbondellyn

### “Broad Streets”

A fashionable neighborhood of elegant manor houses, eclectic artisans, and rising socialites.

**Population:** 4,000 drow, 3,000 non-drow.

**Noble Houses (all eras):** Barrison Del’Armgo, Faen Tlabbar, Fey-Branche

**Noble Houses (until the War of the Spider Queen):** Horlbar, Shobalar, Srune’Lett, Tuin’Tarl.

**Common Families:** Balartyr, Belek’tyr, Hael’Irin, Ilith’vir, Klor’lbar, Mestpar, Oblare, Ouol, Ryrll, Shadalun, Shunn T’ahaladar, Thadalix, Tuek’tarm, and Urundlet.

**Trade:** Luxury boutiques trading in jewelry, perfumes, exotic finery, and similar goods.

**Security:** Narbondellyn’s wide boulevards are patrolled regularly and in large numbers.

Home to many of Menzoberranzan’s wealthiest families, Narbondellyn is a majestic sight to behold.

## MONEYLENDING

Most ambitious drow run short of coin at one time or another. Some are in no position to successfully steal or extort funds, murder and rob, or gain a loan from a patron or house superior. They turn to moneylenders, who also act as money-changers for outsiders.

Menzoberranyr accept all surface coinages, but prefer metal or gems of intrinsic value. Moneylenders also deal in trade bars, rare shells, the jarred and jellied eyeballs used by some mind flayers, all known types of gems, perfumes, and even rare foods and plants. The more exotic the currency or collateral, the higher the rates offered.

A standard loan to a drow citizen is typically in coinage, at an interest rate of 10 percent, compounded every 20 days. Collateral valued at 75 percent of the loan is usually required. Non-drow citizens pay 14 percent interest, while outsiders are charged 16 percent or more. Both of the latter groups must offer collateral equal to 100 percent or more of the value of the loan.

Most moneylenders have spellcasters, hired swords, and spies to back up their demands and defend their wealth. They are wily, ruthless, and often adopt a powerful house as patron (giving its members cut rates and ready credit) to gain its protection when a noble debtor of another house decides, as some of the younger and more reckless inevitably do, that having a bit of sport and wiping out fast-building debts with a quick sword thrust is easier than paying up.

Ascending the terraced slopes beneath Qu’ellarz’orl rise row upon row of masterfully carved manor houses framing wide, arc-shaped boulevards illuminated by the soft, tinted light of permanent *faerie fire* spells. Many of the spired stone edifices are likewise adorned with intricate magical fire, literally setting the district aglow in a scintillating cacophony of color.

This district is also the residence for several lesser but up-and-coming merchant families—the noble houses of the future. These families generally engage in the most luxurious and profitable of trades: gems, perfumes, moneylending, and the like.

## Red Tears

### Cartel of Gem-Cutters & Moneylenders

Red Tears is a secretive consortium of lesser merchants that have banded together against the most conspicuous and haughty merchant houses of Menzoberranzan. This cartel of “dealers in the shadows” was formed in the Year of the Vitriolic Sage (1047 DR) by a sardonic one-eyed drow known as Farseeing Phurn. Phurn is credited by those in the know for fomenting the bitter rivalry between prominent gem-cutting Houses Belek’tyr and Shadalun—a feud that has resulted in countless assassinations and significant loss of profits over the decades. Today Red Tears is an expansive criminal organization with a coterie of smugglers, fences, racketeers, thugs, and cutthroats operating throughout much of the city. Phurn governs his illicit empire from his compound in central Narbondellyn, carved from the ruins of House Tuin’Tarl. The organization takes its name from a rare teardrop-shaped gemstone of unusually-vivid, blood-crimson hue in Phurn’s possession.

## Brothers Jaszarr

### Perfumers



Narbondellyn is home to the wealthiest (and most expensive) perfumers in the city. In the crowded, damp underground, perfuming is an art born of necessity. The best drow scents mingle with less desirable smells to mute everything into a pleasurable background. The brothers Dhellorn and Dirziir Jaszarr are together regarded as the finest purveyors of perfume in the city. Sold only to the finest drow of high society, their scents are woven with magical compulsions that make them more than simple cosmetics. In the right hands, such a perfume is the key to power and influence—two of every drow’s favorite things. Unknown to all but a discreet clientele, the talents of the brothers Jaszarr extend to the crafting of toxic potions and ointments as well. For a hefty sum, these poisons—often seamlessly blended into their exotic perfumes—can cripple or slay a rival with little chance of detection.

## Feathered Masqueax

### Theater and Feshall ★★★★★

Unlike most playhouses in the city, which stage low-brow comedies, the Feathered Masqueax prides itself on hosting only innovative, well-acted dramas. Most astonishing for revelers in attendance is the fact that many of the actors in the troupe are in fact undead, their performances flawless and eerily lifelike. At show's end, privileged clientele are welcomed backstage to enjoy food, libations, and the company of performers they fancy.

The owner and proprietor of the theatre company is an enigmatic male drow named Phaless. Nearly seven feet tall and always shrouded in a dark, blood-splattered robe resembling a funeral shroud, Phaless strikes an imposing figure. A tiny animated skeleton pendant pinned to his robe reveals to those in the know that the drow is a deathsinger, a rare bardic practitioner renowned for songs of dark glory and necromancy.

## Black Sapphire Bath

### Public Bathhouse ★★★★★

One of a dozen public baths scattered about the city, the Black Sapphire Bath is primarily a gathering place for males seeking to rid themselves of a day's sweat and grime, not to mention a place to socialize and relax in leisurely comfort away from the overbearing presence of females. Patrons can be bathed by servants, or left alone as they wish. Many fires keep the octagonal pools warm, its steaming mineral water scented with a choice of fragrances. Although not a feshall, there are no rules against guests enjoying more amorous activities with each other, or with the bathing staff if additional coin is forthcoming.



## QU'ELLARZ'ORL

### Qu'ellarz'orl

#### "The House-Loft"

#### "Palace of Nobles"

The grandest part of the city, Qu'ellarz'orl is the home of the most powerful noble houses, including House Baenre.

**Population:** 5,000 drow, 4,000 non-drow.

**Noble Houses (all eras):** Baenre, Mizzrym, Xorlarrin.  
No lesser houses.

**Noble Houses (specific eras):** Barrison Del'Armgo (Spellplague era only), DeVir (Founding era only), Hun'ett (until end of Sable Years), Agrach Dyrr (until War of the Spider Queen).

**Trade:** None. Qu'ellarz'orl is the private demesne of the great houses. No trade is conducted there.

**Security:** The three houses dwelling there patrol and scry Qu'ellarz'orl constantly. There are no street patrols on the plateau.

Screened from the lower city by its forest of giant mushrooms, Qu'ellarz'orl is a broad plateau on the southern end of the vault that overlooks the crowded city. The plateau rises a second time on its eastern side, and from that lofty perch the compound of House Baenre looms over the city, a constant reminder of the house's pervasiveness. Below and west of Baenre is the Spelltower Xorlarrin, while the House Mizzrym compound has been carved from the vault ceiling above. During the Spellplague era, House Barrison Del'Armgo built a sprawling fortress perched on the edge of the plateau, its tall, crenellated walls overhanging the lower city. The ruins of several other houses litter the area as well.

Qu'ellarz'orl is bare and spacious, since House Baenre ruthlessly keeps the rabble out. Soldiers of the powerful noble houses promenade in the district

### BUILDING A NEW COMPOUND

Qu'ellarz'orl is dotted with the ruins of fallen houses—DeVir, Hun'ett, and Agrach Dyrr are only the three most recent houses destroyed on the plateau. The drow consider it bad luck to claim a fallen house's compound for your own. However, space is tight in the lower cavern of Menzoberranzan, and Qu'ellarz'orl hosts only four houses. Gaining the right to build on the House-Loft would require skilled political maneuvering. At the very least, House Baenre would need to be appeased. Would the new house want to claim an old compound as its own, or start anew?



*Chamber of the Ruling Council: Thrones for the matron mothers, something less worthy for their guests*

from time to time on real or assumed business. More often, Baenre, Xorlarrin, and Mizzrym drill their troops and wizards across the open expanses in a show of force displayed for the rest of the city.

## Chamber of the Ruling Council

In the southwestern corner of Qu'ellarz'orl is the entrance to the Chamber of the Ruling Council. Its arched, ironbound, double entrance doors are closed and guarded by an honor guard from Melee-Magthere at all times. When the council is not in session, the doors remain closed and no one is allowed inside.

The chamber itself is a small side cavern. Unlike most of the city vault, the cavern's natural appearance is unaltered by drow hands. The only additions are a spider-shaped table and an altar to Lolth. Drow lore holds that Menzoberra raised this altar after the defeat of Many Eyes, and it was on this altar after their first prayers that a yochlol told the victorious drow to call their cavern Menzoberranzan.

When in session, the eight ruling matron mothers sit inside in tall, jeweled thrones surrounded by a hundred sweet-smelling candles that light the chamber. A single unadorned chair is provided for guests, and only one

guest is allowed into the cavern at a time. It is rare for a male or a non-drow to be a guest, but not unheard of. Each matron mother is also permitted two bodyguards. By custom, they remain silent, standing against the walls, speaking and moving only when bidden.

## House Mizzrym

The Fifth House is the only great house whose compound is located entirely within the Overways. Visitors to the compound must first walk a spiraling path around a great stalagmite to its peak, then climb a winding, crystal stairway outlined in faerie fire—one of the high and glittering sights in the great cavern of Menzoberranzan. The stairs lead into the point of the hanging stalactite that houses the Mizzrym compound. A pair of adamantine doors block further progress inside. Both the crystal stairway and the doors are guarded by Mizzrym patrols. With a spoken command word, a patrol can cause the crystal stair to vanish.

Beyond the doors, three great caverns form the compound. The largest cavern houses the living quarters, which are spacious and airy for the noble females, and cramped and stuffy for everyone else. An elaborate shrine to Lolth fills the second cavern, while the last is for the mercantile interests of the house.



# WEST WALL

## West Wall

### “The Old Quarter”

This quiet district of “old money” and hidden intrigues exemplifies propriety, modest affluence, and tradition.

**Population:** 4,000 drow, 2,000 non-drow.

**Noble Houses (all eras):** Barrison Del’Armgo (barracks), Duskryn, Druu’giir, Melarn, Symryvvin.

**Noble Houses (until Sable Years):** Do’Urden, Teken’duis.

**Common Families:** Ilueph, Llarabbar, Miliskeera, Neereath, Ol’il’isk, Tirin, Vahadarr, Waeth del’tar, and Yulaun’tlar.

**Trade:** There are few shops in West Wall; the drow who dwell there actively discourage such common establishments, and the traffic they bring, preferring to go into adjacent Duthcloim for such services.

**Security:** Although city troops patrol the district regularly, many of the old families openly parade their own house troops throughout West Wall as a contest of one-upmanship.

This neighborhood of lesser houses and wealthy merchants is a quiet place—and the residents like it that way. Less ostentatious than the assurgent nobility of Narbondellyn, folks of “the Old Quarter” are nevertheless occasioned to indulge in esoteric pursuits: staging gladiatorial contests between noble-born drow, capturing exotic species from across the multiverse, or constructing fantastic vessels that sail into the deepest night of the World Above. Anyone walking the streets would never know of these activities, however, because discretion is the watchword in West Wall.

Amid the twisted streets and quiet mansions of West Wall stand scores of modest stone monuments upon which are carved the images and accounts of the city’s storied past. Although this craft fell out of fashion centuries before the Sable Years, during the Spellplague era a new cadre of artisans is attempting to revive this august tradition. One of the more exemplary examples of this renaissance in stone craft is the construction of the Fane of the Goddess, an epic union of artistry and engineering completed in 1475.

## Lolth’s Web

Following the destruction of Ched Nasad during the War of the Spider Queen, many refugees fled to Menzoberranzan and took up residence in the neighborhood between West Wall and Narbondellyn. Over the following century, they built their homes upward in the fashion of their home city, crafting streets of magically calcified strands of spider silk from the cavern floor to the vaulted roof above, forming a latticework of near-vertical stories stacked high. For those without the ability to levitate or climb the webs, narrow teetering ladders stretch up the full height of the web. Great hollow, cocoon-like dwellings are constructed both above and below the layers of webbing. By decree of the Ruling Council, such webworks can be built only in West Wall, and any attempt to tunnel into the ledges above the city is punishable by death and immediate dissolution of the offender’s house. Drider and chitine slaves labor in Lolth’s Web for House Melarn.



## Elstearn's Escorts

### Hireling Agency

As one of the few businesses that has flourished in West Wall, Elstearn's Escorts provides carte-blanch services of intelligent, well groomed, and attractive drow of either gender to its discerning clientele. Although some clients avail themselves of the agency for simple carnal pleasures, the escort service's pool of diverse hirelings has a wide variety of skillsets useful to Menzoberranyr social climbers. Many are hired as well-spoken and charismatic escorts for social functions; others as guides and interpreters to outlanders visiting the city. Some even seek out Elstearn's Escorts for well-trained bodyguards when business takes them to dangerous parts of the city, or for quick excursions into the surrounding Underdark.

## Fane of the Goddess

### Amphitheatre and Temple of Lolth

The Fane was a "gift" to the city from House Baenre, a grand public gesture to counter what the house perceived as a surge of heretic faiths infiltrating the city in the later Spellplague era. Before the Fane's construction, most drow worshiped Lolth privately in their homes, because the chapel in Arach-Tinilith was restricted to students and high priestesses. For the first time in the city's history, drow and non-drow, male and female alike, can together venerate Lolth publicly. This spectacular open air venue is typically restricted to religious ceremonies, but occasionally large secular activities such as gladiatorial bouts are held within the amphitheater.

## Xeva's Den

### Gaming Pavilion & Tavern

The common room of this drinking establishment offers its discerning patrons a quiet place to enjoy a relaxing game of *sava*, table dice (backgammon), or old men's bones (pick-up sticks). Gamers looking to make wagers can do so in Xeva's private rooms. Elderboy Aumon Baenre is a frequent guest at Xeva's, sometimes gambling away hundreds of platinum in an evening.



# Dark Dominion

Over a hundred tunnels link the great vault of Menzoberranzan with the surrounding Underdark. Even to the haughty drow, the world beyond the City of Spiders is a nightmarish labyrinth of deadly terrain with lurking horrors waiting to feast upon the flesh of the foolish and weak. Even so, the drow still thrive in this unforgiving realm of darkness and death.

The ruling matrons claim all territory within a five-mile radius of the city as property of Menzoberranzan. The drow name their demesne *Bauthwaf*, but to outsiders this grim region is known as the Dark Dominion. The Dominion is regularly patrolled, but only a fool would refer to the area as safe. Fell creatures of the Underdark regularly enter the Dominion despite the patrols, but most predators that invade deep into it are quickly dispatched. The environs are largely unworked, although some caverns bear evidence of battle, magical experimentation, or small-scale mining.

## JADE SPIDERS

The large city gates of Menzoberranzan—as well as most of its temples and noble compounds—are all guarded by towering arachnid constructs known as jade spiders. Appearing as fifteen-foot-tall statues until an intrusion triggers them into action, they take their name from the magically treated jade that tips their sharp mandibles and saw-edged legs. Jade spiders are fearless, unthinking guardians that carry out their assigned orders even in the face of certain destruction.

## THE MANTLE

The many passages and side-caverns of the *Bauthwaf* within immediate reach of Menzoberranzan's main vault have long been part of city life. Known as the Mantle, these winding corridors have served for millennia as a destination for young drow seeking to prove their defiant daring, for trysts between forbidden lovers of rival houses, and as handy meeting places for clandestine plotting. They are well patrolled, but there is no such thing as a safe area of the Underdark. On occasion, Underdark creatures are canny enough to reach the Mantle undetected, but more often than not, creatures found in the Mantle were abandoned there by a citizen of Menzoberranzan.

**The Eastways:** Unlike numerous other gateways guarding the city, the three tunnels that lead from the vault east of Lake Donigarten are not defended by jade spiders, but by scorpion-shaped, poison-shooting

statues of similar construction. The smallest of the Eastway's three tunnels leads to Driders' Chasm; the other two run north and east to the Fardrimm and the dwarf-claimed tunnels of fallen Delzoun.

**The Masterways:** These tunnels north of the Clawrift do not connect to the wider Underdark, and due to this isolation represent one of the "safest" regions of the Dark Dominion. Many nobles use the Masterways for "sport hunting"—wherein a beast or slave is released into the tunnels and then hunted by the noble alone. Slaves unfamiliar with the local geography are often given the false hope of freedom until they realize to their horror that the tunnels of the Masterways lead nowhere.

**The Wanderways:** Many centuries past, as an invading force moved toward the City of Spiders, the Archmage of Menzoberranzan wove a mighty ritual of misdirection throughout these northeastern tunnels of the Mangle. Disoriented by the arcane maze, the invaders were unable to reach the city as a group and were ultimately routed. The Wanderways are protected to this day by the Archmage's enduring magic.

**The Westways:** These tunnels run west some fifty miles to Blingdenstone, before doubling back east toward Mithral Hall and the surface realm of Luruar.

This route also branches toward the trading enclave of Mantol-Derith and Phanlinksal beyond. The Westways are the most heavily patrolled passages of the Dark Dominion. In all the many millennia of Menzoberranzan's existence, the Westways city gates have never been breached by an enemy force.

## Ablonsheir's Cave

This large, unremarkable cavern of the Eastways is named for Ablonsheir Ulu'ar, one-time Archmage of Menzoberranzan. The cave is so named because Ablonsheir dwells there still, petrified and preserved within bloodstone. Local lore suggests that the former Archmage lost his life in either a spell duel or a bizarre medusa attack. In any event, the statue itself is seemingly impervious to harm and all attempts to restore stone to flesh have failed.

## Cavern of the Masters

Off limits to all but the masters of Sorcere, this cavern in the Masterways has long been used as a testing range for arcane experimentation. As part of Lolth's efforts to create the Demon Weave (page 13), wizards of House Xorlarrin and House Barrison Del'Armgo have cordoned off this cavern for rituals that funnel arcane power to Lolth.

## Cavern of the Severed Tentacles

In the Year of the Pernicious Hauberk (568 DR), illithids from Phanlinksal (page 112) sought to invade Menzoberranzan through the Eastways. This cavern is so named for the decisive victory the Menzoberranyr achieved against the mind flayers there. Eighty of the aberrant brain eaters were captured in the final hours of the assault and brought to this cave for execution. In a cruel twist of fate, the captives were forced to watch as their kin were fed one by one to a ravenous vampiric illithid kept by House Oblodra as a pet. When the vampire was finished feasting, the bodies were left to rot in the cavern as a warning against further provocation.

## Driders' Chasm

The smallest of the three passages that comprise the Eastways leads to a chasm inhabited by driders. These failed drow slay and devour all who stray into their clutches, especially prizing the flesh of unaltered drow. From time to time, the driders raid merchant caravans or even a civilized area. Drow defenders and attacking driders suffer heavy casualties in such raids, but surviving driders usually come away with armor, weapons, and supplies.

## Glowstones

As its name suggests, this well-lit meeting place in the Masterways is aglow with naturally luminescent rocks. Most creatures of the Underdark, with their darkvision, avoid areas of glowstone, except when using it to ambush unwary explorers. Menzoberranyr traders use this area to meet contacts from the surface world that are too intimidated to set foot in the city proper.

## Heldaeyn's Pool

This small, unremarkable pool in a modest southeastern cavern of the Mantle is primarily used by drow patrols and slave bands when provisioning for an extended trip into the Dark Dominion. Shortly after the Time of Troubles, a priestess of House Vandree attempted to eliminate a House Kenafin rival by infecting the well with a colony of throat leeches. Her plot failed but went undetected. To this day, the throat leeches still claim an occasional victim.

## The Lustrum

Shortly before the Time of Troubles, House Xorlarrin discovered a rich vein of ore and gemstones in this remote unexplored tunnel of the Westways. Calling this place "the Lustrum" for the great quantities of silver and the astonishing variety of gems within the lode, House Xorlarrin quickly secured the services of Bregan D'aerthe to protect the secret location of the mines, both from the dwarves of nearby Mithral Hall and the unceasing efforts of rival drow houses. The Lustrum remained under House Xorlarrin control until the Year of Blue Fire (1385 DR), when three gemstone golems pulled from the silver vein decades before unexpectedly awakened and slaughtered the miners. Only the highest-ranking nobles of House Xorlarrin know that the constructs are of Mulhorandi design, but none know how they got there or how to defeat them; by all accounts the golems are completely impervious to mundane and magical attack.

## Pit-Warrens

Few dungeons and jails of the surface world can compare to the depravity of the city's pit-warrens in the Eastways. Violators (both drow and non-drow alike) are imprisoned in cramped cells with beasts from the Underdark. Whichever party (beast or drow) survives the night gets to enjoy the cell alone for the remainder of the week, when the violator is either paroled or joined by a new "companion." Carrion crawlers and cave fishers rounded up from Donigarten's moss bed are commonly used in such tortures.

## Proving Grounds

Located a short distance down the tunnel at the back of Tier Breche, the proving grounds is a large cavern that serves as an arena of sorts for gladiatorial games and other events such as the Grand Melee. Thrusting stalagmite mounds and pointed stalactites leering down from the ceiling break the chamber into a twisting maze filled with ambush holes and blind corners.

**The Grand Melee** Each year, in order to establish rank within their class, the students of Melee-Magthere compete in a contest of wit and martial prowess known as the Grand Melee. During this event, twenty-five students are set loose within the Proving Grounds, wielding simple wooden poles as weapons. The rules are simple; the last combatant standing wins. Temporary catwalks constructed around the chamber for the event give the judging masters a good view of the action below. Although his name is seldom uttered openly in the city, Drizzt Do'Urden's nine consecutive championships in the Grand Melee is still a revered record that has yet to be matched.

# The Northdark

Faerûn's Underdark is not a single, continuous cavern system. Rather, it is a collection of subterranean locales among which travel is reasonably easy. Beneath the lands north and east of Waterdeep and Neverwinter lies a vast and notorious domain called the Northdark. Many of the Underdark's most infamous realms lie in this area, including Menzoberranzan, the City of Spiders. Home to the wreckage of numerous ancient realms, the Northdark comprises numerous distinct subregions, of which the following are discussed here:

- ◆ **Shadowed Ways:** A high-traffic region of the northern Underdark centered on the Darklake. It includes the major settlements of Menzoberranzan, Gracklstugh, and Blingdenstone.
- ◆ **Ammarindar:** The ancient dwarven tunnels of the lost kingdom of Ammarindar, now under the dominion of the infernal Scourged Legions.
- ◆ **Araumycos:** The enormous mass of sentient fungus that holds sway over a large portion of the Upperdark is reportedly seeking out ways to expand its domain.
- ◆ **The Fardrimm:** This expanse of tunnels and chambers was once the proud domain of Delzoun, the fabled Northkingdom of the shield dwarves. Nowadays the Fardrimm's passages are used, and abused, by many Underdark denizens.
- ◆ **The Wormwrithings:** Burrowing creatures find this region of porous, regenerating rock to be irresistible—which is all the more reason why all other creatures would be wise to stay away.



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# Shadowed Ways

Drow waymarkers set aglow with permanent *faerie fire* spells alert passersby of the boundary between the relative safety of the Mantle and the greater region of the Underdark known to Menzoberranyr as *Veldrin'har*—the Shadowed Ways. Roughly centered on the Darklake (see below), this region is enclosed by the neighboring regions of Araumycos, the Fardrimm, the Wormwritings, and the Labyrinth (a tangle of interconnected caverns, tunnels, and rifts to the south and west of Menzoberranzan).

This region is by far the most active part of the Northdark, well-trod by patrols and caravans of numerous Underdark races—chitines, drow, duergar, goblins, orcs, quaggoths, svirfneblin, and troglodytes. The drow of Menzoberranzan view the Shadowed

Ways as a proving ground for young warriors and as a source of slaves for their markets.

## BLINGDENSTONE

One of the few bastions of kindness in an otherwise merciless region of the Underdark, Blingdenstone is home to a benevolent population of svirfneblin, or deep gnomes. Lured by rich veins of metal and rubies, the deep gnomes established their city-state in dangerous proximity to Menzoberranzan and relied on obscurity and isolation to protect them from the ruthless drow.

This policy served the svirfneblin well for over two thousand years. However, during the Sable Years, their self-imposed isolation began to crumble when Drizzt Do'Urden arrived in the city. First Blingdenstone contributed troops to the defense of Mithral Hall against the armies of Menzoberranzan in

## THE UNDERDARK ENVIRONMENT

Although in many ways the Underdark is similar to a vast wilderness in the surface world, it is more like a desert than a verdant plain. Travelers in the Underdark must contend with a hostile environment characterized by these features.

**The Suffocating Darkness:** Although it's of little detriment to the eyes of the drow, much of the Underdark is shrouded in complete darkness. Outsiders and slaves traveling with a drow party will need to bring a light source to compensate for the poor natural illumination. Of course, not all in the Underdark live in utter blackness. The rocks containing *faerzress* emit eerie blue and green light. Luminescent lichen, fungi, and mosses light many subterranean grottoes, although most varieties quickly fade if disturbed or removed. Another oft-forgotten hazard is the scarcity of breathable air. Most populated Underdark caverns are sufficiently ventilated, but not always by a surface connection.

**The Deepearth:** On the surface world, thick vegetation, raging waterways, and mountainous terrain slow travel. The Underdark has these obstacles and many more unique to the terrain. Passages frequently twist and turn, and rarely in a predictable direction. Tunnels vary in height and width, sometimes shrinking down to a crack or widening into great grottoes. Rivers and lakes can fill entire caverns. Vast patches of deadly plants and fungi block miles of passages. Because of these impediments, a direct route to a destination does not exist. Underdark explorers need great skill in rock climbing, or even better, the ability to levitate or fly. Pack animals must navigate such terrain as well. Most Underdark races employ subterranean lizards in lieu of mules, oxen, and wagons.

**Sustenance:** The Underdark is like a desert scattered with oases. All the basic necessities of life—food, water,

air, and shelter—are in short supply, and the competition to survive is brutal. Domesticated deep rothé are common in the Underdark, and almost every part of these cattle is useful. Cave boars are also plentiful and hunted for food and clothing. Fungi, lichens, molds, and mosses replace most agricultural produce, and some are used to brew alcohol. Fresh water is scarce in some regions of the surface world, but it is more precious than gold in the Underdark. Like food, magically created water is an invaluable resource to explorers. Underdark denizens get no rain, so they rely on rivers, lakes, and seepage through the rocks for water.

**Faerzress:** This magical radiation is scattered at random throughout the Underdark. *Faerzress* interferes with spells and the effects of magic items in unpredictable ways, but has the most detrimental effect on divinations, teleportation, and most other forms of magical travel. *Faerzress* can take a variety of forms, from clusters of glowing rocks to a barely discernible change in temperature. Particularly talented wizards are capable of rituals that can alter the form of a pocket of *faerzress* in specific ways, but those rituals often attract the attention of native beasts of the Underdark.

**Subterranean Watercourses:** Underground rivers and lakes often serve as the most efficient means of travel in the Underdark. Many deep delvers ferry small craft though the tunnels below, sometimes building boats from giant mushrooms; magical vessels such as *folding boats* are highly prized. The lack of wind makes sailing craft useless, so most vessels are rowed or drawn by aquatic draft animals. As well, cavern ceilings often dip below the water's surface, forcing explorers to come up with creative solutions for safely navigating the submerged passages.

Yvonne Baenre's ill-fated attack on the city. Then, in 1371 DR, the drow destroyed Blingdenstone in retribution for this aid. For the next several decades, Blingdenstone lay in ruins, haunted by a variety of creatures at different times—sentient clouds of elemental dust, deep gnome wererats, and any number of wandering beasts and humanoid scavengers.

Toward the end of the Spellplague era, starting around 1440 DR, the original *svirfneblin* inhabitants of Blingdenstone began moving back into the ruins and rebuilding, under the leadership of Most Honored Burrow Warden Kargien Dissengulp. Through an alliance with the dwarf king Connerad Brawnnavil Battlehammer, the tunnels between Blingdenstone and Mithral Hall (page 104) are now routinely patrolled by combined forces from both realms.

## THE DARKLAKE

This vast series of water-filled caverns lies at the heart of the Shadowed Ways. Long ago, cascades and swift torrents joined several large caves together as water drained down from the Evermoors to the unknown depths below. The complex was extended when dwarves built a series of dams and locks there to clear a path of dry tunnels for travel. The ceilings above the Darklake caverns are very low, rarely higher than ten feet above the water, and sometimes as low as two or three feet. Many Underdark races, particularly *duergar* from Gracklstugh, use the linked caverns as a relatively secure shortcut through the dangerous region.

The upper reaches of the Darklake are home to many strange and hostile aquatic monsters, including schools of *ixzan* (evil creatures resembling manta rays) and isolated bands of freshwater *scrag*s (aquatic trolls). More rare and dangerous denizens are believed to lurk in the dark waters—more than one boat laden with trade goods has mysteriously sunk into the depths of the Darklake.

## DEAD DRAGON GORGE

This large chasm is six to seven days' walk south of Menzoberranzan. Named for a sapphire dragon that laired there long ago, the gorge is odd because it contains no *faerzress*. Connected to a labyrinth of wide caverns, Dead Dragon Gorge is home to cave fishers, giant bats, and many other mostly harmless denizens.

The lack of *faerzress* in the chasm has allowed the construction of many permanent and temporary portals. For a few decades before the Spellplague, a two-way portal connected the gorge with the Old Monster Shop in Waterdeep. The exact location of its subterranean terminus was known only to the proprietor, Feldyn Goadolfyn. The portal was destroyed during the tumult of the Spellplague.

Within a day of Dead Dragon Gorge is Drygulley Tunnel, a steep path that ends several feet from a dry riverbed on the northwestern edge of the High Forest. The tunnel formerly surfaced through a small opening, about the size of a badger hole, but this was collapsed by Liriel Baenre when she escaped to the surface during the Sable Years. The nearest aboveground settlement to the chasm is the village of Trollbridge, located near the northern bank of the River Dessarin.

## ENTEMOCH'S BOON

This large, boulder-strewn cavern is about one day's walk northwest of Blingdenstone. Its entrance is a small tunnel leading onto a ledge high above the cavern floor. Three stone pillars stand in its center. In their midst is a circle inscribed with magical runes that radiate the power of elemental earth. Here, *svirfneblin* priests were able to summon Entemoch (son of the primordial Grumbar and twin brother of Ogrémoch, the lord of evil earth creatures), just days after the end of the Time of Troubles. Though brief, the appearance of this prince of elemental earth was interpreted by Blingdenstone's inhabitants as a sign that their ancient god, Segojan Earthcaller, still favored them.

## GRACKLSTUGH

On the southwest shore of the Darklake, almost directly below the Uthgardt ancestor mound known as Flintrock, stands the *duergar* city of Gracklstugh. The capital city of the *duergar* Deepkingdom occupies a great subterranean grotto dominated by towering rock formations. Many stalagmites have been transformed into smelters that belch smoke into shafts carved into the ceiling. Around each is a cluster of residences and smithies carved into lesser stalagmites and the cavern floor.

A narrow rift, known as Laduguer's Furrow, runs through the heart of Gracklstugh. More than a dozen stone bridges span its length, which was formed by a subterranean earthquake. Volcanic gases regularly escape from vents in the chasm walls and are collected by *duergar* rift sappers. The chasm extends more than a quarter of a mile past the eastern and western walls of the central cavern, and these East Cleft and West Cleft districts are home to many citizens. Each end of the rift has a steeply sloping floor, carved with a set of stairs and a wide ramp for both pedestrians and wagons. These districts are off limits to nonnatives, and *duergar* patrols watch the gates into both. The West Cleft district houses the city's *derro* minority, whose leaders have secretly manipulated the rulers of Gracklstugh for centuries.

From 972 DR to the Time of Troubles, Gracklstugh was ruled by Deep King Tarngardt Steelshadow VII.



## DROW PATROLS

Long experience has taught the Menzoberranyr that establishing permanent, immobile guard posts in the Underdark merely provides ready food to passing monsters. Instead, the drow use nimble, mobile patrols, typically warriors-in-training from the Academy (led by an instructor), augmented by adept priestesses and mages.

The primary responsibility of these patrols is to keep the trade passages to and from the city open. Continual internal strife within Menzoberranzan occupies the Ruling Council's attention, and the burgeoning merchant clans would rather trade with their neighbors than antagonize them. Occasionally, patrols are organized into hunting bands to raid small, isolated settlements along the periphery of the Dark Dominion, but all-out war is rare. In strategically important areas, slave laborers excavate defensible firing-hollows. A patrol sends a squad of four to six drow to move in and secure a hollow, while the others provide covering fire. Once the area is secured, the squad covers the rest of the patrol as it arrives.

who once waged a war of extermination against the derro and later freed all derro slaves in the city and granted them equal rights with the duergar. Because of the king's advancing age, the derro savants of the city had him and several of the local lairds beneath him firmly under their control. With the accession of his grandson, Horgar Steelshadow IV, however, the derro's hold was broken and the Deep King reasserted the power of the monarchy. Horgar led his subjects to attack Menzoberranzan during the War of the Spider Queen. Late in the Spellplague era, his young son, Horgar V, succeeded him.

## MANTOL-DERITH

A crossroads of commerce, news, and migration among denizens of the Northdark, Mantol-Derith is one of the few places where the drow of Menzoberranzan, the duergar of Gracklstugh, and the svirfneblin of Blingdenstone can meet in uneasy truce, trading for otherwise unobtainable goods. By tradition, all transactions take place at the stall of the seller. Mantol-Derith is not a bustling emporium like the Bazaar in Menzoberranzan. Deals take hours or even days to close, and negotiations are conducted privately.

Commerce in Mantol-Derith is governed by covenants that prohibit overt thievery, disguise of goods for barter, and the use of magic to aid negotiations. Breaking of any covenant is punished by wrapping the offenders in chains and throwing them into the Darklake.

## MITHRAL HALL

The most famous dwarfhold in the North earns its reputation from the deeds of its renowned inhabitants, the dwarves of Clan Battlehammer. Mithral Hall is named for the hard silvery metal the dwarves mined there for thousands of years, until the shadow dragon called Shimmergloom emerged from the depths and laid waste to the city, about a century before the Sable Years. Around the Time of Troubles, Bruenor Battlehammer, a descendant of the first king of the Hall, reclaimed Mithral Hall after a long and arduous quest.

Mithral Hall lies near the surface in the region known as the Frost Hills, beneath Fourthpeak Mountain. The mid-level halls include the mithral mines for which the hold is so famed, and beneath them is the Undercity, the main living chambers of the Battlehammer clan. The hall is a self-contained city, with shrines to dwarven gods as well as homes, forges, workshops, and taverns; everything dwarves need for long and happy lives.

Clan Battlehammer sealed the lower tunnels leading to the cavern that was once the lair of Shimmergloom, and the dwarves have constructed a series of defensible bulwarks in the tunnels leading lower into the Underdark. Folk in Mithral Hall are cautious when dealing with strangers, and more likely to stick a drow with a crossbow bolt than to parlay with one.

In the Spellplague era, Mithral Hall was ruled first by Bruenor Battlehammer (until 1409 DR), then by Banak Brawnnavil (until 1445), and finally by Banak's son Connerad Brawnnavil, twelfth king of Mithral Hall.

## ZZ'PZORA'S LAIR

A few miles south of Menzoberranzan, several small icy streams converge from the surface to form a dangerous and swift-moving river full of whitewater rapids known as the Cascades. Drow sometimes run the rapids in small craft resembling kayaks. Midway down the course, a little-known side channel leads down a stone chute to a large icy pond in a deeply buried grotto honeycombed with small caves and alcoves. This hidden cavern was once the home of a two-headed deep dragon named Zz'Pzora (or "Zip," as she was known to her friend Liriel Baenre). The mutant dragon was slain in the Year of Maidens (1361 DR) after journeying to Undermountain through a temporary portal. Zz'Pzora's lair and her hoard remain undiscovered.

# Ammarindar

When compared to Delzoun or Shanatar, Ammarindar was a relatively minor dwarven realm, but what it lacked in influence and size, it more than made up in wealth. Arising around -4100 DR, when dwarf prospectors unearthed rich veins of adamantine ore beneath the Graypeaks, Ammarindar coexisted alongside the ancient empire of Netheril. The kingdom grew steadily in prosperity, sheltered from any foes.

At Ammarindar's height, its borders on the surface included much of the upper Delimbiyr Vale, taking in the Graypeaks from Naurogloth (Bleached Bones Pass) to Horindon Lhar (High Gap), and from the Fallen Lands to the edge of the High Forest. The underways of Ammarindar ran the length of the upper Delimbiyr valley, permitting travelers to walk from one end of the kingdom to the other without ever returning to the surface. Isolated clanholds arose throughout the Ammarindan Underdark close to the richest veins of ore and gemstones.

Ammarindar stood strong through the fall of many neighboring realms, including Netheril and Sharven. The rise of demons in Hellgate Keep, however, spelled the doom of Ammarindar and left the entire region scarred for centuries. In 882 DR, demons from Hellgate Keep allied with orc hordes to overrun Ammarindar and bring the kingdom to ruin. Swift intervention from the Harpers and some of Faerûn's mightiest wizards kept the forces of Hellgate Keep in check, establishing a mighty ward around the castle that kept its greatest dangers locked inside. Over the next four hundred years, however, demons from the keep tunneled throughout the North in an effort to bypass the wards. In 1221 DR, their tunnels connected to the deep tunnels of Ammarindar, allowing the demons to establish a network of outposts throughout the Ammarindan Underdark, guarded by minor demons, half-fiends, tieflings, and ghouls. The expanding demonic forces came into frequent conflict with the drow of Ched Nasad and the beholders of the Graypeaks Hive.

After the destruction of Hellgate Keep in 1369, Ammarindar became the exclusive domain of the warlord Kaanyr Vhok, founder of the Scourged Legion.

## LOST TREASURE OF AMMARINDAR

Because the end came with little warning, the dwarves fleeing the murderous hordes from Hellgate Keep were forced to leave behind most of their belongings, including their precious gold and gems. Much of their wealth was subsequently plundered by demons, drow, and beholders. Nevertheless, hidden



*A drow sentry prepares to give an intruder the sort of welcome that all non-drow deserve*

caches of treasure and dwarven heirlooms still lie scattered throughout the tunnels and halls of the fallen kingdom. The dwarves of Ammarindar were renowned for their legendary weapons and suits of armor crafted of adamantine. Most of this treasure and unworked adamantine is still unaccounted for, drawing explorers who seek out undiscovered caches.

## CHED NASAD

The City of Shimmering Webs was founded by the drow of House Nasadra, who left Menzoberranzan not long after its founding. Upon the departure of House Nasadra, Lolth decreed that Menzoberranzan and Ched Nasad must live in peace with each other. The city rests in a great V-shaped cavern filled with layer upon layer of iridescent calcified filaments, which support the city's cocoon-like buildings. At its peak, it was home to about thirty thousand drow, and twelve noble houses sat on its Ruling Council—although House Nasadra exercised even more authority than House Baenre in Menzoberranzan.

During the War of the Spider Queen, Ched Nasad was razed by an army of duergar using alchemical stonefire bombs that destroyed the calcified webbing forming the structure of the city. Only the members of a handful of minor noble houses survived because their homes were located on the cavern walls and in side caverns, where they escaped the crush of the falling debris.

During the Spellplague era, many of Ched Nasad's structures remained in ruin, until a new ruling council led by House Teh'Kinrellz reestablished some semblance of civilization in the lower city. The council is abhorrent to the ruling priestesses of Menzoberranzan, however, because the males of House Teh'Kinrellz hold positions equal to or even higher than those of the females. In truth, these patriarchs are merely puppets under the absolute control of the Jaezred Chaulssin.

Ched Nasad has tentatively reestablished trade with Menzoberranzan despite the drow's ideological differences. However, trade between the cities is difficult because the tunnels surrounding Ched Nasad are contested by the beholders of Graypeaks Hive and the tanarukks of Ammarindar.

## RUINS OF HELLGATE KEEP

Once an elven refuge named Ascalhorn, this great citadel was later rechristened Hellgate Keep following an outbreak of infernal and demonic invaders. In the Year of the Gauntlet (1369 DR), Harper agents used an artifact—the *Gatekeeper Crystal*—to destroy the keep and the majority of its vile inhabitants. The surviving demons and demon-blooded orcs rallied under the banner of the half-demon Kaanyr Vhok, forming the Scourged Legion. Later, adventurers wielding *Mythanthar's Orb* sealed off the tunnels that connected Hellgate Keep to the surface world. Since that time, the deep caverns beneath the keep have served as a defensible outpost for the Scourged Legion.

Centuries ago, the demons under Hellgate Keep dug an extensive network of tunnels under the lands surrounding the High Forest. Many of these passages connected with Ammarindar and the Fardrimm, with a few reaching as far as the Nether Mountains and Northpeak. These tunnels are heavily patrolled by the Scourged Legion, with standing orders to dispatch any intruders encountered within.

## SPLENDARRMORN

Deep beneath the summit of the Shining Mountain in the Graypeaks rests the site of Ammarindar's royal capital, Splendarrmorn. Through centuries of digging and shaping stone, the dwarves hollowed out much of the mountain, creating a tremendous central vault surrounded by several immense caverns. The vast halls of Splendarrmorn are linked by a lattice of sweeping tunnels, and gently arching stone paths bridge the different levels of the city's open spaces, creating a magnificent stone lattice of roadways.

Splendarrmorn is currently occupied by the Scourged Legion; High Warchief Ghiirvox governs from the resplendent Adamantine Palace at the city's heart. Through some fell sorcery invoked by tanarukk bloodreavers, Splendarrmorn's halls are also inhabited by the ghostly vestiges of the city's ancient dwarf citizens, compelled to defend the city against outside threats.

**Adamantine Palace:** This immense castle, constructed entirely of the precious black metal for which it is named, once housed the ruling dynasty of Ammarindar. But the once gilded and gemstone-encrusted halls of the royal palace have largely been stripped of their treasures since those glory days.

# Araumycos

The largest single life form on all of Toril, Araumycos—Dwarven for “Great Fungus”—might also be the oldest. This sentient fungal colony encompasses hundreds of square miles of the Upperdark (the topmost region of the Underdark) under the High Forest. It is a haven for fungus creatures, especially myconids, who hide within its gray-white mass. Araumycos is a difficult environment to move through and constantly regenerates areas that are cleared. When its sentience is aroused, it becomes actively hostile, lashing out with poisonous fumes, independently mobile pseudopods, and violent psionic attacks.

Over the course of the Spellplague era, the sentient fungus has summoned thousands of myconids to its domain. Toward the end of that era, Araumycos started sending tendrils and spores throughout the Northdark, forcing many communities, including Menzoberranzan, to guard their approaches against fungal incursion. Travel within Araumycos has always been difficult, but since the Spellplague, many explorers in the region have reported an alien influence invading their dreams. These haunting nightmares speak of comfort in the mass consciousness and the hopeless chaos of individuality. The drow call these visions the dream trap or dream madness. Only illithids seem immune to its influence. Countless drow, deep gnomes, tanarukks, and others have succumbed to its siren call and wandered off into the Underdark, never to be seen or heard from again.

## The Fardrimm

The Fardrimm is the name generally used for the sprawling maze of tunnels north and east of Menzoberranzan, beneath the lands now known as Old Delzoun. At the height of the Northkingdom’s strength, the Fardrimm was a subterranean artery that linked all the great dwarfholds throughout the realm, roughly bounded by the Ice Mountains, Anuroch, the Nether Mountains, Silvermoon Pass, and the Moonwood. But the tunnels were difficult to keep clear, and Underdark invaders had seized control of much of the Fardrimm long before the fall of Delzoun around -100 DR.

The Fardrimm remains an impressive system of broad tunnels, although its rich mineral lodes are largely worked out and its byways are controlled by creatures of the Underdark. The drow of Ched Nasad and scouting parties of tanarukks from the Scourged Legion have taken advantage of the dwarves’ long absence by constructing their own tunnels to link up with the Fardrimm. Nevertheless, the dwarves’ influence remains strong in the passages near their

## REALMS OF THE FOUNDING ERA

Depending on precisely when you decide to set a campaign during the Founding era, the Northdark might be a very different place from what’s described in this chapter. The regions of Ammarindar and Fardrimm might not be deserted remnants of ancient dwarven kingdoms, but instead thriving dwarf settlements. The phaerimm might haunt the Buried Realms to the east, raiding into the Fardrimm, or the demons of Hellgate Keep might still be plundering the region. Use the historical information presented throughout the book as a starting point, but details about many of these realms are sketchy at best. That’s actually a key benefit of running a campaign in this era, since it gives you the most room to invent details without worrying that you’re conflicting with what has already been established.

An example of these ancient realms is the dwarven kingdom of Delzoun. Many ages ago, it maintained prosperous trade relations with the mighty nations of Eaerlann, Netheril, and Illefarn. At its height, the great kingdom of the shield dwarves extended southward from the Ice Mountains to encompass both the Rauvin and Nether mountains. Much like their kinfolk in Ammarindar to the south, the dwarves of Delzoun were highly regarded by their allies and trading partners for their skill with metalworking and stonemasonry.

Starting around -200 DR, successive incursions by foes from the Underdark and frequent orc raids forced the Northkingdom into a steady retreat. On the terrible day in the Year of the Black Unicorn (-100 DR) when Delzoun finally fell, only Citadels Adbar, Felbarr, Sundbarr (later Sundabar), and a few other surface dwarfholds survived. In the subterranean portion of their realm, the major halls and entrances of the Fardrimm had been equipped with strong defenses, including reinforced walls, iron-bound gates, and spiked pit traps. The shattered gates, breached walls, and smashed defenses that now litter Delzoun’s broken lands offer mute testament to the centuries of relentless attacks that finally brought the great dwarven empire low.

mighty ancient citadels. Known surface connections include links to Ascore, Citadel Adbar, Deadsnows, Citadel Felbarr, Sundabar, and locations throughout the Rauvin Mountains.



*Every twist and turn of the Fardrimm brings with it new vistas and new perils*

## EVERFIRE

Deep beneath the city of Sundabar on the southern edge of the Fardrimm is a volcanic rift known as the Everfire, where dwarves forged the finest blades known in Faerûn. These weapons readily took enchantment and often outlasted the warriors who wielded them. However, the great forges surrounding the rift were destroyed shortly before the Sable Years. Since that time, the Everfire has been guarded by a dedicated band of dwarves, known as the Vigilant, who are fed, armed, and healed by the people of Sundabar. Their vigil has been interrupted only briefly, during the height of the Spellplague, when monsters coming from the ruins of Ascore to the east overran the Everfire.

## MHAURLOK EXPANSE

Not far beneath the ruins of Ascore lies a tumultuous region of the Northdark few dare traverse. Formed where powerful earth nodes and ancient ley lines intersect, this vast Underdark expanse rests at a juncture where the veil between the mortal world and the Elemental Chaos is at its weakest. The primal forces manifesting in these tunnels are raw, and rifts into the Chaos are common. Unsubstantiated claims suggest the Expanse is the byproduct of a misguided attempt by the Delzoun dwarves to halt the

encroachment of the phaerimm, an ancient race of dreadful power.

The environment in this region is extreme, transitioning rapidly from deep freeze to blistering heat over less than an hour. Chasms and crevasses are common, forming as the earth rapidly cools and heats. Some of them start as glacial gorges, then drop hundreds of feet into pools of superheated magma.

## THE LOWROAD

The Lowroad is a vast highway that runs northwest through the Buried Realms (the former domain of the phaerimm) to Ascore, then turns west through the heart of the Fardrimm to Citadel Felbarr. Its course loosely corresponds with the Fork Road and the River Redrun. Largely hewn from solid bedrock using magical force, the Lowroad is an enduring creation of Netheril's arcanists. Before the phaerimm emerged from the deepest reaches of the Underdark into the Buried Realms below Netheril (around -460 DR), the Lowroad was patrolled by dwarves of the Northkingdom. Through all the ages since, deadly monsters have stalked its pathways. The western reaches of the highway, stretching from Ascore to Felbarr, are still used by dwarven caravans seeking safer passage than the orc-infested surface routes, but the underground danger is still considerable. The eastern reaches have largely been abandoned. Travelers rarely follow this ancient road even as far east as Ascore.

# CHAULSSIN

Nearly ten miles beneath the northern tip of the Rauvin Mountains, the remains of the ancient drow city of Chaulssin endure among the lingering shadows. The remote location and little known history of the settlement make it largely unknown to most Underdark dwellers, let alone inhabitants of the Realms Above, but a secret society of master assassins—the Jaezred Chaulssin (page 68)—uses the place as its hidden stronghold for launching strikes on followers of the Spider Queen.

The so-called City of Wyrms Shadows acquired its name when an extended family of shadow dragons conquered and enslaved its inhabitants. Centuries after its fall, Chaulssin retains only a faint shadow of its former glory. Large sections of the city stand empty, patrolled intermittently by tribes of quaggoths or claimed by small bands of shadar-kai.

## History

In the Year of Shambling Shadows (–221 DR), the shadow dragons of Clan Jaezred conquered the drow city of Chaulssin and enslaved the populace. In the centuries that followed, the dragons slowly eradicated the drow population, twisting them into creatures of shadow and supplanting them with their own wyrmspawned offspring, drawing the city further into the Shadowfell with each transformation.

In the Year of the Darkspawn (634 DR), the shadow dragons of Clan Jaezred were overthrown by their own half-drow progeny, who had mastered formidable planar magic in secret while purporting to serve their masters. Haerinvureem, a shadow wyrm better known as “Shimmergloom,” escaped the carnage, but the rest of his clan were slain and reanimated as spectral creatures.

Over the century that followed, the newly emancipated scions of Clan Jaezred began to rebuild their city using wealth plundered from their forefathers’ hoards. In the Year of Visions (734 DR), the drow god Vhaeraun appeared to Chaulssin’s leaders in a shared dream and revealed to them that the Spider Queen had decided to punish them for their worship of Vhaeraun instead of Lolth: The Ruling Council of Menzoberranzan had dispatched an army to conquer the City of Wyrms Shadows. After hurried debate, Chaulssin’s patriarchs chose to withdraw to the Shadowfell, with Vhaeraun’s help, rather than make a suicidal stand. Menzoberranzan’s army arrived a few days later to find an abandoned city straddling the tenuous border between Faerûn and the Shadowfell.

In the centuries that followed, Vhaeraun’s clergy gradually took control of the city. In 792 DR, the church founded House Jaelzred, an elite society of assassins, to deal with the hazards of the Shadowfell

## ADVENTURES IN CHAULSSIN

What might bring a drow to the City of Wyrms Shadows, the headquarters of the treacherous Jaezred Chaulssin? Consider any of these adventure seeds, and adapt them as you see fit.

- ◆ The animosity between Nimor Imphraezel and his successor as Anointed Blade, Antrysn Barriath, is about to boil over into outright warfare. A character affiliated with the Jaezred Chaulssin is caught in the midst of the conflict and must decide who to support, or an unaffiliated drow is sent to fan the conflict into a war that will destroy the Jaezred Chaulssin forever.
- ◆ A small band of shadar-kai appears from nowhere in the midst of Menzoberranzan and starts wreaking havoc. The characters manage to pursue them into the Shadowfell, and suddenly find themselves in Chaulssin. They must discover how the shadar-kai managed to shadow walk into the heart of their city and find some way to close the passage so such attacks don’t happen again.
- ◆ The Jaezred Chaulssin have a tentative alliance with the shades of Netheril in the Spellplague era. If the drow of Menzoberranzan can disrupt that alliance, or even turn the two factions against each other, the strength of the Jaezred Chaulssin will be diminished.

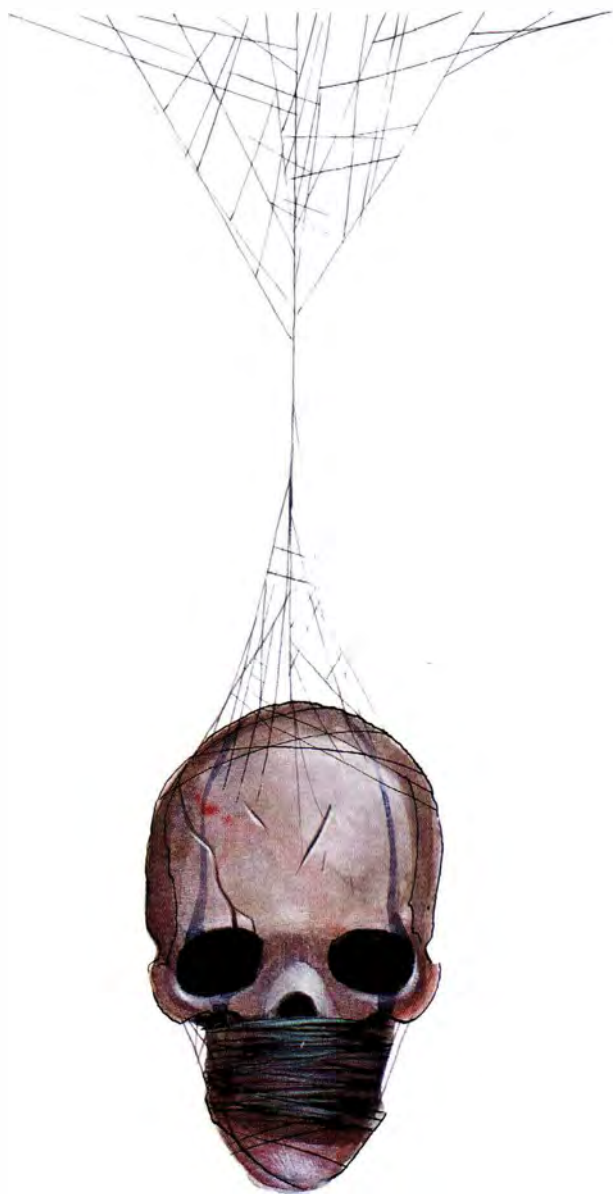
Characters should feel ill at ease from the moment they’re in sight of the dreaded City of Wyrms Shadows. Gloom cloaks the entire city, and parts of the city can appear to vanish or appear suddenly amid the shadows. Deadly creatures from the Shadowfell haunt the city’s streets, and interlopers sometimes disappear inexplicably without a sound or a trace. Chaulssin provides an opportunity to introduce an element of horror in a game otherwise focused on intrigue, or it can be simply a convenient location for one of the characters’ allies to betray them.

and the infiltration of alien shadow creatures called malaugryms.

In the Year of the Shadowkin Return (1136 DR), House Jaezred returned to Chaulssin and established the House of Hidden Masters in the heart of the ruined city. Existing partly in Faerûn and partly in the Shadowfell, Chaulssin was a perfect base for the Jaezred Chaulssin, as the house leaders began calling themselves.

## Featured Sites

The City of Wyrmsadows is a deserted ruin that overhangs a tremendous abyss through which wind perpetually screams. The city rests on a monolithic spur of stone that juts out into the emptiness, and its ramparts and galleries overlook a terrifying void.



## Howling Abyss

The City of Wyrmsadows extends out into a great chasm in the earth. The Howling Abyss, as it is known, extends at least three miles above Chaulssin and descends more than seventeen miles into the depths. Hurricane-force winds buffet the city relentlessly, threatening to sweep away any creature that dares the battlements or attempts to fly through the chasm. Despite the endless gale, the abyss is hardly absent of dangerous creatures. Undead creatures infused with shadow soar on the winds, while spectral shadow dragons—undead remnants of Clan Jaezred—flit about the city they once ruled.

## House of Hidden Masters

At the heart of ruined Chaulssin in what was once the city's largest temple to Lolth is the House of Hidden Masters, the chapter house of the Jaezred Chaulssin. At the desecrated temple's center is the opulent lair of Patron Grandfather Mauzzkyl. The walls are hung with tapestries of woven shadowstuff that depict distorted images of scenes long forgotten. The arched ceilings of the chamber are built of glistening onyx and embedded with the flashing gems known as beljurils, while the floor is piled high with tarnished coins of varying mintage and design.

Mauzzkyl's lair is surrounded by the lavish apartments of the concubines of the Jaezred Chaulssin. Each dwelling resembles the patron grandfather's lair in miniature and is heavily guarded, since the patron fathers do not trust each other. Each harem largely governs itself between visits by its master, but any worship of Lolth is ruthlessly stamped out when discovered.

## Galleries of Shadow

The Galleries of Shadow encompass all the lesser halls and chambers of Chaulssin linked by tunnels within the city and not considered part of the House of Hidden Masters. These areas are home to companies of quaggoths, small bands of shadar-kai, and packs of roving half-dragons. Interlopers from the Shadowfell are common in border areas.

# The Wormwritings

The Wormwritings are twisting, ever-changing tunnels to the west of the Shadowed Ways. Purple worms and all manner of other burrowing creatures are plentiful in the area, creating new tunnels and collapsing old ones as they make their way through the rock. This region of the Underdark is not well traveled by humanoids, who fear becoming trapped in a collapsed tunnel or simply getting lost in the ever-changing network.

The best bet for a guide in the Wormwritings comes from either of two warring factions, a small tribe of kobolds known as the Urlbluk, or svirfneblin excavators from Blingdenstone. The latter track the courses of purple worms in the area, since the droppings of the huge beasts often contain precious metals and gems.

## ACID AERIE

On the southeastern outskirts of the Wormwritings is a gorge several hundred feet across that has been carved by a lake of green, glowing, foul-smelling acid, the legacy of some past wizard's experiment. This gorge is notable for the dozens of interconnected narrow stone walkways, from one foot to ten feet wide, that crisscross the chamber. Many of them lead deep into the Wormwritings, while others wind east toward Blingdenstone. This site gained its name from the flock of dire corbies (*NEVERWINTER™*

*Campaign Setting*, page 128) that lived there until the Sable Years. Since the corbies were slain by the spirit-wraith of Zaknafein, the kobolds of the Wormwritings have made the place their own.

## GARGOYLE TUBE

In the heart of the Wormwritings, a gem-rich shaft stretches up from a great lava bubble deep underground to the tunnels of the Dungeon of Death. Both gnomes and kobolds have noted gargoyle-like monsters hunting near the shaft, and the svirfneblin gave it its common name. The truth is that the region is hunted by a group of nabassu demons residing in the dungeon above.

## DUNGEON OF DEATH

The tunnels known as the Dungeon of Death were originally a gem mine established by Clan Deepdelve shortly after the dwarven kingdom of Gharraghaur fell to monstrous invaders in -3611 DR. Most of the dwarves were killed by a band of medusas, who were, in turn, killed by trolls. The cycle of slaughter continued over centuries, earning the dungeon its bloody name. Due to the innumerable evil acts perpetrated by its various inhabitants, the place carries a unique curse. Any living creature that spends too long in the dungeon is slowly weakened, reduced over time to a mere shadow of its former self—hence its name, the Shadow Curse.





# PHANLINKSAL

Only a few weeks march to the west of Menzoberranzan lie the ruins of the illithid city of Phanlinksal. At its peak, the city housed scores of illithids, their elder brain, and hundreds of enthralled slaves. But in 1339 DR, the city was brought down in a single day of chaotic violence that saw the elder brain and most of the illithids dead. In the years following this massacre, one of the undeveloped illithid tadpoles grew into an enormous bloated monstrosity resembling a purple worm—a neothelid. This psychically-aware slug the size of a dragon haunts the ruins, devouring anything that comes near.

Or so the rest of the Underdark believes.

In the Spellplague era, Phanlinksal is once again a lair for the illithids. The castle is now the base of the Sept of Ill'Ghact, a group that intends to recreate the elder brain that was once in the city. They have tamed the neothelid and use it as a guardian while they rebuild their base. However, they do not want their enemies, including the drow of Menzoberranzan, to know of their presence, so they maintain the pretense that Phanlinksal is still a monster-haunted ruin.

## History

The mind flayers founded Phanlinksal in the Year of Faltering Fires (491 DR) at the behest of the elder brains that rule illithid society. After much deliberation, the elder brains chose a cavern relatively near the surface for easy raiding of the Uthgardt tribes of the Lurkwood, yet defensible because of a number of clefts in its floor. Of course, they might have considered other, more alien reasons for their choice of location. The importance of the site was underscored when the illithids carried one of their revered elder brains to the cavern to create the foundation of Phanlinksal. Yet even at its height, the city was small, housing only 120 illithids and three times that many slaves—mostly drow, goblins, duergar, hook horrors, orcs, and ogres.

The drow of Menzoberranzan repeatedly threatened the city over the centuries. Raids by the illithids drew an armed response from House Baenre in the Year of the Adder (1328 DR). The illithids avoided complete destruction of their city when one of their strongest members, El-Viddenvelp, agreed to journey to Menzoberranzan and serve Matron Yvonne Baenre as her advisor in return for her sparing the elder brain of the city.

## ADVENTURES IN PHANLINKSAL

Drow of Menzoberranzan might explore the ruined city of Phanlinksal for any of a variety of reasons. Consider using or adapting any of these adventure seeds:

- ◆ Rumors return to Menzoberranzan that Phanlinksal is not abandoned, and the adventurers are sent (or decide on their own) to investigate.
- ◆ A noble house sends a team to retrieve a family member who has been captured by the Sept of Ill'Ghact.
- ◆ A house wizard dispatches the characters to Phanlinksal in an attempt to retrieve arcane and mysterious information that only the illithids possess.
- ◆ A house or other faction seeks a powerful magic item said to be lost in the ruins of the ancient city.
- ◆ A character who has ties to the Sept of Ill'Ghact is brought to the city to compete in the gladiatorial arena, and the reward for success is becoming a host for an illithid tadpole.
- ◆ A character who has psionic ability is targeted as a prospective tadpole host, and dominated thralls are sent to retrieve the character.
- ◆ The characters discover a strange canister that contains the still-living brain of El-Viddenvelp, rich in knowledge and priceless to both the sept of Ill'Ghact and the drow of Menzoberranzan (particularly House Baenre).

In the Year of the Weeping Moon (1339 DR), the illithids of Phanlinksal captured Drizzt Do'Urden and his two companions, putting them to work as slaves. The illithids thought they were fortunate in the capture of such valuable slaves, but that action eventually brought their doom upon them. Compelled by the will of Matron Mother Malice Do'Urden, the spirit-wraith of Zaknafein tracked Drizzt to Phanlinksal. The mind flayers were powerless against the undead creature, which slaughtered large numbers of them. Meanwhile, Drizzt's panther companion Guenhwyvar slew the elder brain at the heart of the castle, allowing the slaves to turn against their captors. The resulting slave rebellion destroyed Phanlinksal in a matter of hours. The few surviving illithids abandoned the city and rejoined their distant kin in the fallen city of Gauntlgrym.

El-Viddenvelp (Methil) was in Menzoberranzan at the time and thus survived the destruction of the city. Determined to rebuild Phanlinksal and create a new elder brain to form its heart, he founded the Sept of Ill'Ghact, recruiting other illithids and enthralling new slaves to achieve this goal. Methil began secret forays back to Phanlinksal, where he encountered the feral neothelid that was roaming the ruins of the city. After many attempts, Methil was able to subdue the creature and bend it to his will. He set it loose in a small lake in the cavern of Phanlinksal, where the creature's eternal hunger for brains deals with any would-be explorers.

In the Year of Shadows (1358 DR), Methil was lost at the Siege of Mithral Hall. By this time, more than a dozen mind flayers lived in Phanlinksal along with roughly fifty thralls. Without Methil's driving vision, the sept stalled in its efforts to recreate the elder brain. Instead, the illithids pursued individual studies and gathered ever more thralls, which they used for food, labor, and entertainment. Twenty-five years after Methil's disappearance, the ulitharid Galgast (page 76) assumed control of the Sept of Ill'Ghact and Phanlinksal. It revitalized the plans to remake the elder brain and continued expansion of the city's illithid population.

## Featured Sites

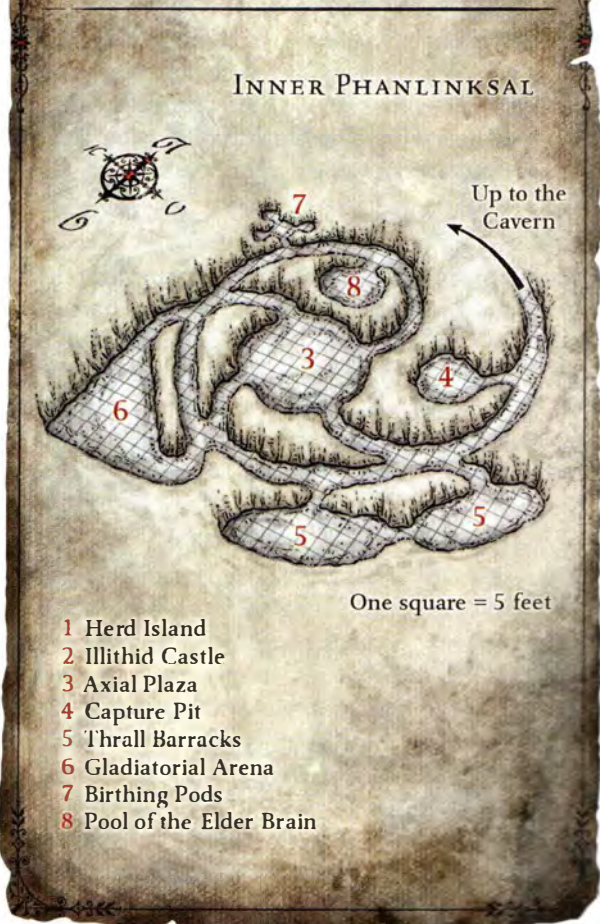
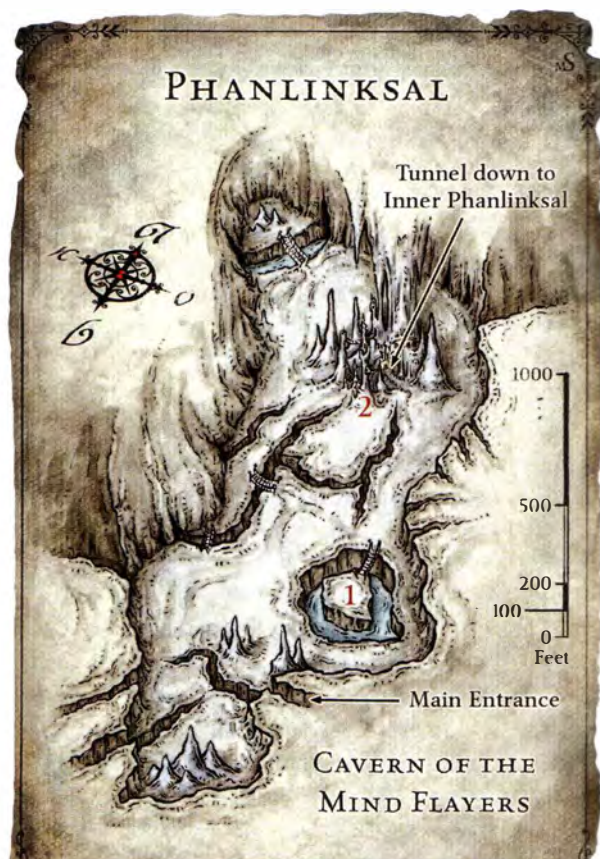
Phanlinksal lies in a long winding cavern nearly one-quarter of a mile wide and more than half a mile long. The main cavern is riddled with deep clefts that plunge into the lower reaches of the Underdark.

### 1. Herd Island

This island in the middle of a small underground lake was once used by the illithids to maintain a herd of deep rothé to feed their many thralls. Now the neothelid lairs there, usually resting partly in the water. It attacks anything that comes near, except for the illithids.

### 2. Illithid Castle

Plank-and-rope bridges span the clefts to allow access to a great castle carved into the heart of a massive stalagmite: the illithids' home. All the following locations are inside the castle.



### 3. Axial Plaza

An air of ancient opulence hangs over this large plaza, whose main feature is a great fountain. It would be beautiful were not the ornamentations so disturbing and the geometry so alien. As in most illithid settlements, the central plaza is the heart of the community. The walls of this spacious chamber are honeycombed with individual dwellings. Members of the elder council dwell in the lower living spaces while younger illithids claim abodes higher up the walls, which are reached through long spiraling ramps.

### 4. Capture Pit

Prisoners are held in this 20-foot-deep pit until the mind flayers can determine which ones will make good thralls and which ones are best for consumption. Usually the pit contains six or fewer Underdark denizens, but after a surface raid, it might hold scores of creatures.

### 5. Thrall Barracks

The sept's thralls sleep in this area. Since they have no desire to do anything other than serve their masters, the thralls' barracks contain only simple sleeping chambers, a mess hall, and a kitchen.

### 6. Gladiatorial Arena

The illithids stage gladiatorial combats in this triangular arena. Several rows of stone benches overlook the sunken pit, whose stone floor is stained with blood of many colors. The illithids meticulously clean up bones and other remains after fights.

### 7. Birthing Pods

The mind flayers bring thoroughly enthralled hosts to these small round chambers for ceremorphosis, the process by which an illithid tadpole develops into an adult. A host is strapped to a table to prevent injuring its body, and then a tadpole is inserted into the ear to devour the brain and transform the host into a mind flayer.

### 8. Pool of the Elder Brain

This great chamber lies in the deepest and most protected part of the castle. It contains no elder brain yet, but the pool has been scrubbed clean, and the illithids have filled it with a briny solution. A few egg clutches stick to the pool's side, and thousands of tadpoles swim about in the liquid, waiting for hosts.



## The Neothelid

This monstrosity arose in the wake of the Phanlinksal elder brain's destruction. A slime-covered worm of immense size, a neothelid is a throwback that develops when an illithid tadpole fails to undergo ceremorphosis. When the elder brain dies, the illithid community collapses and the tadpoles devour one another until only one remains. The survivor spends the next hundred years as a mindless slug, developing psionic abilities only when it eats its first sentient brain. Most neothelids are feral creatures that attack any living thing they can catch.

A neothelid's body is 10 feet in diameter, but the creature continues to grow longer throughout its life, reaching lengths of 120 feet or more. Four 20-foot-long tentacles sprout from its eyeless head, thrashing around a circular maw large enough to swallow a drow whole. In addition to its psionic capabilities, it can expel a gout of acid that dissolves everything but brain matter. Its body glistens with poisonous mucus, and a slime trail marks its passage.

Neothelids sense the world through innate telepathy and can communicate with intelligent creatures in that manner.



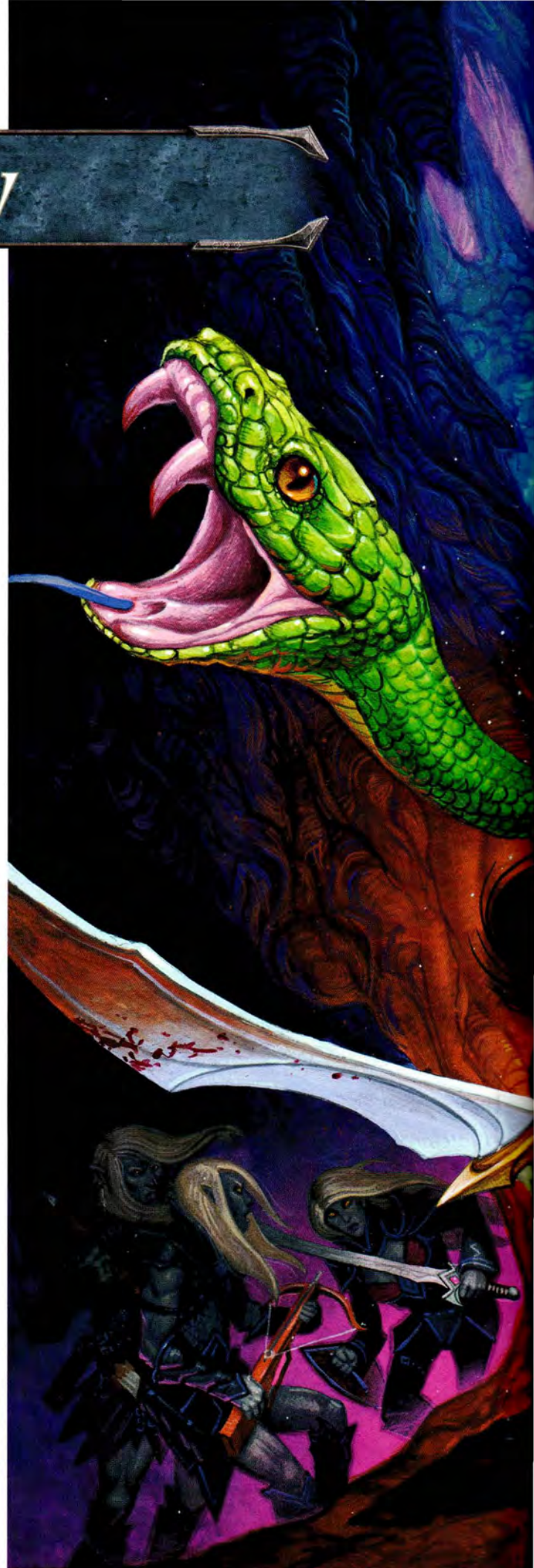
# Be a Drow

Menzoberranzan is a place where evil thrives. The drow are a depraved, wicked race cursed by the gods and hated the length and breadth of the Faerûn. Yet there is a curious allure to the drow. They are elegant, dark, and deadly. They live in secret underground caverns alight with magic and scheming, while serving a capricious demon-goddess.

This chapter provides you with roleplaying and tactical suggestions to help you play one of the infamous dark elves in a campaign set in the benighted city of Menzoberranzan, rather than in the surface world where the drow are outsiders.

This chapter includes the following sections.

- ◆ **An Evil Party in an Evil City:** A party of drow characters is assumed to be thoroughly evil. What does that mean for your game?
- ◆ **Choosing a House:** This section offers guidance on associating your character with a noble house or other faction, as well as some discussion of what happens when different characters represent different houses. It also includes a summary of the character backgrounds introduced elsewhere in this book.
- ◆ **Station in Drow Society:** Station is everything to the drow, and this section helps you track your character's standing in the complex web of houses and other factions in Menzoberranzan. It includes benefits your character can gain as he or she rises in station.
- ◆ **Roleplaying a Drow:** This section gives advice for taking on the role of a scheming, depraved, manipulative drow.



CHRIS SEAMAN



# AN EVIL PARTY IN AN EVIL CITY

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS is typically a game of righteous heroes and treasure seekers, but a campaign set in Menzoberranzan offers a very different opportunity for adventure. In Menzoberranzan, the players assume the roles of drow adventurers. They become servants of the Spider Queen, clamoring for her favor. They fight and claw their way to power. Mercy, kindness, and other soft emotions are scorned while strength, cruelty, and perversion are lauded. Treachery is a tool they will use early and often. This setting is not for the faint of heart.

Running a campaign with evil characters is not that different from one with traditional heroes. Non-heroes can still partake in most scenarios a Dungeon Master devises; only the motivation for the adventure is different. Most drow have little interest in altruism, find no motivation in pity, and feel no sympathy for the less fortunate. Instead, the DM must appeal to the key desires of the drow: station, power, revenge, and most important, gaining and keeping the favor of Lolth.

Characters in a Menzoberranzan campaign are likely to use different tactics than those in a standard heroic campaign. Drow quickly resort to intimidation and violence to achieve their ends. They have no regard for the weak and innocent, and efforts to blackmail them by threatening supposed loved ones will usually fail. Drow are evasive creatures, relying on ambush and surprise to win in combat, rather than direct assault. They are also willing to deal with evil creatures, such as demons and illithids, though always with blades at the ready.

## GETTING ALONG

Just because the adventuring group is comprised of evil characters doesn't mean that the characters should constantly come to blows. Evil characters with similar goals or common foes can work together without conflict. Like most creatures, they achieve their goals faster by working together than by plotting at cross purposes.

On the other hand, sometimes it's just fun to pit characters against each other. These conflicts don't need to be duels to the death or cause a permanent parting of the ways. A minor deception or innocuous betrayal is enough to add some backstabbing flavor to a campaign without destroying it.



## Drow Treachery Deck

The D&D Treachery Deck provides an entertaining opportunity for introducing treachery into a campaign. When a player plays a treachery card, it typically creates a detrimental effect for the allies of that player's character, while granting a benefit to that character.

The deck can be used in conjunction with the Worth rules on page 120. Each card has a numeric value listed in the left-hand corner. When played, that player's character gains Worth equal to the card's number. If the number is negative, the character loses that many points of Worth. In each encounter, a player can only gain Worth points equal to the highest-value card that he or she plays.

## CHOOSING A HOUSE

Drow society in Menzoberranzan centers on the roughly fifty noble houses that are constantly struggling for dominance in the City of Spiders. When creating a character for a Menzoberranzan campaign, you should give careful thought to which house (if any) your character will join or if he or she is part of an independent faction, because each choice will determine many details about your character. A selection of houses is presented in this book, and several independent factions exist, like Bregan D'aerthe or Arach-Tinilith.

Because of the importance of the houses to character backgrounds, changing houses is not recommended. If you and your Dungeon Master decide to enact that change, it should make sense for the story. For example, your house might fall, leaving you free to join Bregan D'aerthe.

### Multiple Houses in the Party

Chances are very good that not every character will want to be from the same house. Below are three examples of how to integrate multiple houses into the same group in a Menzoberranzan campaign.

**Allied Houses:** Noble houses often find it pragmatic to cooperate with one or more other houses to achieve similar goals. Alliances are forged and broken regularly in the political chaos of Menzoberranzan. Houses can always be realigned as needed.

**Similar Causes:** While the characters are from different houses, they share a common interest even if their houses do not. This cause could be as complex as a goal to bring down House Baenre from its lofty position, or as simple as a desire to gain in wealth, worth, and station from adventuring.

**Outside Influence:** The characters are united by an outside force. In other campaigns, this entity would likely be a kind mentor or scheming manipulator. In Menzoberranzan, the characters are pawns in a larger game, played by more powerful drow. Characters might be bribed, coerced, or blackmailed into working together.

### Character Backgrounds

Character backgrounds are an excellent way to add depth to a character from Menzoberranzan. While they have no mechanical effect on the game, a background provides story elements and potential goals for your character.

Below is a list of background suggestions based upon the houses, factions, and foes presented in this book. If you would like to design a unique background, discuss customizing one with your Dungeon Master.

#### MENZOBERRANZAN BACKGROUNDS

Background	Faction	Page
Arachnomancer	House Melarn	49
Bloodreaver	Scourged Legion	72
Dread fang of Halisstra	House Melarn	49
Drow slaver	Melee-Magthere	61
Drow trader	House Hunzrin	43
Elite guard	House Baenre	35
House priestess	House Baenre	35
House weapon master	House Do'Urden	41
House wizard	Sorcere	63
Infiltrator	Jaezred Chaulssin	69
Gladiator	Scourged Legion	72
Inquisitor of Lolth	Arach-Tinilith	59
Master of Melee-Magthere	Melee-Magthere	61
Master of Sorcere	Sorcere	63
Mentored psion	Sept of Ill'Ghact	75
Mercenary	Bregan D'aerthe	65
Mindplagued thrall	Sept of Ill'Ghact	75
Mistress of Arach-Tinilith	Arach-Tinilith	59
Oblodran fanatic	House Oblodra	46
Oblodran psion	House Oblodra	46
Renegade	House Do'Urden	41
Scout	Bregan D'aerthe	65
Shadow agent	Jaezred Chaulssin	69
Spellspinner	House Xorlarrin	53





# STATION IN DROW SOCIETY

Your station as a drow determines your place in the society of Menzoberranzan. Station is divided into two types: house rank and personal esteem.

House rank determines a house's station in relation to other houses within the city. While even the noblest drow cannot directly command drow of other houses, members of a lower-ranked house must give deference to members of a higher-ranked house or face the consequences of angering powerful rivals.

Personal esteem, represented by an individual's Worth score, determines a drow's station within her house. Each drow character starts with a Worth score of 0, modified by the circumstances of his or her birth. A drow can gain and lose Worth in a variety of ways. The Worth Modifiers table provides some criteria that raise and lower a drow's Worth during his or her lifetime. Your DM can rule that other events raise and lower your Worth as well.

A drow's Worth is affected only by publicly known events. If a drow slays enemies of her house but no one knows about it, then that character's Worth is not affected. Drow usually choose to spread rumors about their deeds rather than openly talking about them, since they prefer not to appear desperate to climb the social ladder.

The only exception to this is that gains and losses of worth due to the respect or disrespect of Lolth do not require public acknowledgement. Lolth and her yochlol handmaids spy on her followers constantly, and spread word of their deeds and misdeeds to priestesses of Lolth.

## WORTH AT BIRTH

- +5 **Born female**
- 5 **Born male**
- +4 **Female or male born to matron mother**
- OR +2 **Born into matron mother's extended family**
- OR +1 **Born into a drow noble house**
- OR -20 **Born outside of a drow noble house**

## WORTH MODIFIERS

- +5 **Become matron mother**  
**Graduate from Arach-Tinilith**  
**Become a high priestess of Lolth**  
**Receive public recognition of Lolth's favor**
- +4 **Become house wizard**  
**Create a new spell or prayer to Lolth**  
**Pass a Test of Lolth**  
**Slay a personal rival**
- +3 **Become house weapon master**  
**Complete a major quest for your house**  
**Graduate from Sorcere**  
**Slay powerful enemies of your house**  
**Humiliate a rival in public**
- +2 **Become house patron**  
**Being acknowledged by matron mother**  
**Betray someone and get away with it**  
**Slay significant enemies of your house**  
**Survive an ambush or assassination attempt**
- +1 **Complete a minor quest for your house**  
**Gain a level**  
**Graduate from Melee-Magthere**  
**Embarrass a rival in public**  
**Slay minor enemies of your house**  
**Win a public competition**
- 1 **Go a month without gaining Worth**  
**Let an insult to Lolth pass unanswered**  
**Lose a public competition**  
**Suffer minor public humiliation or betrayal**
- 2 **Back down from a conflict**  
**Disobey a superior**  
**Endure an insult to your house without seeking revenge**  
**Display a weak emotion (love, kindness)**
- 3 **Let an insult to yourself pass unanswered**  
**Perform menial labor or other slave work**  
**Show mercy**  
**Suffer major public humiliation or betrayal**
- 4 **Disobey a priestess of Lolth**  
**Endure an insult to your person**  
**Pass up an opportunity to slay elves**  
**Speak ill of Lolth**  
**Strike a drow female**
- 5 **Disobey a matron mother**  
**Receive a public manifestation of Lolth's disfavor**  
**Be thrown out of your noble house**

## Tiers of Prestige

Each house has nine tiers of personal prestige in its hierarchy, each one associated with a range of Worth values that is particular to each house. There is no ceremony or event that marks moving from one tier to another. When a drow obtains or loses enough Worth to change his or her tier, the rest of the drow in the house instinctively recognize the change and respond appropriately.

## LOSS OF STATION: DRIZZT'S STORY

The inspiration for these optional rules on station came from the events of Drizzt Do'Urden's life as chronicled in the novel *Homeland* by R.A. Salvatore. Here's a summary of how Drizzt's Worth went up and down (well, mostly down) during that story.

Drizzt is male (-5) and is trained as a warrior (-1). He is the son of the matron mother (+4) and graduates from Melee-Magthere (+1). He won the Grand Melee nine times (+1 each time), but was betrayed by Kelnozz in the first melee (-3). He showed soft emotion for his father Zaknafein (-3) and again at the destruction of House Teken'duis (-3). He struck a drow female when he fought Maya Do'Urden (-4). He refused the advances of a high priestess at the graduation ceremony (-4), then disobeyed high priestess Vierna Do'Urden (-4) and spoke ill of Lolth (-4). He slew scraggs and hook horrors (enemies of Menzoberranzan) while patrolling around Menzoberranzan (+1 each time). He suggested parlaying with the svirfneblin (-2) and then showed mercy to Belwar Dissengulp (-4). He was betrayed by Masoj Hun'ett (-3), but he survived the assassination attempt (+2). He disobeyed Matron Malice and left the compound (-5). Finally, Drizzt showed mercy to an elf child (-4), and failed to kill elves when he had the chance (-4), which caused him to lose the favor of Lolth (-5). At the end of the novel, Drizzt's Worth score was lower than -30, putting him in the lowest tier of drow society (see Tiers of Prestige, below).

To move from Tier 0 (where most drow begin) to Tier 1 requires a gain of Worth sufficient to make the drow's Worth score equal to the house's power rating. After that, advancing to the next higher tier requires a further gain of Worth equal to the house's power rating multiplied by the next tier's number. The mechanic works into the negatives as well.

For example, House Do'Urden has a power rating of 9. Therefore, a drow needs a Worth score of 9 to attain Tier 1. The drow then needs another 18 Worth points ( $9 \times 2$ ) to reach Tier 2, or a total Worth score of 27. Attaining Tier 5 would require a Worth score of 144. Filling the boots of Matron Malice will take decades of accumulation of personal worth.

Drizzt went in the opposite direction. When his Worth reached -9, he descended to Tier -1. When it reached -27, he dropped to Tier -2. Since House Do'Urden was about to go to war, Matron Malice decided to sacrifice Drizzt to regain Lolth's favor. After Drizzt fled the city, he fell to Tier -3, but House Do'Urden was prevented from taking his life.

## Benefits of Station

Most drow wield influence in the City of Spiders, more so if they are noble born and female. Even in the wilds of the Underdark, those of your race are regarded with grudging respect, if not outright fear. The benefits of station described in this section are meant to model the extent of a drow's influence within a *Menzoberranzan: City of Intrigue* campaign.

If your Dungeon Master adopts this optional system, your drow character gains access to certain benefits of station. Each of these benefits provides a noncombat ability that you can use to gain specific advantages in and around Menzoberranzan.

Benefits of station are cumulative. For example, at Tier 3, you enjoy the benefits of that tier and the two lower ones. Conversely, if you lose enough Worth to drop a tier, then you lose the benefit of that tier until you reach it again.

In addition to these direct benefits, station also affects social interaction. When drow of the same house are interacting with each other, a drow of a higher tier gets a bonus to all interaction skill checks equal to the number of tiers of difference, while the drow of lower worth gets a similar penalty to all such checks.

**Tier -3: Sacrifice** You are a blight on the reputation of your house, and your very existence is a threat to the house having the all-important favor of Lolth. The priestesses will sacrifice you on an altar to Lolth at the first opportunity. You must scrounge for your basic needs, because your house gives you nothing. If you are not yet a prisoner, your accommodations (if you have any) are the most wretched in the house.

**Tier -2: Expendable** Your worth is so low that your continued existence is not important to the house. More powerful drow will use and dispose of you for their own gain. The house gives you substandard equipment to perform your duties. Your accommodations are unsanitary and unpleasant.

**Tier -1: Drudge** You aren't worth much in the eyes of the matron mother. To her, you are just another in the mass of low-stationed drow. The house does you no favors and will make few efforts to help or protect you. The house gives you used equipment to perform your duties. Your accommodations are cramped and crowded.

**Tier 0: Member** You have done little to prove your worth. The matron mother barely notices you, and higher-ranking house drow command you to do menial tasks. The house gives you standard equipment to perform your duties. Your accommodations are spartan and severe.

**Tier 1: Aspirant** You're not completely without value in the eyes of the house mistresses. You have some level of authority and can command lesser drow of the house. The house gives you quality items to perform your duties. Your accommodations are drab but not uncomfortable.

**Benefit:** Once per week, you can ask a sage, a spy, or other appropriate informant one question. It can be about obscure lore, members of rival houses, your Underdark surroundings, or any other subject the DM deems it possible to find someone to ask about. The information you receive will be accurate, although potentially incomplete.

**Tier 2: Favored** You are a promising member of your house. Higher-ranking drow will consider you for minor leadership positions and might include you in their many plots. Your house provides you with high-quality equipment to perform your duties. Your accommodations are comfortable but not lavish.

**Benefit:** Once every two weeks, you receive material assistance from someone else in your house or another associate who wants to curry favor with you. You can use this benefit to bring about one of the following events.

- ◆ You gain hard-to-acquire material objects worth a total of 20 gp or less.
- ◆ A cleric or wizard of your level casts a spell or ritual for you. You must pay all component costs.
- ◆ You receive an invitation to an exclusive social occasion.
- ◆ You are informally introduced to a powerful noble.

You can also use any of these benefits on behalf of another drow you want to assist.

**Tier 3: Scion** Your worth is noted by all within your house. The house matrons will consider you for significant leadership positions and for inclusion in their schemes. At the same time, your competence marks you as a rival to be watched or eliminated by other leaders. Your house grants you superior and possibly magical items to perform your duties. Your accommodations are pleasant and relatively spacious, but not private.

**Benefit:** Once per month, you can request and receive a formal audience with your house's matron mother, house weapon master, or house wizard. This audience lasts no more than ten minutes.

**Tier 4: Peer** Your worth to the house is without question. The matron mother will consider you for a primary house position, such as high priestess, house wizard, or house weapon master. You are a major player in all house intrigue, and you play for

high stakes, up to and including your life. Your equipment is among the best the house has to offer. Your accommodations are large, elaborately furnished, and private.

**Benefit:** You can hold meetings in your private accommodations without worry of observation. You gain three noncombatant servants who attend to your needs. You gain also gain a competent drow of your level minus three and a class of your DM's choice as a lackey. This lackey can run more demanding errands for you or handle significant matters while you are otherwise indisposed. If any of the servants or the lackey are slain, you can replace them one month later.

**Tier 5: Eminence** You are the ultimate authority in your house. All others in the house bow before your power and worth. If you are not the matron mother, then you are the power behind her throne. If you are female, it's only a matter of time before you kill her and become the matron mother. If you are male, you take secret or even overt delight in thwarting the established matriarchy. You have access to any equipment the house possesses. Your accommodations are the best in the compound.

**Benefit:** You can command any drow in your house of lesser Worth. Once a month, you can demand a formal audience with the matron mother, house weapon master, or house wizard of any other house.

## TYING OFF LOOSE ENDS

If a player character who gains a lackey loses Worth and is forced to give up this benefit, the former lackey is a dangerous vulnerability. The lackey likely knows many of the character's secrets and is no longer loyal. The character should consider killing the former lackey at the first opportunity, or—*even better*—accuse her of treason to Lolth and have her sacrificed to the Spider Queen. If the character can make the accusation stick, then he or she stands a chance to restore some Worth by exposing a traitor and offering her up to Lolth. Devious Dungeon Masters could have the lackey immediately shift allegiance to a powerful rival, putting the character in a difficult position.

# ROLEPLAYING A DROW

Playing a drow character from Menzoberranzan is very different from choosing one of the standard heroic races of the *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* game. Drow are not just elves with dark skin, and Menzoberranzan is not an elf city in which all the trees have been replaced by stalagmites. The drow world is nearly a complete inversion of the society of the surface elves. What was once virtue is now vice, and what was vice is now virtue.

## Drow Society and Culture

Drow society is thoroughly corrupt and evil, having been molded by Lolth for her benefit and enjoyment. In this society, relationships are hierarchical. There is no ability to treat another person as an equal, and all interactions between drow are couched in terms of those who are stronger and those who are weaker. Ascension to higher status is the ultimate goal for most drow, who desire to be the dominant force in all their relationships.

Drow are extremely treacherous. They readily make alliances, and then break such agreements the moment the terms are no longer advantageous. Lolth sees her people best served by the competitive striving of individuals, factions, and houses. This way, the race grows stronger without breeding in decadence, weakness, or laziness. Since they are so duplicitous, drow trust no other creatures, especially other drow.

Drow society is strongly matriarchal, with females holding nearly all positions of power. Females are seen as stronger, more intelligent, and more holy than males. Female drow can choose and discard mates freely, though occasionally a female will select one particular male as a consort. Males compete with each other for the female's attention, hoping to be selected as a consort. When a female is done with a consort, she sometimes simply leaves him, but more often, she will slay her former lover to protect her secrets.

Child rearing is the responsibility of the whole family. Often, the older siblings raise their younger kin. Males have little if any say in the raising of their children, and many drow do not know who fathered them.

Since almost all drow worship Lolth, most drow have a strong affinity for arachnids. Spiders dwell among drow communities in great numbers, and they are prominent in drow art and fashion, with the motifs of webs and arachnids repeatedly displayed.

For all their flaws, drow love beauty, whether it is embodied in art, magic, or crafted items. They seek to surround themselves with beautiful things at all times. Ownership of exquisite items fills the drow with pride and improves their status in the eyes of others. The drow body is regarded as the most

## ENCOURAGING THE DROW MINDSET

To get the players into the mindset of playing drow, a Dungeon Master also should make use of this material when roleplaying other drow. NPCs will see the characters as rivals to be either appeased or exploited. Paranoia is rampant, and the characters' every word and deed is carefully examined for hidden danger.

You can ratchet up the tension by having allies turn against the group at critical moments. After a few such betrayals, the characters will become suspicious of any drow who purports to be an ally.

beautiful object in their civilization. The dark elves work hard to keep themselves in peak physical condition and proudly display their physiques, dressing in ways that other races consider scandalous. Any children exhibiting physical deficiencies are slain.

Finally, magic fascinates the drow. The dark elves exult in wielding magic. They adorn their homes with permanent glimmering *faerie fire* spells and dozens of magical conveniences.

## Drow Motivation

Drow do nothing out of the goodness of their hearts—generally speaking, they have no understanding of the concept. They are motivated almost entirely by anger, fear, and pride, and they are consumed with attaining the three goals of favor, station, and vengeance.

**Anger:** A current of rage runs through the entire drow population. They are a primal and instinctive race, quick to lash out at those who offend them. Violence is their first option in all conflict, and they hold their seething rage in check only while waiting for a more opportune time to strike.

**Fear:** Though often not aware of it, the drow live every day of their lives in mortal terror. They fear their superiors will eliminate them, they fear their underlings will betray them, they fear losing status, and they fear displeasing Lolth. This fear engenders paranoia, distrust, and a driving need for secrecy.

**Pride:** Drow are a proud people. Every drow believes she is a superior example of a superior race. A drow who is under another's authority chafes at the servitude. If a drow fails in some way, it is because of underlings' failures, enemies' machinations, or allies' betrayals. It is never that individual's fault.

**Favor:** The Spider Queen holds her favor over the drow of Menzoberranzan as a reward to those who please her. She forces the drow to dance about like puppets on a string to gain her favor, and she is quick to take it away for the slightest offense. As a

consequence, all drow constantly beg for Lolth's favor and try to find new ways to earn it.

**Station:** Social standing is everything to the drow. They yearn to climb in station in order to lord their new authority over even more drow. This driving ambition pushes drow to take risks and forsake good sense. Station is gained through treachery and invites treachery against those who hold it.

**Vengeance:** No insult can go unpunished, and any challenge must be answered, or a drow risks being considered weak, which is as good as a death sentence. Even if payback takes years, drow mull on every slight and plot devastating vengeance.

## Depravity of the Drow

Beyond the commonplace acts of evil such as lying, cheating, theft, betrayal, and murder, the drow embrace four depravities that define their culture: debauchery, sacrifice, sadism, and slavery.

**Debauchery:** Drow are extremely sensual creatures with a taste for lechery and the unorthodox. They take and leave lovers with abandon, and their wanton fetes are notorious throughout the Underdark for their licentiousness and depravity.

Among the most perverse fetishes of the dark elves is the ritualized coupling between demons and drow. These acts are typically part of a religious rite performed in Lolth's honor. In Menzoberranzan, the graduation of students from the Academy is cause for such depraved celebration. On rare occasions, these unholy unions are favored with the conception of a half-demon draegloth.

### EXCEPTIONS TO THE RULE

Even though the overwhelming majority of drow are evil to the core, not all are. A few drow have broken from their society and managed to navigate the treacherous ways of the drow on their own. Most are eventually rooted out and slain by their wicked kin. A rare few escape Lolth's grasp and make their own way in the world, becoming some of the greatest heroes in Faerûn.

**Sacrifice:** Lolth demands sacrifice from her worshipers to demonstrate their devotion. These blood offerings cannot be common slayings that occur during the normal course of an adventure. Instead, the sacrifice must be offered in a ritual to the Spider Queen. The successful completion of such a ritual typically rewards the petitioner with a boon or a blessing in return. Lolth often requires sacrifices from drow who seek to avoid divine punishment for a prior transgression.



**Sadism:** Drow are notoriously cruel and delight in causing pain in others. Seeing a foe flinch from a blow or watching eyes blink back tears is like ambrosia to the dark elves. Although drow love physical cruelty, they truly delight in causing emotional suffering. The cutting word that bites deep is just as delicious as a knife thrust, and psychological wounds leave scars that cannot be healed with magic.

Drow strongly believe in the survival of the fittest. If a creature cannot defend itself, then it is weak and deserves any pain and suffering that is delivered upon it. Furthermore, acts of sadism demonstrate the mastery of the drow over helpless creatures, raising the status of any drow that performs such acts.

**Slavery:** The drow enslave other creatures at every opportunity. Their society is built almost entirely on slave labor, because doing menial tasks is beneath a drow's sensibilities. From gathering and producing the food the drow eat, to caring for their animals, to mining the wealth out of the Dark Dominion, slaves do the work in Menzoberranzan that makes the continued existence of the city possible.

A slave's life in the city is harsh and filled with endless labor and cruel punishment. The drow exploit their slaves with complete disregard for the creature's health. To the drow, a slave is seen as a tool to be used and discarded. If slaves die, replacements can always be obtained from among the other races of the Underdark or the surface lands.

## Secrets and Lies

One of the most precious currencies in Menzoberranzan is secrets. The secrets of one's own house must be carefully guarded, for drow who can unearth the secrets of another house hold an advantage over the house. Advantage is power, and sooner or later a situation of advantage leads to an attack.

When you're playing a drow character, come up with at least one dark secret—something you have done or some characteristic that no one else knows about. Guard your secret well, but make sure that it informs your roleplaying. For example, if you killed the elderboy of a rival house, you might be particularly tense in any situation involving that house or a member of that house—even another player character.

Make sure your DM knows your secret as well, so situations might arise where the nature of your secret becomes significant to the campaign.

What happens if your secret is uncovered? One option is to kill everyone who knows it, but if those are your fellow player characters, that course of action might be undesirable. The best answer in such a case is to make sure you know their secrets, too, providing an effective deterrent—if they reveal your secret, you'll reveal theirs, and you will all be disgraced.

You can choose or roll randomly from the list of secret ideas below, or come up with your own secret.

d20	You . . .
1	Murdered one of your siblings
2	Received unearned praise for an accidental success
3	Are illegitimate
4	Stole a prized object from a rival house
5	Stole a prized object from your own house
6	Killed the elderboy of a rival house
7	Carried on an affair with a prominent member of a rival house
8	Helped a close family member flee to the surface
9	Are beginning to develop a conscience (to your horror)
10	Have a close relative who worships Eilistraee (killed following the end of Lolth's silence, in a post-War of the Spider Queen campaign)
11	Were once tortured on suspicion of worshipping a god other than Lolth
12	Were wronged and failed to take vengeance
13	Were cast out of House Xorlarrin or Sorcere because of your lack of magical aptitude
14	Missed an opportunity to kill an elf or other surface dweller
15	Were once controlled by a mind flayer and made to act against your house
16	Are a survivor of a destroyed house
17	Are a refugee from Ched Nasad or another destroyed drow city
18	Allowed some of your house's slaves to escape on your watch
19	Were rejected by Bregan D'aerthe
20	Negotiated a trade pact or other agreement with one of the enemies of Menzoberranzan



# APPENDIX: MAP KEY

The poster map included with this book uses a combination of letters and numbers to mark the locations of specific buildings, including businesses, the compounds of noble houses, and the residences of other significant but non-noble families. Each tag on the map begins with a letter indicating the district, followed by a sequential number. The letter codes are as follows.

- S: The Bazaar
- B: The Braeryn
- D: Duthcloim
- E: Eastmyr
- N: Narbondellyn
- Q: Qu'ellarz'orl
- W: West Wall

Each entry in the list of locations below includes the map tag, the name of the location, and sometimes a brief description of the kind of business the place is. Then three additional pieces of information are shown in parentheses: usage, building classification, and building size.

**Usage:** A brief descriptor of the structure in general terms. Common usages include: tavern, inn, business, temple, noble villa, city building, shrine, warehouse, and residence.

**Classification:** An artificial categorization of structures into one of four groups (described below), sufficient to allow the Dungeon Master to describe the building on the fly.

**Class A:** These structures are always unique and distinctive landmarks of any scale. Most, however, are of a large and grandiose nature, almost built as much for show as for use. Examples include the city's public structures, major temples, and the nobles' villas.

**Class B:** These structures cover the larger, more successful and elaborate single buildings within the city. They often have many stories and extensive cellars. Examples include inns, merchant houses, warehouses, and festhalls.

**Class C:** The great majority of structures in Menzoberranzan fall into this classification—multi-story, multi-tenant row houses that line the streets. Row houses usually have shops on the ground floor, with offices or apartments above. This class also includes many of the better-kept taverns and rooming houses in the city.

**Class D:** These structures are small, usually a single story, and constructed of simple materials. Used primarily as individual homes, merchant stalls, or storage sheds, these buildings are mainly found in the poorer districts of Braeryn and Duthcloim.

**Size:** Finally, a notation (usually a number ranging from 1 to 5) that indicates the number of stories in the building.

## The Braeryn

- B1: Drythaera Bryn'Tereth [fence] (residence, D, 1)
- B2: Black Balaeryn's Band [gang of orphans] (guildhall, C, 2)
- B3: Rhaldyn "the Old" [retired swordsmith] (residence, C, 2)
- B4: Dzurren the Weaver (business, D, 1)
- B5: Malaric Darkstar [agent for Sept of Ill'Ghact] (mage's domicile, D, 1)
- B6: Blind Alyss [potter and sculptor] (business, D, 1)
- B7: The Wan Hag [diviner, information broker] (guildhall, C, 3)
- B8: Quaggoth Drool (drinking pit, D, 1)
- B9: Black Thunder Brewery (drinking pit, D, 1)
- B10: Lair of the Lizard King (drinking pit, D, 1)
- B11: Black Tusk Gang (guildhall, C, 2)
- B12: Zesdorl's Coffins and Coffers (business, C, 2)
- B13: Dipkah's Leathers (business, C, 1)
- B14: Bastenym the Trader (business, D, 1)
- B15: Gargoyle Spirits (drinking pit, D, 1)
- B16: Chaszgos Laundry (business, D, 1)
- B17: Phare's Chattel [slave pens] (warehouse, C, 3)

## Duthcloim

- D1: Shadowcloak Pit (tavern, C, 1)
- D2: Maurn's Deep (tavern, C, 2)
- D3: Viltiern's Fine Chains (business, B, 2)
- D4: Tlar Quel'tlarn [metalsmith, locksmith] (business, D, 1)
- D5: The Deep Dragon's Lair (tavern, C, 1)
- D6: Jhulaye's Legendary Caresses (massage house, C, 3)
- D7: Maelchya's Massages (business, C, 2)
- D8: The Spiderdrink (tavern, C, 3)
- D9: The Dancing Dwarf (tavern, C, 3)
- D10: Amcryl's [massage house] (business, C, 3)
- D11: The Quynstone Pit (tavern, C, 2)
- D12: Gaussaun's Coins (business, C, 1)
- D13: Filaril's Firewine Flagons (tavern, B, 3)
- D14: The Pampered Drow (massage house, C, 3)
- D15: Shairsteel's [massage house] (business, C, 2)
- D16: Rhauvais' Arms [weaponsmith] (business, B, 3)
- D17: The Black Glove (massage house, C, 3)
- D18: Ormyth's Tankard (tavern, C, 2)
- D19: Arachar's Pit (tavern, C, 2)
- D20: Myrinzar's Chasm (tavern, C, 4)
- D21: Vickah's Boots (business, C, 1)
- D22: The Sign of the Azmyth (tavern, C, 3)
- D23: Droblyn's (tavern, C, 2)
- D24: Du'arthe Klendara [textiles] (business, B, 2)
- D25: Ulaver's Winegoblet [family winery] (business, B, 1)
- D26: Talnilee's Meats (business, C, 1)
- D27: Nullfein Stables (business, C, 1)
- D28: The Cup and Lizard (tavern, C, 3)
- D29: Orlarbryn's House (massage house, C, 1)
- D30: Faera's Floating Plants [florist] (business, C, 3)
- D31: Tier Llochl (tavern, C, 3)
- D32: Sh'aun Darnruel [clothier] (business, C, 3)
- D33: Uluruela Drael Tuabbar [travel goods] (business, C, 3)
- D34: The Emerald Pit (tavern, C, 3)
- D35: Bhaern del'Hluanter [cooper, carpenter] (business, C, 4)
- D36: Vhaudryl's (massage house, C, 1)
- D37: Baelaskros Do'llisharr [grocer] (business, C, 3)
- D38: Blurren's Fine Sausages [butcher shop] (business, C, 3)
- D39: The Cathlyre [aviary] (business, A, 1)
- D40: Alessra's Couches (massage house, C, 3)
- D41: The Rothé Rampant (tavern, C, 3)
- D42: Shondarl's (tavern, C, 2)
- D43: House Oblodra (noble manor, A, 5)—ruined after the Time of Troubles

## The Bazaar

- \$1:** Daelein Shmmerdark's Decanter (bazaar stall, D, 1)
- \$2:** Vhurn Bhaelyndryn's (bazaar stall, D, 1)
- \$3:** Whispers in the Dark (bazaar stall, D, 1)
- \$4:** Quild's Mobile Message Parlor (bazaar stall, D, 1)
- \$5:** Sense of Sensuous Scents (bazaar stall, D, 1)
- \$6:** Dhode's Cloaks and Clothes (bazaar stall, D, 1)

## Eastmyr

- E1:** Calask's (business, D, 2)
- E2:** House of Family Ashodela (residence, B, 3)
- E3:** Narbondel's Shadow [rooming house] (business, B, 3)
- E4:** The Battered Beholder (business, C, 2)
- E5:** Symeera's [rooming house] (business, B, 3)
- E6:** House of Family Dlaen Del'Amatar (residence, B, 5)
- E7:** House Freth (noble manor, A, 2)—ruined after the early Sable Years
- E8:** House of Family Fael Olyphar (residence, B, 3)
- E9:** House of Family Ilystryph (residence, B, 4)
- E10:** House of Family Uluar (residence, B, 3)
- E11:** Lylar's Helm [rooming house] (business, C, 2)
- E12:** Dylchanta's Feathers (massage house, C, 2)
- E13:** House of Family Zalyzryn (residence, B, 5)
- E14:** Ruins of House of Family Yune'duis (residence, B, 2)
- E15:** Ilitree's [rooming house; drow only] (business, B, 4)
- E16:** House Kenafin (noble manor, A, 3)—abandoned during the Spellplague era
- E17:** House Hunzrin (compound, A, 4)
- E18:** The Darkled Depths (tavern, B, 4)
- E19:** Jewel Box (tavern, A, 3)
- E20:** Sindorl's Stables (business, D, 2)
- E21:** Nightwyrms (tavern, C, 2)
- E22:** The Bawdy Trickster (inn, C, 3)
- E23:** Hunzrin Highbench (warehouse, C, 3)
- E24:** The Golem Grocer (business, C, 2)
- E25:** Maloren's Leatherworks (business, D, 2)
- E26:** The Mithral Codpiece (festhall, C, 4)
- E27:** Old Wruzal's Shop (business, D, 1)

## Narbondelyn

- N1:** Infynyl Mestpar [gem dealer] (business, B, 3)
- N2:** Yuimmith Shulcloak [moneylender] (guildhall, B, 3)
- N3:** Home of family Shunn Tahaladar (residence, B, 3)
- N4:** Home of family Klor'lbar (residence, B, 3)
- N5:** Home of family Shh'starm (residence, C, 3)
- N6:** Home of family Ilith'vir (residence, C, 3)
- N7:** Home of family Chueth'duis (residence, C, 2)
- N8:** Belek'tyr Grand Gems [gem merchant] (residence, B, 4)
- N9:** Thadalix [diamond merchant] (residence, C, 3)
- N10:** Home of family Urundlet (residence, C, 2)
- N11:** Nantlel of the Three Fingers [lender] (business, B, 3)
- N12:** Sheeress of the Many Eyes [lender] (business, B, 6)
- N13:** Home of family Hael'Irin (residence, C, 3)
- N14:** Home of family Ilith'vir (residence, C, 3)
- N15:** Maershala of the Flowers [perfumer] (business, C, 2)
- N16:** Mritt Shadalaun [gem merchant] (residence, B, 3)
- N17:** Red Tears Compound (guildhall, C, 4)
- N18:** Brothers Jaszarr [perfumer] (business, B, 4)
- N19:** Home of family Balartyr (residence, C, 3)
- N20:** Home of family Oblare (residence, C, 3)
- N21:** Home of family Hael'Irin (residence, C, 3)
- N22:** Home of family Ouol (residence, C, 4)
- N23:** Home of family Ryll (residence, C, 3)
- N24:** Home of family Shadalun (residence, C, 3)

- N25:** Home of family Tuek'tharm (residence, B, 3)
- N26:** House Barrison Del'Armgo (noble manor, A, 4)—house barracks in the Spellplague era
- N27:** House Faen Tlabbar (noble compound, A, 3)
- N28:** House Fey-Branche (noble compound, A, 3)
- N29:** House Horlbar (noble compound, A, 3)—abandoned during the Spellplague era
- N30:** House Shobalar (noble compound, A, 4)—ruined after the War of the Spider Queen
- N31:** House Srune'lett (noble compound, A, 3)—ruined after the War of the Spider Queen
- N32:** House Tuin'Tarl (noble compound, A, 3)—ruined after the War of the Spider Queen
- N33:** Feathered Masqueax (theater, A, 4)
- N34:** House Godeep (noble compound, A, 3)
- N35:** House Ousstyl (noble compound, A, 3)
- N36:** House Despana (noble compound, A, 3)
- N37:** Black Sapphire Bath (bathhouse, B, 2)
- N38:** Shynt's Fine Pastries (business, C, 2)
- N39:** Umraevin Spire (wizard's tower, B, 5)
- N40:** Pickled Halfling (tavern, B, 4)

## Qu'ellarz'orl

- Q1:** House Hun'ett (noble manor, A, 3)—ruined after the Sable Years
- Q2:** House DeVir (noble manor, A, 3)—destroyed during the Sable Years
- Q3:** House Mizzrym (compound, A, 3)
- Q4:** House Agrach Dyrr (noble manor, A, 3)—ruined after the War of the Spider Queen
- Q5:** The Spelltower Xorlarrin (compound, A, 6)
- Q6:** House Baenre (compound, A, 4)
- Q7:** Chamber of the Ruling Council (special, A, 1)
- Q8:** House Barrison Del'Armgo (noble manor, A, 3)—built during the Spellplague era

## West Wall

- W1:** Home of family Ilueph (residence, B, 3)
- W2:** Home of family Miliskeera (residence, B, 4)
- W3:** Home of family Llarabbar (residence, B, 6)
- W4:** Six Black Rings (tavern, C, 3)
- W5:** Tolkar's Copper Door (massage house, C, 4)
- W6:** Home of family Neereath (residence, B, 3)
- W7:** House Teken'duis (noble manor, A, 3)—ruined after the early Sable Years
- W8:** Home of family Ol'il'isk (residence, B, 3)
- W9:** Home of family Tirin (residence, B, 3)
- W10:** Home of family Waeth del'tar (residence, B, 3)
- W11:** Ruilath's Rental Coaches (business, C, 2)
- W12:** Home of family Vahadarr (residence, B, 3)
- W13:** Elstearn's Escorts [hirelings] (business, B, 3)
- W14:** House Do'Urden (noble manor, A, 3)—ruined after the Sable Years
- W15:** Home of family Yulaun'tlar (residence, B, 3)
- W16:** Warmfires [rentable mansion] (manor, B, 4)
- W17:** House Melarn (noble compound, B, 3)—built during the Spellplague era
- W18:** House Duskrin (noble compound, A, 3)
- W19:** House Druu'giir (noble compound, A, 3)
- W20:** House Symryvvin (noble compound, A, 3)
- W21:** House Barrison Del'Armgo training ground (noble compound, A, 3)
- W22:** Fane of the Goddess (amphitheatre/temple, A, -)
- W23:** Xeva's Den (tavern/gaming hall, B, 5)





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