



THE DROW OF THE UNDERDARK

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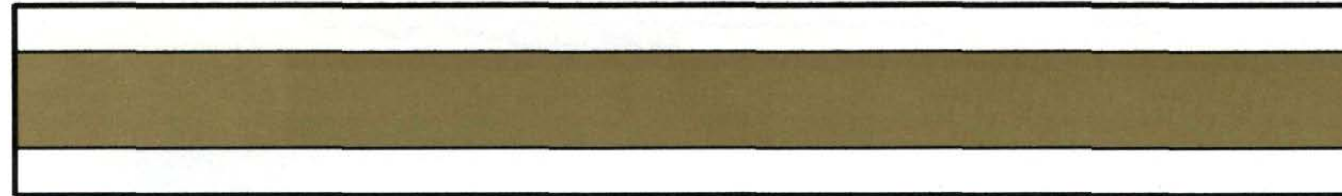
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Dedication

To Gary Gygax, for our first dark look at the drow.

To Roger Moore, for glimpses of drow, dwarves, and a campaign of warfare between them.

To Eric Oppen, for the dark elven point of view.

To C.E. Misso, for a look at the unfortunate driders.

To Ann Dupuis and to Erol Otus, for a little magic.

To James Jacobs, for two names and more fun.

To Jim Lowder, for finding drow in the Realms.

To Karen Boomgarden: Eilistraee is for you, with love and respect.

Most of all, to Bob Salvatore, for bringing the drow to life in the Realms — and spinning tales of the Realms to warm many a fireside, down the passing years!

Greater indeed are pleasures that are shared.

— Drizzt Do'Urden, *Exile*

Introduction: Drow in the Realms



Drow. The Dark Elves. Those Who Have Turned to Evil. In elven tongues, they are referred to by several names: “tirl aukhbhet-ess,” “tuer lothnil,” and “duiss aszbhar.” All of these translate to “The Accursed.” The elegant, dark and deadly drow are a hated and feared race.

In the dangerous caverns of the Underdark dwell many horrible monsters, including the drow. Obsidian-skinned kin to elves, this fell race has won mastery of magic—and a cruel reputation. Small children of Faerun hear whispered tales even before they are officially warned of Those Below.

As everyone knows, drow come by night, sporadically raiding the surface realms with their twisted magic and their near-invulnerability to the magic art of most wizards. They are masters of subtle treachery, and cannot be trusted even by their fellows.

“Were they not divided into warring factions, they’d no doubt have overrun a realm or two before this—and mayhap (quietly, now; they’ve spies everywhere) even *have already*, on the sly, here on the very sunlit surface of Faerun! Eh—smile not! Have ye not heard of strange magic and doings, and this an’ that going short, that never ran out before? Well—’tis going *below*, mark ye—to *them*.”

So much I heard from a dozen hire-swords and caravan-guards in the taverns of Waterdeep when I asked about drow (a subject best avoided, they gave me to know). Armed with the ever-accurate lore of the average sword in the street, I used a secret gate I knew, and in a single step was flung from the City of Splendors. Half a world away I flew, to the old green trees of Shadowdale; between two old and gnarled forest giants, actually, just across the high road from the

unheralded flagstone path that leads to Elminster’s Tower.

What did The Old Sage, among the greatest (and almost certainly the most widely-experienced) living mages of Faerun, know of drow? I quickened my steps as I framed the question half a dozen ways, thinking on how best to approach His Crustiness.

Hearing a familiar chuckle from off to the left, I took the side-path that led down to Elminster’s Pool. Perhaps he was doing dishes or laundry (or rather, sitting and talking, smoking his infernal pipe, while Lhaeril did the actual work), or maybe he ~~was~~—I stopped dead.

Elminster was sitting, yes, smoking, definitely—but he was also chuckling at the low, murmured words of a visitor. Words that ceased abruptly at my arrival, changing to silent hand-movements, head-shifts, arched brows, and a complex shifting of expressions.

Elminster laid a level gaze upon me, nodded in a “wait-and-bide-quiet” manner, and turned his attention to his guest. His hands, shoulders, and what could be seen of his face above the beard also moved, in a silent, high-speed gesture-talk that seemed concerned with the safety of my presence, and what I might reveal. I forgot to wait and bide quiet in the approved inscrutable manner; I was too busy staring.

Before me, shoulder-deep in the pool, was a very beautiful elven woman. Her head and shoulders were framed by a cascade of fine, snow-white hair, which pooled in the water around her in an impressive nimbus. Ruby-red eyes, set in a delicately-featured obsidian face, darted from Elminster to me like licking flames in the gathering twilight.

The drow lady—I could only call her a



lady—held a swirled-crystal wine glass clear of the water. Green, spiced drow wine sparkled within its depths. A similar draught occupied a matching glass on a rock beside The Old Mage.

Elminster smiled, and turned to me. “Well met,” he said. “May I present—no closer, please; she’s rather apprehensive, and for reasons of modesty won’t come out of the water just now—my onetime apprentice, Susprina Arkhenneld.”

He held my eyes almost challengingly. I remembered that one knelt on one knee to ladies of esteem (even when they’re bathing in a pond), and did so. Elminster smiled. “Aye, she’s drow. Mystra minded not. Have ye become so expert in the ways of Faerun that ye must stand as dumbfounded as a local? Ye came to ask me something?”

I took a deep breath, and tried a smile on the angry-looking Susprina. This wasn’t going to be easy....

It definitely wasn’t easy, but you now hold the end result: a sourcebook exploring the fascinating, often deadly culture of the drow in (or rather, under) Faerun. Elminster helped, as did Susprina, but they both warn that much here is incomplete: adventurers may well learn more at their peril. Moreover, in the other worlds where they are found, drow may vary in customs and details from the information given herein. As The Old Mage says (all too often, it seems): *Ye Have Been Warned.*

The Nature of Dark Elves

The drow, or dark elves, are a fearsome and mysterious race to most surface dwellers in the Realms. Their essential characteristics, statistics, and game-related details are given in Volume 2 of the *Monstrous Compendium*, under the heading “Elf, Drow.”

This chapter augments the information given there, as the essential first step toward the goal of this work: bringing the drow of the Realms to life, for easy DM reference and ready use in play.

Drow Build

Drow vary in shape, features, and hair color as greatly as humans do. The only exception to this rule is their uniformly jet-black skin (the few exceptions tend to be bone-white albinos).

The majority of drow have snow-white hair from birth, yellowing (if female) or graying (if male) and thinning with great age. Rare drow have naturally silver or copper-hued hair, although there are those who deliberately dye their hair silver (see the chapter on Drow Religion, under “Eilistraee”).

Most drow have red eyes. Others have green, brown, or black. Various shades of gray, even amber and rose-hued eyes are not unknown. All drow eyes tend to grow redder when they are angry or upset. Yellow eyes usually denote illness, disease, poisoning, or the presence of certain detrimental magics.

Blue and purple (and all the tints thereof) are the most unusual eye colors, and usually denote human or surface-elven blood somewhere in the drow’s ancestry.

Drow teeth may be black, white, or purple, and their gums, tongues, and throats pink, red, or purple.

Drow females tend to be bigger and stronger than males. Both sexes tend to be lithe, slim, and graceful in build, features, and movements, much as other elves appear to human eyes.

Drow Intelligence

Drow are also very alert and inquisitive, simply as survival traits in their twisted society. This mental readiness gives them an intellectual advantage over most creatures. When creating drow characters, DMs may elect to add +1 to Intelligence score rolls, and +1 or +2 to Dexterity score rolls, to a maximum of 18. Note that while drow Intelligence is augmented, drow Wisdom is not—the all-pervasive teachings of Lolth, and the limited exposure to other societies, beings, and surroundings, are not conducive to a wide and reasoned experience of the world.

Drow are rarely surprised. DMs should add the “expecting attack” +2 modifier to all drow surprise rolls. This is because drow *always* expect attack, whether in the “wild” Underdark or surface world, in their own cities (where rival drow may strike with a dagger, dart, or spell at any time), or even at home (where rival family members may seize an unguarded moment to “prune the family tree”).

To reflect the true deadliness of drow in combat, DMs are urged to have them use shrewd strategies, be alert and responsive to PC foes preparing spells and other dangers to come, and so on. Typical drow tactics include arranging ambushes where known dangers can be used, such as loose rocks that can be knocked down atop intruders. Anti-personnel traps, such as strategically-placed phycomids, and glass bulbs filled with ascomoid spores, are also not uncommon in the



Underdark. Drow who fall in combat are customarily animated as zombies (so long as their lower limbs are usable) by drow clerics, not left for others to plunder. Such zombies are often commanded to carry less-mobile dead and wounded, and are also useful as “shock troops.”

Drow Senses

Drow eyes can see heat patterns in air and rock thanks to their 120' range infravision. Against a dim gray “cold” stone backdrop, progressively warmer hues show as subtle blue, purple, red, and warm yellow. The warmth comes from hot springs, magma, seeping water, and fissure-breezes.

Drow learn to use the “shadows” of these varying hues for concealment while stalking, in much the same way as a surface creature uses the shadows produced by the sun, moon, and other light sources. Like surface dwellers, drow must learn to “read” heat-hues; the meanings of various shades and patterns become known to drow only through teaching or experience “in the field.”

Near areas of drow habitation in the Underdark, the varying heat-hues of the natural Underdark are blurred by the higher ambient heat of many gathered, living beings and their activities. Drow cities also sport magical glows, a few actual lights (notably the sharp, foreign-to-most-drow radiances of the candles of studying wizards and important rituals to Lolth), and the far more common *continual faerie fire* glows that highlight drow sculpture.

Drow are proud of the beauty of their designs, and usually outline the most impressive works with this spell.

Drow hearing is highly developed. In

the Underdark, one learns to find water by timing the echoes of dripping or running water, and to detect coming rock shifts or collapses by listening for the natural grating and groaning sounds of unshaped rock.

Drow have long, slender, sensitive fingers, and a highly-developed tactile sense. In addition to their silent language of gestures, stances, and expressions, they are able to read subtle, braille-like “secret signs” left on rock walls, message stones, and other places by fellow drow.

The drow sense of smell, however, is not so acute. The all-pervasive smell of the rock and damp air all around, tainted by ever-present mold and fungus spores and the scent of drow and slave bodies, is a strong background. Most drow have been exposed to strong incense and offering-burnings since infancy, which further serves to dull the olfactory sense. Drow still enjoy perfume, incense, and the like, but their smell is only about as acute as that of most humans—far less than that of many native inhabitants of the Underdark.

Personal Magic

All civilized drow receive training in wizardly magic (discussed in the next chapter), both to test their aptitude for casting spells and to train them in the mental concentration necessary for control of their natural spell-like abilities. (DM NOTE: SPELL-LIKE ABILITIES FADE WITH TIME ON THE SURFACE WORLD. BY THE TIME A PC IS OF ADVENTURING AGE, THEY WILL HAVE FADED AWAY.)

These innate “base powers,” so-called because all drow are born with them, and with practice can learn to use them without formal tutelage, are the abilities