

THE SPIDER QUEEN'S RITUAL



A cunning priestess, evil dark elves, and bloody sacrifices.
Sharpen your blades. Nock your arrows. Ready your spells.
Can you stop the ritual and save Winterhold before it's too late?



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The drow high priestess's nefarious plans have been revealed.

The dark elves are planning a horrific ritual to honour the goddess known among the drow as the Spider Queen. The ritual demands many bloody sacrifices, and the dark elves will kill hundreds of innocent people kidnapped from Winterhold.

To make things worse, if the unholy ritual is completed, the drow will be granted almost immortal powers – which would make them unstoppable.

Sharpen your blades. Nock your arrows. Ready your spells.

Can you stop the ritual and save Winterhold from the dark elves?



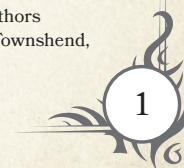
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EASTERN FARRAWAY

BASED ON THE ORIGINAL MAPS FROM AURORA GNAMTRIX'S
TRAVEL CHRONICLES: EXPLORING EASTERN FARRAWAY REGION



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OVERVIEW

ABOUT THIS ADVENTURE

The Spider Queen's Ritual is an adventure for the world's greatest roleplaying game (5e). It is designed for a group of three to five 6th-level characters, and can be played as a one-shot episode or as part of the *Secrets of the Drow* trilogy. This adventure can be used in any campaign that features a region with mountains or underground terrain.

FEATURED CONTENT

- Open sandbox-style adventure with multiple ways to resolve the quest.
- Unique magic items: Ceremonial Robe of the Drow and Ritual Sacrificial Dagger.
- New monster: Drow Ritual Zealot.
- Legend & Lore: The Dark Elves' Ritual (Tar'rael Nar-haul).
- Detailed NPCs with background descriptions.
- Original full-colour maps and illustrations.

SYNOPSIS

The characters are currently in the town of Winterhold, a trading town and former mining colony high in the mountains. They have been invited to the Halls of Lore by Edna Hellmund, head of an academic department and a member of the Five, a group of influential individuals who govern Winterhold.

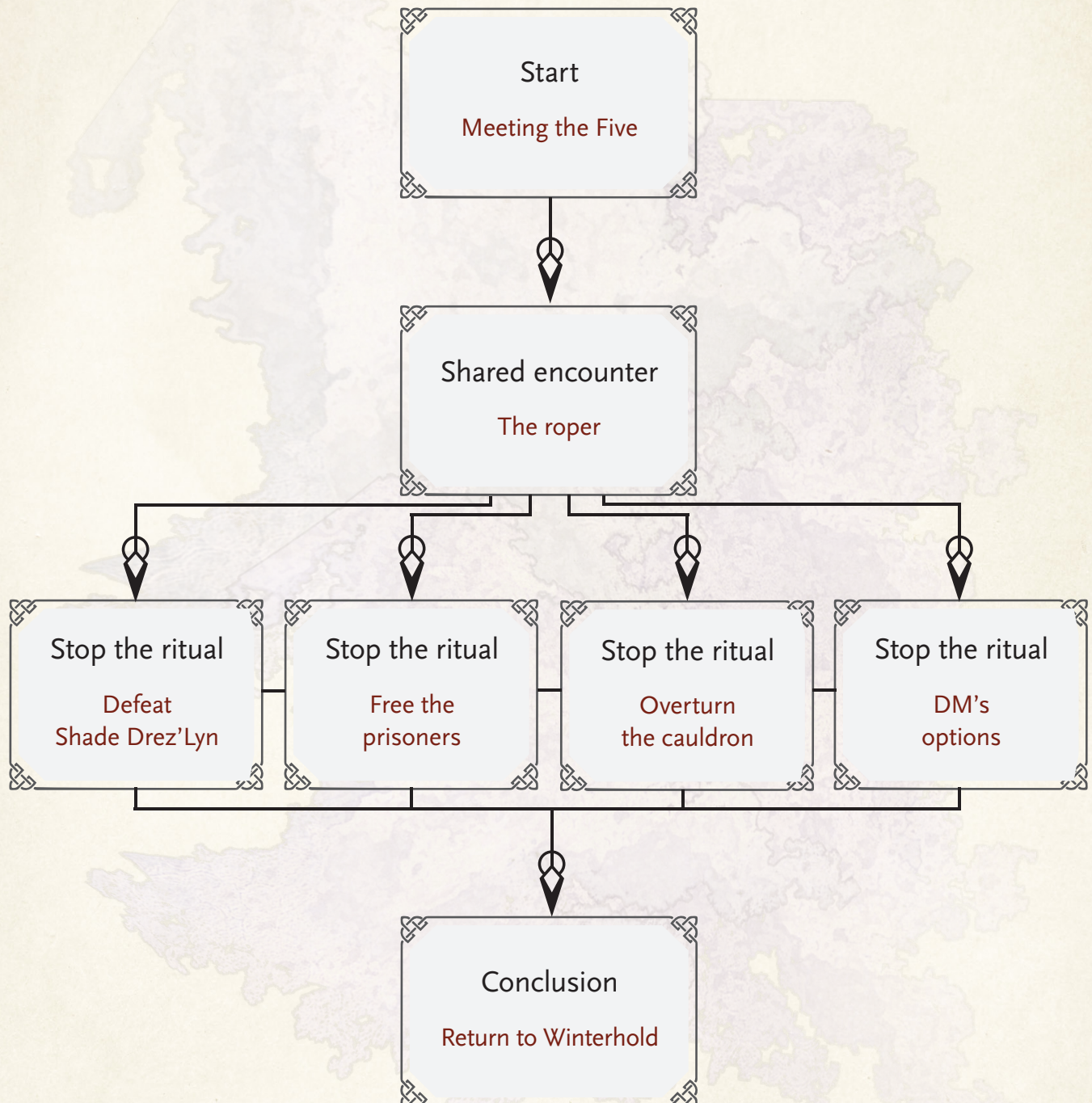
The characters are hired to prevent a gruesome ritual that is about to be held by dark elves deep underground, during which people kidnapped from Winterhold are expected to be sacrificed. The way to where the ritual is held is dangerous, and the characters encounter monsters, natural hazards, and drow guards.

At the site of the looming ritual, the characters find several buildings, e.g. a church of the Spider

Queen, the high priestess's residence, a prison, stables for giant lizards, and more. From here on, the adventure has an open sandbox-like structure, and the characters are free to devise how they plan to stop the ritual. Some ways to do this are detailed in chapter 3, but the DM has complete freedom to decide on additional methods for the characters to achieve their goal.



ADVENTURE FLOWCHART



CHAPTER 1: A MATTER OF URGENCY

When the adventure starts, the characters have been called to the Department of Archaeology, Mining, and History in the Halls of Lore, home of most academics in Winterhold. The invitation comes from the Five, a group of key individuals in Winterhold and effectively the town's council. Not much was said in the invitation other than that the Five wish to hire the characters for an urgent and important quest.

ABOUT WINTERHOLD

A former dwarven mining settlement that has developed into a trading town, Winterhold is located in the mountains northwest of Buckwild, a vast, dangerous wilderness. The climate varies from cool summers to long, icy winters, but the town's ideal location means that merchants and other travellers pass through the gates all year round.

Winterhold was constructed in the entrance of an enormous cave and backs to a myriad of old, disused mining tunnels and shafts. For a time, the town was a military outpost that over the centuries has withstood the onslaught of dark elves as well as the threat of aggressive neighbouring rival kingdoms. Since those troubled times, Winterhold has enjoyed decades of peace, but recent attacks by dark elf raiders are pressing the town's meagre defences hard.

A ROCKY PAST

Because the town was founded by dwarves, many buildings display the trademarks of dwarven architecture and decorative style. Almost all structures are made from expertly fitted large blocks of granite and sandstone, and pine is the general choice for beams or flooring. Many walls and corners are adorned with rune-like patterns or blocky ornaments. Likewise, many statues found in open spaces or shrines are typically dwarven in style.

A stout ancient wall runs through the town near the edge of the cave, but as Winterhold has grown, hundreds of buildings have been built outside the protective barrier. In addition, there are many

outlying hamlets and farms. The town's coat of arms, proudly worn by the guards, consists of two crossed pickaxes over a large snowflake.

LOOMING SHADOWS

During the daytime, the town's shops and larger streets are busy with the hustle and bustle of commerce, artisans going about their business, couriers running errands, and guards patrolling every district.

There is little crime in Winterhold, but the guards are numerous and alert: Lately, dark elves have raided villages and the outermost parts of town during the night, murdering, plundering, and kidnapping everywhere they turn up.

See the appendix for more information about Winterhold.

MEETING THE FIVE

You arrive at the Halls of Lore just as the setting sun casts its last rays over Winterhold. As soon as you step inside, you are shown to a small cosy meeting room. Tall bookshelves packed with thick tomes stand along the dark panelled walls. A fire burns in a small hearth, and a pair of strong oil lamps fill the room with a soft golden light. In the middle of the room is a large oval table laden with maps, scrolls, feather quills, and bottles of ink.

The characters are welcomed by Edna Hellmund, member of the Five as well as head of the Department of Archaeology, Mining, and History. Edna is an elderly female dwarf with long snowy hair, and her dark blue velvet robe is shot through with copper thread. She checks the corridor and quickly closes the door behind the characters. It is obvious she is nervous.

Three more members of the Five sit around the table. Osil Twoaxe is a burly dwarf with a mane of dark hair and a scar that runs across his face. Next to Osil sits Tharl Merryheart, a short, red-haired male gnome with an arched nose, who is a diplomat and the Negotiator of Foreign Affairs; and Ulfrik Jormund, a middle-aged male dwarf with squinting eyes and a neatly trimmed black beard, who has the role of head of Magic and Sorcery. The fifth and last member of the Five is Kethra Dyer, Master of Trade, who has not shown up for the meeting, much to the concern of her colleagues.

BUSY TRANSLATORS

Two more people are attending the meeting. Sitting in a corner with a huge book open in his lap is Bjorn Amberclan, a jovial-looking middle-aged dwarf with copper-coloured hair crowning a balding patch. Next to Bjorn sits Ian von Boulderstock, a tall dwarf in an expensive brown suit. Ian looks slightly annoyed by the distraction and turns back to the book he is reading with a muffled harrumph.

As two of the academy's most experienced archaeologists, Bjorn and Ian have been charged with translating a long-lost journal. Many at the Halls of Lore hope the text will reveal information that can help protect Winterhold from the drow.

See the appendix for more information about Bjorn Amberclan and the members of the Five.

A MOLE IN THE MIDST

The reason for Kethra's absence is that her seven-year-old son and only child Edwin has been kidnapped by drow raiders. The dark elves threaten to cut the boy's throat unless Kethra supplies them with information about the whereabouts and schedules of Winterhold's guards. Kethra has agreed to the demands, but she is tormented by guilt and fear for her son's life. At this point, she is too distraught to participate in the Five's meetings.

THE QUEST

"Thank you for coming." Edna's face is pale, but her voice is steady as she continues. "We have dire news to share, and important decisions ahead of us."

Tharl Merryheart clears his throat. "As you know, the dark elves have raided our town and nearby villages, and kidnappings have become more and more frequent. It is not uncommon for drow to take prisoners, as their society uses slaves. However, the situation is worse than we thought."

"That is one way of describing it," Osil mutters under his breath.

"We believe," Tharl says bleakly, "that the dark elves will sacrifice the kidnapped people in a grisly ritual."

"Over one hundred innocent people from Winterhold and nearby villages have been kidnapped," Edna says gravely.

"But it gets worse," Osil says.

Osil explains that according to the logs of former captains, the drow have carried out large-scale kidnappings like these before. And the impending ritual is not just a gruesome mass sacrifice: It is designed to bless those present with great powers granted by the goddess known as the Spider Queen.

The last time this ceremony took place was one hundred and twenty years ago. It made the drow almost invincible, and they managed to invade Winterhold. Only the heroic deed of a guard captain prevented them from capturing the town (see the box *Night of the Dying Flames* later in this chapter). However, if the dark elves try to take Winterhold again, they may very well be successful.

But there is a sliver of hope. Bjorn and Ian have translated the journal of Queen Freja Swiftsteel, an ancient dwarven ruler who mapped the drow's caverns, and know where the ritual will take place. The ritual will be carried out in a location called the Gloomheart during the next dark moon, in three days. What is more, several of the underground drow forts will be guarded by fewer guards than normal at this time.

This means that the ritual presents a perfect opportunity for Winterhold's guards to capture one of the forts that is a strategic holdfast of great importance. If Winterhold can establish a permanent fortification there, the drow can be stopped once and for all. But storming the fort will take all of Winterhold's guards – no one can be spared. This is where the characters come in.

ENTER THE CHARACTERS

Only a small group of people would be able to sneak past the drow guards into the Gloomheart, so on behalf of the Five, Edna asks the characters to try to disrupt the ritual. The reward is 500 gp.

Thanks to the translated maps, the characters can travel to the location where the ritual will take place by the use of a route that Bjorn has plotted.

However, stopping the ritual will be difficult and dangerous, as the site will be heavily guarded. Also, Edna emphasises that the priestess who will lead the ritual is an lethal and cunning adversary.

"The dark elves are currently led by High Priestess Shade Drez'Lyn, and she is as shrewd as she is powerful. Her name has been whispered feverishly by dying dark elves left behind by their kin after raids. We have heard rumours that she has designed rituals so grotesque even other drow are in awe. The ritual she plans might make her soldiers both unstoppable and bloodthirsty. But if you can disrupt the ritual so Winterhold's guards can take the fort, Winterhold would be protected against the dark elves for the foreseeable future."

RIISING TO THE CHALLENGE

If the characters accept, they must leave very soon: The journey is expected to take over two days, and the ritual will occur at midnight during the black moon in three days. They can buy provisions in Winterhold if they hurry while the shops are still open. See the appendix for more information about what Winterhold offers in terms of goods and trade.



As the meeting draws to a close, Bjorn gives the characters a copy of a detailed map over the area and walks the characters back to the street.

NIGHT OF THE DYING FLAMES

Some parts of Winterhold still carry the marks of blades and arrows from the battle during which the town came close to being lost to the drow. The town survived only through a heroic deed by Captain Rigmar Bronzhammer and his closest men.

Grievously wounded, the captain and his few remaining troops locked themselves in the town hall along with a large number of dark elves and set the building on fire. It stopped the drow from escaping, but everyone inside perished.

Every eight years, Winterhold celebrates the guards' bravery by gathering at a plaza around a statue of the guard captain, erected where the town hall stood before it burnt down. There is a silent minute during which a bell tolls in one of the churches. A member of the Five holds a short speech and places a lit candle by the base of the statue. In the evening, everyone in town lights a candle in their window.

CHAPTER 2: IN SEARCH OF THE ENEMY

At the inner part of the cave in which half of Winterhold is situated, a pair of imposing gates and a large portcullis bar the way to the huge network of old mining tunnels that extend deep beneath the mountain. Guards are posted here at all times, and no civilians are let through unless they have been permitted by the Five.

The scene was different many centuries ago when hundreds of miners walked through these gates day and night in shifts. At that time, Winterhold's mining trade was booming, and the mines were a hive of activity. However, the escalating conflict with the dark elves caused the mining to cease, and the area was eventually sealed off. As there are too many tunnels beyond the gates to collapse without risking damage to Winterhold, the Five decided to board most of them up.

Together with Osil and Bjorn, you wait while the portcullis is pulled up with a slow, grating screech. The gates swing open and reveal an immense cavern filled with heavy shadows. Disintegrating timber and lengths of rusted, broken railway lie between piles of rock and pebbles. Here and there are tall stone signposts with faded symbols and script. The air is wet and cold, as if you were standing on a shoreline in winter.

"Remember to move with great caution," Osil says in a hushed voice. "It is vital that the dark elves do not learn that we plan an attack. You must keep your mission secret. The same goes for everything that has been discussed today."

"Godspeed, and good luck down there," Bjorn says quietly.

TROUBLE IN THE TUNNELS

The characters follow Bjorn's map through the old mining tunnels. For quite some time, the walk is easy, as Bjorn's map offers clear instructions about which tunnels to use and which to avoid.

However, towards the end of the first day, they are hit by setbacks. One of the tunnels they are meant to use has collapsed completely, leaving no chance of passage. Because of this, the characters need to backtrack and look for alternative tunnels. This takes several hours and leads them farther away from their planned route. They eventually identify a passage that takes them back on track, but it is a far more hazardous route than the one Bjorn intended.

VICIOUS VIEWS

After a series of twists and turns, the tunnel straightens and opens into a long passage with uneven ground and arched walls, all covered with crystals. If the characters carry a light source, the crystals glitter as if the characters were walking through a starlit night.

These crystals are beautiful to behold, but their edges are so sharp they easily cut through cloth and leather. The passage is 50 feet long and 20 feet across. Unless the characters can fly through this space, or avoid the crystals by other means, they need to succeed on two DC 14 Dexterity saving throws. On each fail, they suffer 1d6 piercing damage.

DEATH FROM ABOVE

Roughly an hour after the characters clear the tunnel with the crystals, they arrive at a 100-foot-long passage that is only 5 feet wide, making it significantly narrower than most previous tunnels. A series of long dark stalactites hang from the 20-foot-high ceiling. The ground is slick with a black, sticky substance that resembles lamp oil. A sharp acidic odour fills the air, as if they were standing in an apothecary's storage room.

One of the stalactites is in fact a **roper**, who waits here for unsuspecting creatures to pass below them. As soon as the characters have moved in beneath the roper, it attempts to snare them.

COMING CLOSER

Shortly after the characters defeat the roper, they finally reach a tunnel described on Bjorn's map, close to where the ritual will take place. These passages are narrow and chilly, and the walls drip with rank water. Characters who pass a DC 18 Wis (Perception) check detect a whiff of incense on the air. They also hear the very remote sound of chanting.

At this point, the characters are severely delayed: According to their best guess, merely two hours or less remain before the ceremony is due to start.

As the characters continue, they notice decorations and ornaments in alcoves and niches: Statues in gleaming onyx that portray graceful elven women wielding long daggers, and sculptures in black marble of huge spiders with elongated fangs. On a few occasions, large but harmless spiders hiss at the characters before they scuttle away into the dark. Big milky-white spiderwebs hang like canopies in the ceiling.

GUARDS IN THE DARK

After about twenty minutes, the characters arrive at a sharp bend. Around the corner is a 20-foot-wide corridor that leads up to a tall double gate some 30 feet away. The sound of chanting is more distinct but still distant.

The double gate is constructed from polished grey-black marble and framed by columns in the shape of two gigantic spider's legs. Above the gate is a large stone plaque with writing in Undercommon that reads *The Gloomheart*, followed by *Hallowed be this chamber in the name of the Spider Queen: Weaver of Chaos, Ruler of the Dark, Mother of all Drow*.

DEAD OR ALIVE

Four **drow** stand on guard on each side of the double gate. Due to the upcoming ritual, which will draw important dark elf guests keen to witness the bloodbath, they are tense and alert. But they are also confident, as they are in their territory, so they attack intruders on sight and call for help only if the fight goes badly.

Special: If the characters encountered Jezzara in the adventure *Find the Lost Expedition* and helped her escape, the four guards are dead. However,

as the corpses of the guards are hooked onto jagged parts of the decorations around the gate to hold them upright, they can easily be assumed to be alive from a distance. Unless the characters succeed on a DC 16 Wis (Perception) check, they believe the dark elves are simply slouching against the walls. If the characters venture closer, they quickly realize the drow are dead.

All the dark elves have deep stab wounds in their backs. The characters also find a note pinned to one of the dark elves by a dagger. A message is scribbled on the note in Undercommon: *Enjoy hell, bastards*. The note is signed *Jezzara*.

This message was left by Jezzara, who either guessed that the characters would seek to stop the ritual or overheard them planning to do so. After she was released, she decided to provide the characters with a little help by dispatching some of her former allies.



CHAPTER 3: INFILTRATING THE VENUE

When the characters enter the Gloomheart, one and a half hours remain until the ceremony starts. Roll 1d3 to find through which gates the characters. On a result of 1, they enter through the southern gates; on a 2, the western gates, and on a 3, the eastern gates.

STOPPING THE RITUAL

The ritual can be prevented in several ways, for example by:

- Defeating High Priestess Shade Drez'Lyn.
- Freeing the prisoners.
- Overturning or destroying the cauldron.
- Stealing the sacrificial dagger needed for the ceremony.

In addition, the DM has complete freedom to add ways to disrupt the high priestess's plans.

RANDOM ENCOUNTERS

There is plenty of activity in the Gloomheart as the drow prepare for the ritual.

Check this table every 15 minutes to see what happens while the characters are exploring:

1. A dark elf **scout** spots the characters from his hiding place behind a stalactite in the ceiling, but cannot make out if they are guests or intruders. Intrigued, he moves down to take a closer look.
2. Three **giant spiders** trained to guard the Gloomheart scuttle around the corner ahead. Characters who are successful on a DC 17 Wis (Perception) check hear them approach.
3. A **drow mounted guard** (see chapter 11 for the statistics of this new monster) hears a strange sound and rides closer to the characters' location to investigate. Characters who are successful on a DC 14 Wis (Perception) check hears the rider approach.
4. A visiting drow **noble** and her **veteran** bodyguard walk by while touring the area before they will attend the ritual. Characters

who are successful on a DC 14 Wis (Perception) check hear them approach.

5. Four **drow** guards walk past while inspecting the Gloomheart. Characters who are successful on a DC 12 Wis (Perception) check hear them approach.
6. Seven chanting drow priestesses appear. They all carry smoking censers and large prayer books. Characters who succeed on a DC 8 Wis (Perception) check hear them approach. The priestesses use the statistics for the **priest** in the core rulebooks.

COMPLICATIONS

As the ritual is an event of huge importance, the drow in the Gloomheart are tense. They expect no trouble this far from the surface, but they are still quick to inspect potential disturbances.

Any of the following can cause a drow mounted guard to investigate or raise the alarm:

- If the characters make a lot of noise, such as shout, enter combat, or use verbal spellcasting.
- If the characters cast loud or spectacular spells, such as *Fireball* or *Lightning bolt*.
- If the characters leave signs of violence behind, such as dead bodies. (Given the gory rituals that take place here, a few splashes of blood are unlikely to raise suspicion.)



CHAPTER 4: ABOUT THE GLOOMHEART



reated many hundreds of years ago after the vision of an influential priestess, the Gloomheart is a religious venue used only for particularly

important rituals. It was constructed with the aid of hundreds of slaves, all of whom were sacrificed to the honour of the Spider Queen as soon as the work was completed. A few other, similar venues exist in the realm of the drow, but few are so well-known among the dark elves as this site.

When a ritual takes place, many drow houses send representatives to watch the spectacle. A small number of dark elves, mainly warriors and novice priestesses, live here permanently as guards, for clerical training, or to maintain the venue.

The Gloomheart is overseen by a high priestess, who also leads the preparation and execution of rituals that take place here. This is a prestigious role, coveted by many drow priestesses, and attempts on the life of the high priestess in charge are as common as they are inventive. For this reason, most priestesses in control of the Gloomheart employ the best guards their money and reputation can buy.

DESCRIPTION

Located in a vast, dome-shaped cave, and surrounded by a 10-foot stone wall, the Gloomheart encompasses a cluster of various constructions and buildings centred around a greatly decorated church. Huge stalactites hang suspended like enormous fangs from a high ceiling filled with countless layers of spiderwebs. The ground is smooth, and most spaces between buildings are covered with carefully raked gravel.

The Gloomheart is generally filled with heavy shadows and counts as heavily obscured. However, torches are mounted along the outer walls in some places and provide bright light in a 20-foot radius

and dim light for another 20 feet. There are also sources of illumination outside some buildings as described below.

The walls feature many hand- and footholds that enable the characters to climb them and move around the perimeter in this way. However, this exposes the characters and gives them a -2 penalty on Stealth checks while they are climbing.

ENTRANCES

WEST ENTRANCE

This entrance is formed by a towering double gate engraved with weblike patterns. The stone columns on each side are sculpted like huge skeletal bones.

EAST ENTRANCE

These tall double gates are decorated with etchings of skulls with fangs for teeth. On each side is a column carved to resemble long writhing snakes.

SOUTH ENTRANCE

The gates in this entrance are framed by columns shaped like gigantic spider's legs. The gates themselves are engraved with scenes from a battlefield on which huge spiders are overrunning human soldiers.

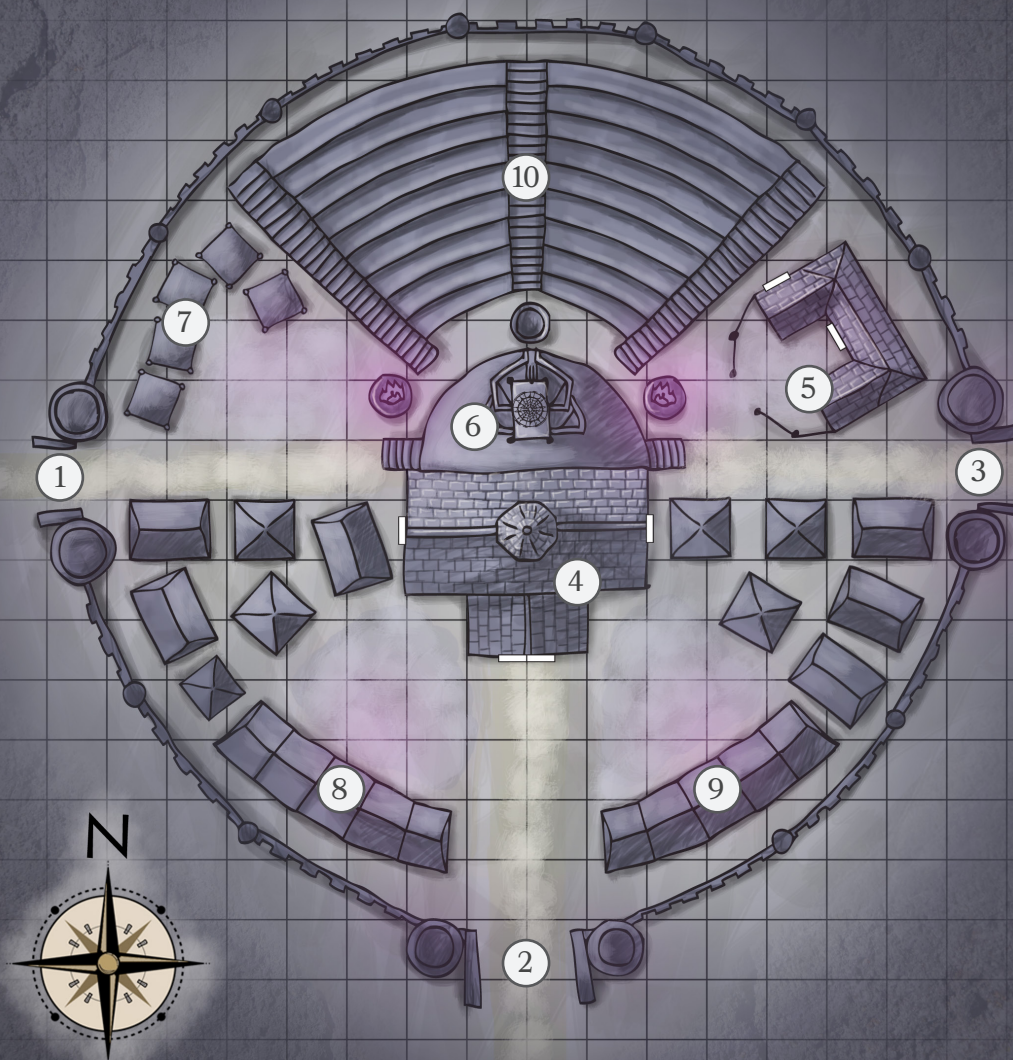
OTHER RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS

These buildings are used as living space for the priestesses and guards who dwell here permanently. Each residence consists of an undecorated single room, with a comfortable but plain bed, a table, a few chairs, and various everyday items of no monetary value.

If the characters investigate a house, roll 1d4 on this table to find who lives there (the priestesses use the statistics of a **priest**):

1. 1 drow priestess.
2. 2 drow priestesses.
3. 1 drow **guard**.
4. 1 drow **guard** and 1 priestess.

GLOOMHEART



MAP LEGEND

— DOOR / GATE

One square = 20 feet

DROW RITUAL VENUE

1, 2, 3: Entrances. 4: The Church of the Spider Queen. 5: Shade Drez'lyn's house. 6: The Scene.
7: Prison. 8, 9: Stables. 10: Amphitheatre

CHAPTER 5: THE SPIDER QUEEN'S CHURCH

The walls of this tall, single-storey church are richly decorated with etchings that portray a vast horde of spiders. Its roof features rows of leering gargoyles, and it is crowned with a towering spire. At the top of the spire is a statue of a drow priestess in deep prayer. The arched, narrow windows are fitted with beautiful stained glass.

Two tall stalagmites just to the south of the church have been carved to serve as braziers filled with glowing coal, which provide dim light with a 20-foot radius.

The church has two entrances. To the south are the main gates, a pair of thin alabaster doors surrounded by a huge sculpture of a spider, its legs wrapped around the doorframe. On the other side of the church, a pair of marble doors offer access to the scene on which the sacrifices take place.

Both gates are unlocked, but four **drow** stand guard on each side of the main entrance.

INSIDE THE CHURCH

1. STORAGE

The door to this room is locked. The lock requires a successful DC 8 Dex (Thieves' tools) to pick.

Inside the room, the walls are lined with shelves that hold nine steel goblets, two wine glasses, three bottles of good red wine, twelve rolled-up prayer carpets, a stack of eighty black wax candles, and five boxes with different types of incense. Three robes in black and red satin hang on pegs on one wall.

The items described are worth equal to their respective prices in the core rulebooks. If any character unrolls the prayer carpets, they disturb a sleeping **spider** that attacks the nearest creature.

2. CENTRAL PRAYER HALL

This huge room takes up the vast majority of the space inside the church. The floor consists of long, perfectly fitted slabs of fine white marble. In one end of the room is a 10-foot tall altar in pure onyx and fashioned as an enormous spider, rising on its hind legs while spreading its front legs wide.

On the wall behind the altar hangs a large intricately woven tapestry that portrays a striking female drow. On each side of the altar is an ornate brazier in cast iron that burns with purplish flames, which provide bright light for 20 feet and dim light for another 20 feet. A row of black candles is lit on the altar and drips sooty wax onto the white marble floor.

TRAP

The floor within 5 feet of the altar is rigged with concealed pressure plates. Anyone who steps on one of the plates releases a cloud of bright green and strongly toxic gas that affects all creatures inside a 15-foot cube centred on the altar. Everyone inside this space must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or take 2d10 poison damage.

The pressure plates can be spotted by a successful DC 15 Wis (Perception) check and disabled by a DC 10 Dexterity check.

Anyone who takes a closer look at the tapestry notices that the motif consists of thousands of tormented faces in different hues. The fires in the braziers are purple because the coal is mixed with the incense kept in the storage.

3. TREASURY

The door to this room is made of steel (AC 18, 30 HP) and locked with a complex lock that requires a successful DC 15 Dex (Thieves' tools) to pick.

This room contains three large chests (AC 15, 15 HP each) in solid oak, reinforced with mithral bands. In the middle of the room is a small wooden table that holds a large glass bell jar.

Underneath the bell jar is a dagger that rests on a cushion of red velvet. Its blade is made from pure adamantite, while the silver-and-jade handle ends in a pommel fitted with a large ruby. The dagger does not show any signs of being magical, but the spell *Detect Evil and Good* reveals an intense aura of malice around the weapon.

There are also three drow priestesses (who use the statistics of the **priest** NPC in the core rulebooks) present in the room. They came here to discuss details around the upcoming ritual rather

than stand guard, but if the characters have caused any significant noise when entering the church, the drow have advantage on their initiative checks.

The chests contain spider-themed sculptures, candelabras, ornaments and other small decorations with a total value of 1450 sp. One of the chests also contains a short staff in polished ash, its upper half shaped like a skeletal arm that ends in a bony grasping fist.

The staff is a Staff of Withering. It has been left here temporarily by Shade, who often carries it around when she is inspecting the Gloomheart.

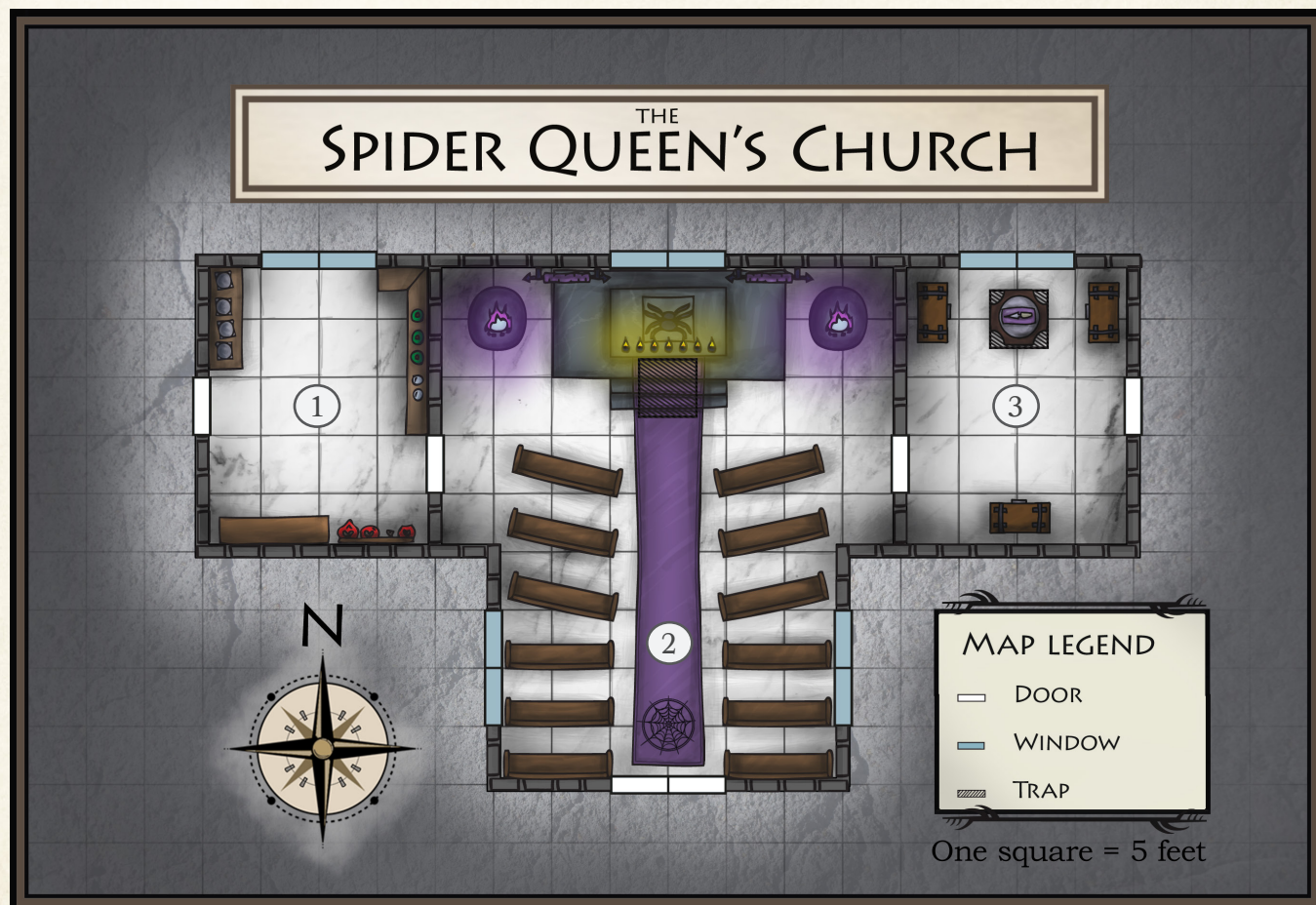
TRAP

The bell jar that covers the dagger is protected by a magical field that drains the life essence of interfering creatures. Any non-drow creature who touches the glass must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom save or take 4d10 necrotic damage and be stunned for 1 round. Moving the table does not trigger the trap.

The trap can be spotted as a faint, shimmering field around the glass by a successful DC 15 Wis (Perception) check. A successful DC 10 Intelligence check allows a character to remove the bell jar without setting off the magical ward, effectively disabling the trap.

The dagger underneath the bell jar is a sacrificial dagger called Shal'Asaschz (which loosely translates to *Blooddrinker*) that Shade Drez'Lyn will use during the ritual. It is cursed, and any creature that touches the dagger must immediately make three DC 16 Wisdom saving throws. See chapter 10 for more information about this item.

Development: One hour before the ritual, a group of six drow priestesses (using the statistics of the **priest** NPC in the core rulebooks) arrive to fetch the ritual dagger and transport it in a procession around the Gloomheart until the ritual starts. If the priestesses notice the characters, they attack immediately.



The centrepiece of the Gloomheart: The Spider Queen's Church.
1: Storage. 2: Central Prayer Hall. 3: Treasury.

CHAPTER 6: SHADE DREZ'LYN'S HOUSE

The two-storey building in which High Priestess Shade Drez'Lyn dwells is smaller and lower than the church, yet its gaudy architecture makes it resemble a miniature mansion rather than a regular house. Its façade features ornate gothic frames around the tall, leaded windows, and a dark purple ivy native to the underground world covers part of the exterior. Numerous gargoyles shaped like skulls, dragons and snakes grin down at the characters from the roof. A 10-foot tall iron fence encircles the courtyard. The gate is propped open.

At all times, two **drow** stand guard outside the front entrance, and another pair of **drow** are posted outside the entrance to the kitchen.

INSIDE, DOWNSTAIRS

The home of the most important resident in the Gloomheart is by far the most comfortable and luxurious building. All floors except in the kitchen are chequered in black and white and made from fine marble. The dark stone walls are polished to a mirror-like sheen, and the 20-foot ceiling is painted with patterns of thorny intertwined vines.

1. WELCOME HALL

This hall is cool and spacious. On the wall opposite the entrance, a staircase runs up to a landing with two large double doors. A huge arched doorway in the eastern wall opens to the dining room. Along the northern wall, just to the left of the staircase, stands a pale, delicately crafted statue portraying an elven woman in flowing robes, with a dagger held aloft in both hands and a blissful smile on her face.

2. DINING ROOM.

A great dining table in lacquered mahogany dominates this room. The high-backed chairs around the table have thick cushions in velvet, and two candelabras in wrought iron with slim unlit black candles stand on the table. A large glass cabinet contains enough exquisite crockery for ten people. In a corner is a wooden rack holding four bottles of red wine with dusty labels.

The high priestess has all her meals here. The

wine has been stolen from merchants on the surface and is of high quality: Each bottle is worth 15 gp.

3. KITCHEN

This kitchen contains a long oaken worktop, two tall shelves packed with ingredients, a large cast iron wood-burning stove, and a corner cabinet filled with kitchen utensils. In the western wall are a door and a window. The floor is made of thick timber.

There is a 50% chance that the chef, a male drow with the statistics of a **commoner**, is present.

INSIDE, UPSTAIRS

4. LANDING.

This landing offers access to the double doors that lead to the rooms upstairs. The low railing is made of black iron and shaped as chains. A huge window overlooks the courtyard in front of the house and the iron fence that encircles it.

5. BEDROOM.

In the middle of this room is a sumptuous bed filled with an abundance of velvet sheets and large pillows. Three empty wine glasses stand on a small lacquered table beside the bed. Two large freestanding mirrors in gothic frames have been placed on each side of the bed.

A large ornate wooden wardrobe stands in the southeast corner. In the southwest corner is a mannequin coat hanger in wrought iron that holds a long, superbly tailored blue-black robe. An elegant sword with a hilt shaped like the wings of a bat rests on a stand close to the mannequin.

The robe is a magical garment called a Ceremonial Robe of the Drow. It is worn by the high priestess during important rituals. See chapter 10 for more information about this item.

The wardrobe contains a large number of fine dresses and other luxurious clothes that belong to Shade Drez'Lyn.

TRAP

The sword that rests against the wall is a **flying sword** that is loyal to Shade Drez'Lyn. It has been

SHADE DREZ'LYN'S HOUSE



N

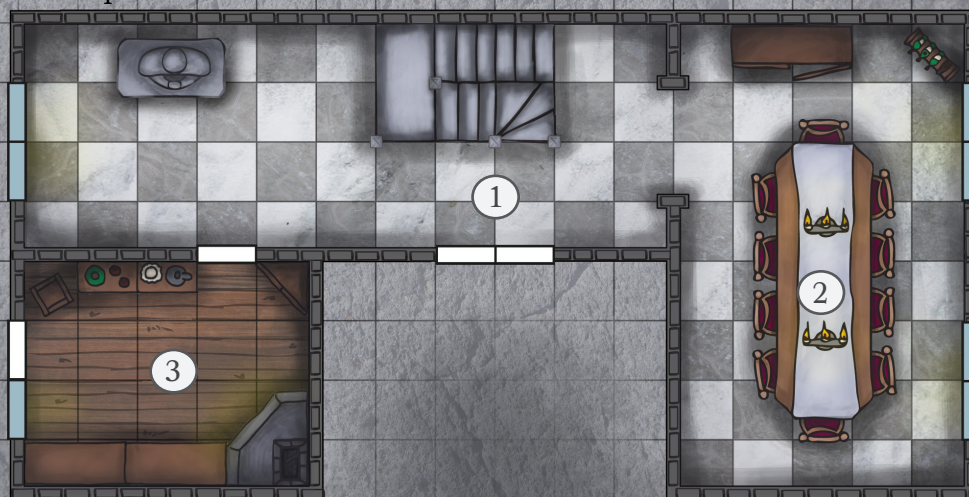
UPSTAIRS



MAP LEGEND

-  DOOR
-  WINDOW
-  TRAP

One square = 5 feet



DOWNSTAIRS

The residence of high priestess Shade Drez'Lyn.

1: Welcome Hall. 2: Dining Room. 3: Kitchen. 4: Landing. 5: Bedroom. 6: Bathroom. 7: Preparation Room. 8: Study.

left here to protect the robe on the mannequin against intruders and immediately attacks anyone who interferes with the robe.

6. BATHROOM.

The walls in this room are decorated with mosaics in hues of black and grey. In the middle of the floor, an extravagant bathtub in gleaming black steel rests on four iron legs shaped like a dragon's feet.

A huge round mirror is fitted on one of the walls, while hundreds of candles have been placed on a ledge that runs along one wall. A rack next to the door holds several quality towels and bathrobes. Five big copper pots filled with water stand on the floor in the northwest corner. The water is hot but not scorching.

Anyone who investigates the pots sees inside each of them a fist-sized, uneven rock that glows faintly green. This rock is a Steamgem, a wonderous item that heats liquids to a temperature perfect for bathing. Each rock weighs 1 lb. and can heat up to ten gallons.

7. PREPARATION ROOM.

This room contains a massive free-standing mirror in a heavy iron frame on small wheels. Four wardrobes hold a great variety of robes, cloaks, and other clothes in shades of red, purple, and black. In one corner is a massive chest in deep-brown oak, reinforced with thick iron bands.

TRAP

The chest is protected by a mechanism that fires a burst of poisoned needles if anyone tries to open its lid without pressing a concealed button.

All creatures within 5 feet must make a DC 14 Constitution saving throw. On a failed save, the creature takes 2d6 poison damage and is Poisoned for 1 minute. While poisoned in this way, the creature is Paralyzed. On a successful save, the creature takes half as much damage and is not Poisoned.

A successful DC 14 Wis (Perception) check reveals the trap and the button that disarms it, but only if the lock is inspected.

The chest contains 302 gp, 321 sp, seventeen small gems in various sizes and colours (worth a total of 50 gp), a bejewelled dagger worth 20 gp,

nine hairpins in silver worth 2 gp each, and three scrolls (*Fear*, *Gentle Repose*, and *Warding Bond*).

8. STUDY.

The most eye-catching feature in this room is a large plush divan with black padding and thick, spider-like legs that stands close to one wall. Four bookshelves on the opposite side of the room are filled with neatly stacked scrolls and tomes arranged in alphabetical order. A beautifully crafted writing desk stands under the windows. On the desk are several blank parchments, a selection of red-feathered quills, and two bottles of ink.

The tomes in the bookshelves cover a range of subjects, most of which are dark, grisly, and disturbing. Some of the works are valuable: Those who succeed on a DC 18 Int (Arcana) or (History) check can identify five books that will collect a total of 25 gp at a collector in a large city.

SHADE DREZ'LYN

Shade Drez'Lyn is haughty and self-assured, but she has obtained her position through tactical wit. If she notices the characters before they encounter her, she casts *Guardian of Faith* and then hides to wait for a perfect moment to surprise the intruders. In combat, she opens with *Hypnotic pattern* and follows up with melee attacks. If she loses more than 45 HP, she drinks a Potion of Flying and tries to escape.

If she is unaware of any intruders, and has not been drawn elsewhere due to reports of trouble or for some other reason, the drow high priestess sits by her desk and studies a thick religious book.

Read the following out loud as she attacks:

Shade Drez'Lyn glares at you disdainfully.

"Pathetic cretins," she says calmly. "How dare you defile my home with your presence. Even a lifetime in the slave pens would not be sufficient punishment for this offence. I will enjoy watching you suffer before you die – if I ever let you die!"

With a nasty grin that twists her features, she raises a hand and begins to weave a spell.

SHADE DREZ'LYN

Shade is a female **drow ritual zealot** (NE). She is calculating, fond of luxury, and loves inflicting pain on others. Most of all, she delights in tormenting those who reject the superiority of the goddess known as the Spider Queen, and ripping the hearts out of the chests of heathens fills her with boundless joy.

Her skin is lustrous, dusky, and flawless. Whenever she leaves her house, her long white hair is combed to perfection and interwoven with strands of pure silver. Her long, flowing silk robes are dyed purple with embroidery in black. Shade's holy symbol is a coin-sized silver medallion with the symbol of the Spider Queen, carried on a black choker band around her neck.

Trait: I am the foremost herald of the Spider Queen. As such, all others are beneath me.

Ideal: Sadist. Causing pain infuses me with life. (Evil)

Bond: The Gloomheart is the nexus of my existence, and I will destroy anyone who threatens it.

Flaw: I am so assured of my magical prowess that I can become overconfident.



CHAPTER 7: SCENE, PRISON & STABLES

THE SCENE

This area consists of a large stage in the shape of a raised semicircular stone platform, immediately adjacent to the church and facing a steep amphitheatre. Two huge iron braziers burn with purple flames on each side of the scene, while a pair of short stairs lead up to the platform. The braziers provide bright light for 20 feet and dim light for another 20 feet. A huge purple tapestry hangs on the back of the church and forms a backdrop for the stage.

The sacrificial table at the edge of the stage is a slab of onyx with iron shackles in each corner. Countless stains of dried blood are found on the table and the platform around it. Rows of depressions in the table are used to channel the blood of victims into a huge tarnished silver cauldron on the ground just below the stage. The cauldron is currently half-filled with blood. To characters able to detect magic or alignments, the cauldron is strongly magical and evil.

THE CAULDRON

If the characters overturn or destroy the cauldron or spill out the blood, the souls of hundreds of previously sacrificed victims are released and dissolve in streaks of misty tormented faces accompanied by harrowing shrieks. All characters within 50 feet must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or be Stunned for 1d6 rounds.

Also, this act immediately causes great anguish and panic among all dark elves in the Gloomheart. This gives the drow disadvantage on fighting, while the characters have advantage on Stealth checks for as long as they remain in the Gloomheart.

Development: Ten minutes before the ritual, the prison warden Styrix (described later in this chapter), accompanied by two **drow** guards and two **drow mounted guards** (see chapter 11), arrives here with the shackled prisoners in tow.



THE PRISON

The captives held by the drow are imprisoned in five large robust cages placed side by side. Each cage holds about 25 prisoners and has a single locked door. All prisoners are bound by hand and ankle manacles in black steel.

The prisoners are mainly dwarves and humans, as they are taken from Winterhold and its nearby villages. One **drow** stands guard on either end of the row of cages.

PRISON WARDEN STYRIX

Unless alerted to the characters' presence by noise or alarms, the prison warden Styrix stands immediately in front of the cages. Styrix is responsible for keeping the prisoners subdued until they are sacrificed. He is remarkably tall and muscled for a dark elf, and his long hair is unusually unkempt.

Styrix is an experienced warrior and feared among other dark elves for his ferocious fighting technique. He fights as a **gladiator** but wields a greatsword (2d6 + 4 slashing damage) instead of a spear. Always willing to draw blood and looking for a fight, he will leave temporarily to investigate disruptions that come to his attention.

FREEING THE PRISONERS

Characters must succeed on a DC 14 Dex (Thieves' tools) to pick the lock of a cage. Styrix carries the keys to the cages on a keyring that hangs from his belt.

If the characters approach the cages without attempting to use stealth, the captives whisper pleas for help. This can alert Styrix, who will hear the commotion if he succeeds on a DC 14 Wis (Perception) check. If the characters are successful on a DC 12 Intelligence check, they can figure out how to signal to the prisoners that they need to be quiet.

Development: Fifteen minutes before the ritual is due to start, two **drow mounted guards** arrive at the prison to take the prisoners to the scene together with Styrix.

THE STABLES

The dark elves keep their lizard mounts in these stables, which are made up of two groups of five boxes in stone and wood pilfered from loggers on the surface. One **giant lizard** is kept in each box. All doors are kept shut by sturdy latches.

A rancid, spicy pong rests over the area, and anyone within 20 feet of the stables who succeeds on a DC 10 Wis (Perception) check hears hissing and wheezing. A wooden box next to the stables contains strips of dried meat of unknown origin, which are used as treats for the lizards.

The lizard mounts are foul-tempered but more intelligent than regular reptiles, and while they do not like their drow masters, they dislike other races even more. If the characters venture within 10 feet of one of the lizards and are spotted by them, the lizards hiss loudly. This might draw the attention of any other dark elves in the vicinity.

A lizard can be pacified with a successful DC 20 Wis (Animal handling) check. If the characters use the treats found in the box next to the stables, the check is made with advantage. At the DM's discretion, the lizards can be used as mounts by characters who succeed on the check.

Development: If the lizards are released, these do not attack the drow but make the most of their unexpected freedom to rampage around the area in search of food and carnage. This gives the players advantage on Stealth checks until the drow have caught and returned the lizards to the stables 10 minutes later.

Some of the lizards will pick up the scent of the prisoners and go straight for the cages in the hope of a snack. Characters who succeed on a DC 12 Intelligence check will see a few lizards dart off purposefully towards the prison.

CHAPTER 8: IF THE RITUAL IS DISRUPTED

The interference of the ritual sends the drow into immediate and frenzied terror. The resident guards and priestesses make for the nearest escape route, as they fear the wrath of the high priestess as well as the Spider Queen.

The giant lizards panic, burst out of their stable boxes, and chase around the area, biting at everyone in their path. Likewise, all visiting dark elves will run for the nearest exit, with a few taking the opportunity to thin the competition by stabbing their rivals in the chaos.



GETTING OUT

To escape the area unnoticed while the drow are in turmoil, the characters must succeed on a DC 15 Dex (Stealth) check. If any of the characters fail the check, roll 1d4 and consult the table below to see what happens.

Remember that a disruption of the ritual and the ensuing tumult grant the characters advantage on Stealth checks, while the drow have disadvantage on attack rolls.

1. A raging **drow mounted guard** turns a corner ahead and storms at the characters.
2. Two escaped and frenzied **giant lizards** leap over the body of a dead dark elf (a visiting noble who was stabbed in the back by a rival) and attack the characters.
3. A **giant spider** drops down from the ceiling onto a random character in hope of a snack.
4. If Shade Drez'Lyn is still alive, she appears in front of the characters and unleashes all her powers to avenge her thwarted plans. If she already has been defeated, roll again.

If the characters make their way through the mayhem and manage to leave Gloomheart, they can safely return to Winterhold.

THE AFTERMATH IN THE DARK

Failing to complete the ritual is particularly bad news for Shade Drez'Lyn. Given the immense shame and her inevitable fall from the Spider Queen's favour, she is likely to sacrifice herself at the earliest chance to avoid a greater and more drawn-out punishment at the hands of her fellow drow.

The disaster is also likely to lead to an internal power struggle within the drow society over rulership of the Gloomheart. The Spider Queen goddess will be gravely disappointed and might even pay the drow a personal visit to set an example.

CHAPTER 9: THE CLOSING OF A TRILOGY

Upon return to Winterhold, the characters are greeted by Bjorn, who is happy to see the characters alive. Once the party arrives at the Halls of Lore, Edna, Osil, Tharl, and Ulfrik are present in the meeting room.

Osil gives them a rundown of what has happened:

“I just got back with all of my guards,” Osil says, “and I have great news. We managed to invade the drow fort as we planned. The guards of Winterhold are in charge now. But we could not have done it without the diversion you created. I am not sure how you pulled it off, but I look forward to finding out. This will be a story I will want to hear more than once!”

“Well done, all of you,” Tharl says, and Ulfrik nods in agreement.

“We have much to celebrate today,” Edna says. “The dark elves are no longer a threat to us. Winterhold is safe, at least for now. You have truly deserved this.”

The Five give the characters a small iron-clad chest that contains 500 gp.

THE MOLE

Osil has some more news to share. When he took part in storming the drow fort, he discovered why the drow have been able to raid Winterhold and its villages at the worst possible times: The dark elves have received intelligence about the guards’ schedules from Kethra Dyer, Winterhold’s Master of Trade and a member of the Five.

Osil quickly returned to the town to confront Kethra, but she was nowhere to be found. A letter was found in her quarters in which Kethra explained how she regretted her betrayal, and that she was forced into coercion: The drow has kidnapped her young son and threatened to murder him unless she agreed to work as their informant.

When she realized that the drow might be defeated, she knew that her secret would be revealed, and she has chosen to go into exile, forsaking her title, house, and inheritance. Kethra ends her letter by saying that as far as she is concerned, her greatest punishment is that she will never see her beloved son grow up.

NEW MYSTERIES ON THE HORIZON

“This document was found by Osil in the dark elves’ fort,” Edna says and glances at a scroll on the table as if it were a poisonous snake. The broken wax seal on the scroll is shaped like a grinning skull surrounded by a ring of stars.

“It is a message in Undercommon, addressed to the high priestess. The message describes how the drow have agreed to intensify their search for the Pledge, the legendary orb. Why they want it, or how they plan to use it in their evil schemes, we do not know. At least not yet.”

AT THE CENTRE OF ATTENTION

By the time the meeting is over, news of the characters' heroic act has spread all over the town of Winterhold, and the main streets are milling with laughing, celebrating citizens.

Edna guides the characters to the town square, where many hundreds of people have gathered. As soon as the characters arrive, a loud cheer erupts, and countless hats and jugs of ale are raised in tribute.

During an impromptu ceremony led by Edna, the characters are rewarded with a silver pin in the shape of the town's coat of arms: Two crossed pickaxes over a large snowflake. She also bestows the characters with the title Friends of Winterhold, which confers them with the status

of trusted allies and valued advisors to the town. It also means they always will find shelter and protection in Winterhold for as long as they live.

What is more, the pin provides the characters with a 10% discount on goods and services at every shop, vendor and inn throughout Winterhold, and the heroes are frequently stopped in the street by thankful residents for days after their triumph.

THE END

The adventures continue in
The Frozen Labyrinth, part 1 of the
Rise of the Ice Dragons trilogy.



CHAPTER 10: NEW MAGIC ITEMS

SHAL'ASASCHZ

Weapon (dagger), very rare (requires attunement)

You gain a +2 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

Curse. This dagger is cursed and possessed by the spirit of a dark elf wizard, who willingly sacrificed her soul to imbue the weapon with dark powers. Over time, the soul of the already unhinged mage has become raving mad and even more wicked, and finds great pleasure in corrupting those who touch the dagger. *Shal'Asaschz* loosely translates to *Blooddrinker*.

Becoming attuned to the dagger extends the curse to you. As long as you are cursed in this way, you are unwilling to part with the dagger and keep it on your person at all times.

ADDITIONAL EFFECTS

Any creature that merely touches the dagger must make up to three DC 16 Wisdom saving throws.

- If the first check fails, the creature changes their alignment to evil. They also become strongly attached to the weapon and refuse to part with it. In addition, they must make another saving throw.
- If the second saving throw fails, the creature's alignment changes to lawful (evil). They must also make another saving throw.
- If the third saving throw fails, the creature becomes devoted to the drow goddess known as the Spider Queen and passionately follows her doctrine.

A creature who is cursed in this fashion has an irresistible desire to use the dagger in combat and has disadvantage on attack rolls when using any other weapon (unless the dagger is wielded at the same time as an off-hand weapon).

The wielder has advantage with the dagger on attack rolls against dwarves and all kinds of elves except drow.

What is more, the wielder of the dagger hears a recurring deranged female voice whisper encouragingly when they commit evil (or just slightly immoral) acts.

The curse can be broken by casting *Banishment* on the dagger, which forces the spirit to leave the dagger and turns the weapon into a normal dagger with no other properties.

Its great craftsmanship makes it worth 700 sp.



CEREMONIAL ROBE OF THE DROW

Wondrous item (robe), rare (requires attunement)

This robe is made in fine midnight blue velvet. Its long flowing sleeves are matched by a deep cowl and a broad satin belt. The robe is always cool to the touch regardless of the surrounding temperature.

The powers exhibited by the robe increase as the character that wears it becomes more experienced. When a humanoid puts it on for the first time, the robe bestows the wearer with its first-tier powers. If carried continuously by the same individual, the robe's second-tier powers are unlocked after two levels are gained by its wearer. Its third and final tier powers are unlocked when two additional levels are gained.

For example:

- If a 1st-level character puts on the robe, it exhibits its tier 1 powers.
- When the character reaches level 3, the robe's tier 2 powers are unlocked.
- Finally, when the character reaches level 5, the robe's tier 3 powers are unlocked.

POWERS

Tier 1

- The wearer is granted a +2 bonus to Int (Arcana) checks.
- The wearer gains a +1 bonus to their AC, in addition to other armour worn (including that provided by the spell *Mage armor*).
- The wearer has superior Darkvision with a range of 180 feet.

Tier 2

- The wearer's spell attack bonus increases by 1.
- Once per day, the wearer can cast the spell *Moonbeam* without expending a spell slot. The wearer does not need to have the spell on their spell list.

Tier 3

- The wearer's spell save DC and spell attack bonus increase by 1.



- Once per day, the wearer can cast the spell *Shadowblade* without expending a spell slot. The wearer does not need to have this spell on their spell list.

When used in dim light or darkness, the robe also enables its wearer to withdraw into the shadows and become a more difficult target. This effect is identical to the spell *Sanctuary* and can be used once per day. The effect recharges at dusk.

CHAPTER 11: NEW MONSTERS

DROW ZEALOT

The drow zealot is a specific type of priestess who is wholly dedicated to the task – or art, as they prefer to call it – of leading large rituals, especially those that include human sacrifices.

They are selected from the dark elves who study to become priestesses, after which they undergo long and intense training in leading rituals according to ancient, complicated rules documented in the *Scripts of Black Rapture*, a holy text said to have been written by the Spider Queen herself.

Drow zealots are found in many drow cities, but there is usually only one at every major temple, as they pride themselves on their virtue to such an extent that infighting is inevitable. Some of the most devious and committed drow zealots rise to become leaders of dark elf Houses, and their unerring devotion to the drow pantheon means they are highly respected in all quarters. However, it is widely held that drow zealots are prone to become unhinged, which makes them all the more feared.

While the drow zealot is a powerful spellcaster, she is also dangerous in melee combat. All drow zealots have been trained in using knives and daggers of all sizes for battle as well as execution, and their instructors include both elite warriors and skilled assassins. The dagger used by drow zealots is typically a masterfully crafted weapon with jagged edges dripping with poison. This makes the drow zealot a formidable opponent to anyone naïve enough to mistake her grace for weakness.



DROW ZEALOT

Medium humanoid (elf), neutral evil

Armor Class 16 (black lizard scale mail)

Hit Points 74 (13d8 + 15)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	17 (+3)

Saving throws Dex +5, Con +3, Wis +4

Skills Insight +5, Perception +4, Religion +7, Stealth +4

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Abyssal, Elvish, Undercommon

Challenge 8 (3,900XP)

Fey Ancestry. The drow zealot has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic can't put her to sleep.

Innate Spellcasting. The drow zealot's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 15). She can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *dancing lights*

1/day each: *darkness*, *faerie fire*, *levitate* (self only)

Spellcasting. The drow zealot is an 8th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks).

The drow zealot has the following cleric spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance*, *chill touch*, *prestidigitation*, *thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *command*, *charm person*, *divine favour*, *shield of faith*

2nd level (3 slots): *enthrall*, *hold person*, *zone of truth*

3rd level (3 slots): *clairvoyance*, *fear*, *hypnotic pattern*

4th level (1 slot): *divination*, *compulsion*, *guardian of faith*

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

Righteous Vengeance. If the drow zealot makes a critical hit with a dagger, she can make an additional melee weapon attack as a bonus action.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The drow zealot makes three attacks with her dagger.

Ceremonial dagger. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1d4 + 2 slashing damage plus 4d6 poison damage.

DROW MOUNTED GUARD

Drow mounted guards are skilled warriors and expert riders of a type of giant lizards that are native to the domain of the dark elves.

The drow mounted guard wears chain mail over black leather armour and uses slim shields decorated with the crest of the House they serve. Traditionally, their main weapon is a light, sleek and barbed halberd, but many drow mounted guards also carry scimitars and daggers as backup arms.

The lizards that serve as mounts are usually bright blue or blue-green and have long tails covered with short spines. They are known and feared for their sharp teeth and nasty temperament.

DROW MOUNTED GUARD

Medium humanoid (elf), lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (chain mail)

Hit Points 38 (7d8 + 7)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
13 (+1)	16 (+3)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	12 (+1)

Saving throws Dex +5, Con +3, Wis +4

Skills Animal Handling +6, Perception +4, Stealth +4

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Elvish, Undercommon

Challenge 3 (700XP)

Fey Ancestry. The drow mounted guard has advantage on saving throws against being charmed, and magic cannot put them to sleep.

Mounted. Unless they become unmounted or choose to dismount, the drow mounted guard rides a giant lizard and fights using the mounted combat rules in the core rulebooks.

Lethal Rush. When the drow mounted guard and its mount move at least 10 feet in a straight line immediately before attacking, it can make an additional melee weapon attack with the halberd.

Parry. Once per round, the drow mounted guard can add 2 to its AC against one melee attack that would hit it. To do so, the drow mounted guard must see the attacker and wield a shield.

Terrifying teeth. The fangs of its mount give the drow mounted guard advantage on Charisma (Intimidation) checks.

Unruly reptile syndrome. The lizards used as mounts by the drow mounted riders are very unpredictable and extremely bad-tempered. If the rider leaves the mount, the giant lizard must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or go on a rampage and attack the nearest creature for 2d6 rounds.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. If the rider makes a melee weapon attack, the mount can make a bite attack.

Honourguard halberd. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. Hit: 1d10 + 3 slashing damage.

Giant lizard bite. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. Hit: 1d8 + 2 piercing damage.

CHAPTER 12: LEGEND & LORE

THE RITUAL

The sacrifices planned by the dark elves will make the drow an almost unstoppable force. Known as *Tar'zael Gash Nar-haul*, this particular ritual has helped them conquer large areas.

The ritual invariably draws a large audience of other dark elves, usually from the most prominent members of houses across the drow society, as it is seen as a privilege to be invited to the event.

The ritual hinges on three important parts. First and foremost, there must be among the drow a priestess whose standing with the Spider Queen goddess is sufficiently high. When such a priestess arises, she will have a sudden and feverish vision of cities on the surface crumbling under a wave of crimson blood. This is a sign that the priestess is considered worthy and that early preparations for the ceremony can begin.

Secondly, there must be a supply of living sacrifices, whose lifeblood will be imbued with great and terrifying arcane powers as it is spilt and collected in a cauldron. Thirdly, the ritual must take place during the occurrence of a Black Moon, meaning the opportunity arises only every twenty-ninth month.

FROM BAD TO WORSE

The effects of the ritual upon the drow are powerful and frightening to behold. After the last sacrifice has been made, the Spider Queen reaches out from her extraplanar home and enchants the blood-filled cauldron.

The dark elves who then drink this blood are infused with powers that transform them into extremely fast and mindlessly savage warriors with twisted, almost demonic features. This effect lasts for nine days.

ORIGIN

Much of the origin of this ritual has been lost to time, but it is believed that the first high priestess who carried out the sacrifices was Alyeari Helviath of House T'orrza, renowned for her ruthlessness and faultless commitment to the Spider Queen.

Legend has it that one evening, Alyeari emerged from her abode in a halo of bright, searing indigo, and proclaimed that her house was chosen by the Spider Queen to build a site for a special ritual that would bring great prosperity to all drow. She soon began to draw up plans for the venue, and commanded a prominent wizard to craft a dagger needed for the sacrifices that would take place during the ritual.

Many who witnessed this event also saw an impossibly large spider gaze down at the streets below from the vast ceiling above the city. Most concluded that this was an avatar of the Spider Queen, or even the goddess herself, who had come to witness a critical moment.

Alyeari swiftly gathered the resources needed to build the site she had seen in her vision. She named it Gloomheart and lived there until she was poisoned by a rival priestess some two hundred years later. Since that day, seven other priestesses have been in charge of the Gloomheart, all of whom have been replaced after they were openly slain, died under mysterious circumstances, or simply vanished. Other, less significant rituals are held in the Gloomheart too, but none are even remotely as important as the *Tar'zael Gash Nar-haul*.

LONGING FOR REVENGE

Around one hundred and twenty years ago, the ritual enabled the drow almost to conquer Winterhold. Using weapons infused with unholy magic, the drow attacked the town in full force and quickly breached its defences. Streets and alleys ran red with the blood that day as the elves slew all in their path.

Had it not been for the captain of Winterhold's guard, who trapped the bulk of the drow army inside a building and set it on fire, the town would have been overrun. The captain, who lost his life along with the dark elves, is celebrated as a hero among the citizens of Winterhold. Underground, however, the captain is remembered as a conniving villain, and the dark elves long to defeat the town once and for all.

APPENDIX

NON-PLAYER CHARACTERS: THE FIVE

EDNA HELLMUND

Edna is an elderly female dwarven **noble** (LG). She has long snowy hair, blue eyes, and usually dresses in simple but high-quality robes in dark, muted colours. She is an experienced scholar and heads up the Department of Archaeology, Mining and History at the Halls of Lore. In addition, she is presently part of the Five, the leaders of Winterhold. Her family has been resident in Winterhold for many generations, and she knows all the influential members of the town. Edna's small modest house is one of the oldest in Winterhold and located near the Halls of Lore.

Trait: Patience is a virtue and the key to great insights. But when patience is not enough, one must act with firmness.

Ideal: Everyone has their place in the world. Mine is at the heart of knowledge.

Bond: Winterhold's walls may look unbreakable, but the town has been on the brink of disaster before. It needs me to keep its people safe.

Flaw: **Lofty.** I disrespect those who refuse to see that one book is worth a hundred swords.

OSIL TWOAXE

Osil Twoaxe is a middle-aged male dwarf **veteran** (LG). His braided hair and beard are inky black and secured by small wooden clasps. More often than not, his expression is a deep scowl, and his temper runs hot, but he is also generous and laughs easily. He wears battered scale mail, a hefty mace, and a corn blue woollen cloak. As the captain of Winterhold's guards, he is often found near or on the walls, alternatively in the barracks.

Trait: The world is too blunt for subtlety and charades. Better to be direct and earnest.

Ideal: I spend most of my time moving among the citizens of Winterhold. That way, I am the first to know of all that happens.

Bond: The guards of Winterhold are my family. I know their every name and face, and I hold myself responsible for their fate.

Flaw: **Impatient.** I cannot stand waiting. Especially when there is nothing else I can do.

KETHRA DYER

Kethra is a human female **noble** (N) and head of the Dyer family, counted among Winterhold's wealthiest merchants. Kethra is pale, has large green eyes, and keeps her hair in a long tidy braid. She wears well-tailored shirts and waistcoats in distinct colours that match her fine trousers and shoes.

Kethra is usually calm and composed. A lifetime as a merchant has taught her to hide her feelings. Since she is responsible for the wealth of both Winterhold and her family's estate, she values forbearance and loathes haste. However, at present, Kethra's son is held hostage by the dark elves who launch raids against Winterhold. Because of this, she covertly supplies the drow with details about the guard patrols around town.

Trait: Many fools rush into situations and come out poor, wretched, or not at all. I take my time to understand all circumstances and conditions. Only then do I act.

Ideal: My family's sound actions in the past have made our name, reputation, and hometown prosper. I will continue and strengthen the legacy of the Dyers.

Bond: Money and status are important, but they are nothing compared to family. I value my only son more than anything else in life.

Flaw: **Fickle.** I sometimes lose myself in lengthy calculations and flare up if I am interrupted.

THARL MERRYHEART

Tharl is a male gnome **noble** (NG) who has taken up the role as diplomat and Negotiator of Foreign Affairs in Winterhold. He is short for a gnome, with an aristocratic arched nose of which he is quite proud, and he keeps his wavy red hair neatly combed. He usually wears blue heavily decorated jackets, trousers in contrasting colours, and high leather boots of excellent quality.

His role includes dealing with diplomatic issues and security questions with other nearby towns and communities. Given Winterhold's isolated location in the mountains, this means he travels quite a bit and rarely stays for a lengthy time in Winterhold.

Trait: There is always a solution to a problem, no matter how tangled or sensitive the issue may be. One needs only patience and a positive outlook to find it.

Ideal: I have studied for years to reach this position. My journey has made me see the value of immersing oneself in knowledge.

Bond: My connections in Winterhold and other towns are like close friends, and I care for them greatly.

Flaw: Assumptious. It happens that I misjudge other people's lack of optimism for dullness or even stupidity.

ULFRIK JORMUND

Ulfrik is a middle-aged male dwarf and an experienced **mage** (LN). He is tall for a dwarf and sports a neatly trimmed black beard. When out and about, he dresses in long flowing robes, often embroidered with scrollwork and patterns.

Usually squinting at everyone around him, Ulfrik is often (correctly) taken for a nearsighted scholar who has spent most of his life buried in dusty tomes. As the head of Magic and Sorcery in a time when his hometown is under frequent attack, he is deeply concerned with the town's faltering defences.

Trait: I endeavour tirelessly to make those who wield tools and weapons see the elegance of magic.

Ideal: When in trouble, one should look to libraries, not to violence.

Bond: My collection of books is worth more to me than any other material item.

Flaw: Biased. I tend to rely on a spell or two as the perfect response to any challenge, and forget about other means to an end.

BJORN AMBERCLAN

Bjorn Amberclan is a middle-aged male mountain dwarf **commoner** (LG). He is short for a dwarf and has copper-coloured hair around a bald patch. Specialized in archaeology, he is currently in Buckbridge to research the long-gone Ironshield Clan, especially their ancient language.

Trait: Fieldwork is all good and well, but the best kind of research is the type that can be done surrounded by books in a comfy inn.

Ideal: I am deeply passionate about archaeology and my special research area is ancient runes.

Bond: I search for information about the Ironshield Clan that can help protect my hometown of Winterhold.

Flaw: Relaxed. I am comfortable to a fault and try hard to avoid both dangers and unnecessary adventures (I loathe outdoor camping).

THE HISTORY OF WINTERHOLD

Winterhold is a town of about 3,000 people situated partially inside a gargantuan cave in a mountain. A quarter of the town is located below ground, and another quarter is found inside the mountain behind the old wall, which runs along the mouth of the cave. The remaining half sits outside the mountain and the wall.

A TUMULTUOUS PAST

The town traces its origin back almost 1,200 years, when a group of dwarven miners discovered promising veins of ore, especially silver and rare adamantine, deep in the cave and decided to mine the depths of the mountain. There was plenty of ore to be found, but it was also difficult to mine, so when the dwarves realized they would spend considerable time in the area, they drew up plans for how to expand their settlement and turn it into a permanent home. Winterhold was born.

Within a couple of decades, Winterhold was a small but proper mining town that saw frequent visits by traders journeying through the area. The town grew in size and added a permanent palisade as protection against dangerous beasts and raiding orcs.

THE IRONSHIELD CLAN

Around two centuries later, another dwarven society known as the Ironshield Clan arrived in the region. The clan's queen, Freya Swiftsteel, was an excellent tactician. Under her command, the Ironshield Clan conquered more and more land and expanded their kingdom towards the mountains in which Winterhold is located.

In response, Winterhold bolstered its defences with allies and constructed a stout stone wall, effectively becoming a military outpost. But Winterhold faced more threats: The dark elves who lived under Winterhold did not appreciate how Winterhold's mines intruded on their territory, and made life for the mining dwarves dangerous.

This marked the start of a drawn-out conflict between Winterhold, the drow, and the Ironshield Clan. The future of Winterhold looked particularly grim at one point when the Ironshield Clan and the drow entered a pact designed to crush Winterhold. However, due to a series of misunderstandings and unfortunate events, the dark elves undermined and destroyed the Ironshield Clan's stronghold.

In retaliation, Queen Freja triggered a trap she had prepared in secret and flooded the drow's tunnels, forcing the dark elves to retreat. In a flash, both forces were heavily decimated. Over the following months, the drow pulled back into the shadows while the Ironshield Clan was annihilated in a string of ill-fated battles. At last, Winterhold could breathe out.

A long period of peace ensued, which allowed Winterhold to recover and thrive. Today, Winterhold is a lively trading town, perfectly situated between cities such as Northwind Gate to the north, and villages and hunting outposts in the south, such as Buckbridge. The ore has been depleted, but the town prospers from trading, as merchants from south and north meet here to trade ore and hides for cloth and grain.

Recently, however, the drow have advanced on the town, kidnapping people and stealing livestock as well as equipment.

GOVERNANCE AND EVERYDAY LIFE

There is no king, queen, or mayor in Winterhold; instead, the town is governed by a group known as the Five. This circle of leaders, usually scholars and military commanders, currently consists of three dwarves, one human, and one gnome. Every ten years, the members of the Five change according to an election in which the most influential merchants, families, and guilds take part.

The population of Winterhold is made up of all kinds of races. However, the town was founded by dwarves, and therefore the architecture is largely dwarven above as well as below ground, and most decorations are in typical dwarven styles. The oldest parts of the town are still owned by various dwarven clans, although some of these areas belong to successful merchants and wealthy families.

A PURR-PLEXING LOCATION

One remarkable place in Winterhold is Octavia's Tower, an old stone tower that once belonged to the renowned mage Octavia Dragonborn. After she left Winterhold, her old tower has been taken over by generations of very small, but highly intelligent cats.

These feline residents are the result of one of Octavia's mysterious and often debatable experiments. They are approximately half the size of a normal cat. Over time, the cats have established a small empire of sorts in the tower and its immediate surroundings.

Notably, there is not a single rat or mouse to be found in Winterhold, and dogs have long since learnt never to challenge a cat or they might disappear under mysterious circumstances or meet with freak accidents. As the cats possess rare knowledge, it happens that scholars and others visit the tower in hope to glean an insight or two from the cats in exchange for tasty treats, answers, and sometimes specific favours.

Anyone who would like to visit the cats should bring scrolls or potions that enable them to communicate with animals (while clever and organized, the cats cannot speak). Not everyone is allowed inside the tower, but those who gain an audience with the cats are advised to keep their wits about them: The cats are quite clever, and many scholars suspect that the cats might have a secret agenda of their own.

ALL AN ADVENTURER CAN CARRY

In the traders' quarters, one finds tailors, smithies, bowyers, fletchers, and shops that offer maps and general adventuring gear. There are also armourers, weapon smithies, second-hand book shops, clothiers, bakers, grocery vendors, and chandlers. The town market, located near the bank and the vault, is open on Fridays. There is also an auction hall that opens its doors every afternoon. Those interested in exchanging gems for coin (or vice versa) can make use of the services of Winterhold's bank, where one also can stow away valuable belongings in a vault for a fee of 5 sp per week.

MEALS AND MORE

As the weather in the mountains is often bitter and unforgiving, many who pass through Winterhold arrive hungry and cold, and therefore there is a wealth of places where one can find hot meals and good lodgings.

The town boasts over thirty inns and taverns, ranging from large establishments with dozens of rooms to simple hole-in-the-wall places with only a few seats.

Three popular establishments are:

- **Wyvern & Hammer**, which serves large portions of rustic food and hearty beverages. This tavern is managed by a retired dragonborn warrior and is particularly popular with blacksmiths, miners, and others who do physically demanding work.
- **The Silver Horn**, a cosy inn with a reputation for its imported wine. Most evenings, its small stage is occupied by a musician or one of the local amateur theatre troupes. This venue is often visited by travelling bards, for example, the much-loved performer Lily Lightfoot, familiar to characters who played any of the adventures in the *Hunter's Full Moon* trilogy.
- **Trader's Arms**, a large and usually busy tavern located near the gates. On most days, merchants fill the inn's single and famously long table here as they negotiate deals or try to expand their contact networks.

FOR THE FAITHFUL

Locals and visitors who wish to pay homage to their deities of choice can do so at three churches in town. These churches are dedicated to the deity of craft; the deity of guardians and protection; and the deity of trade and wealth.

There are also shrines for the worship of many other good and neutral deities. Many of these shrines are found in places fitting for the deity's domain. For example, the shrine dedicated to the god of writing is located in a discreet corner in the Halls of Lore, while the shrine erected in honour of the goddess of the moon is situated on a rooftop with a clear view of the night sky.

The town's cemetery, known as the Granite Glades, is a series of large halls in which deceased are interred in alcoves. These catacombs can be visited by descending a set of stairs near one of the churches.

ROOMS FOR RUMINATION

The Halls of Lore and its library, situated in a quiet part of town, is a grand terraced townhouse that has been converted into a meeting place for academics. It was founded over 300 years ago, has around fifty members specialized in different subjects, and attracts scholars from far and away. Found here are a library, a lecture hall, a few meeting rooms, and the private chambers of senior academics. In its basement is a vault where especially valuable or fragile items are kept safe from clumsy apprentice scribes.

There is also a small museum of sorts on the first floor, where curiosities and rare (but not too rare) objects are exhibited to the public for a small entrance fee. The Halls of Lore is dedicated to knowledge, research and academic studies rather than magic, yet wizards sometimes pass through here in search of information about legends and rare items.

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END OF LICENCE

SHADE DREZ'LYN'S HOUSE



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UPSTAIRS

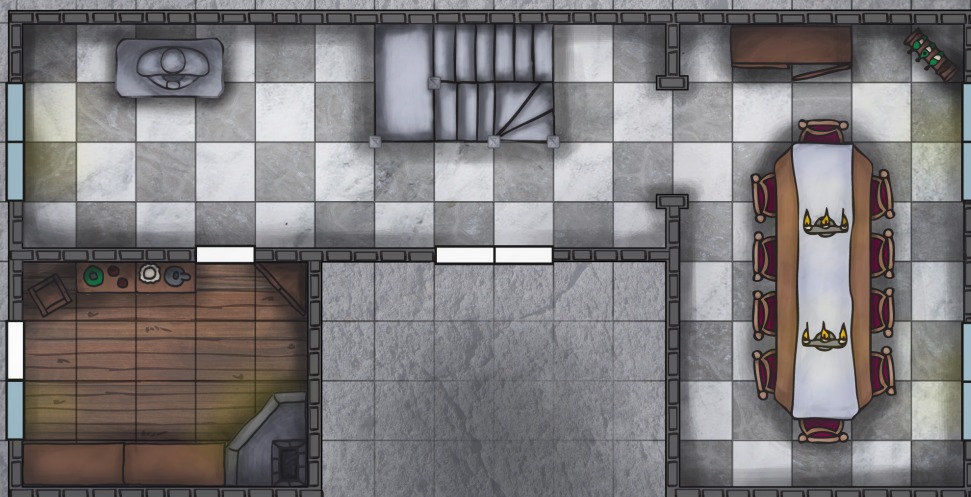


One square = 5 feet

MAP LEGEND

— DOOR

— WINDOW



DOWNSTAIRS

The residence of high priestess Shade Drez'Lyn: Player-friendly map



The Spider Queen's Church: Player-friendly map