

# XEM'S GUIDE TO THE UNDERDARK

## PLAYER SUPPLEMENT

### A BREACH IN THE DARK

Anywhere the light of the surface touches the Underdark is called a **Breach**. A breach may be formed naturally or artificially, but places where breaches form often find themselves deserted in short time. Creatures of the light can venture into a breach, but creatures of the dark can slip out as well. Often times you will find a breach as a boarded up tunnel in a mine, a forgotten basement in a city slum, or a particularly deep pit in an otherwise standard dungeon.

Breaches are not often found near each other, but when they happen to be close, that is often where the largest settlements of surface folk will form in the Underdark. To find the Deepbreach the metropolis of the Underdark, one must venture deep into the darkness, far away from a breach – navigating the labyrinthine caves and tunnels, all the while fighting of the hordes of monsters drawn to the stench of your sun baked skin and clothes.

Some of the most entrepreneurial denizens of the Underdark have setup shop at the edge of a breach – offering up unique goods at exorbitant prices, as well offering themselves as guides. Surface dwellers must be wary, as many cut throats and monsters in disguise have offered their services only to lead the gullible into their lair.

### THE ZONES

To those of the surface world, the Underdark is just that – dark. But to those denizens who regretfully call this place their home, dark is just the beginning. As one gets farther from a **Breach** from the Prime Material (or certain other bright planes), a seasoned eye can spot different types of darkness, each with its own menagerie of dangerous creatures and supernatural characteristics.

Underdark natives call these darknesses **zones**, and they will each be described in detail in their own sections. Each zone is identified

#### Xem's Fishing Tips

Before heading into the Underdark, you best do your research on what you want to catch. If y'all want to catch a Lava Kraken you'd be stupid to bring fishing line made of cotton!

by its distance from the nearest **Breach** from the Prime Material (or certain other bright planes). However, aspects of the terrain or other phenomena may alter the nature of a region, transforming it and changing its properties. For example, the light from a decaying sun giant causes the current zone of Shadow to become Dusk or shadows behind a cliff side can turn harmless Twilight into Gloom.

As one zone bleeds into another, adventurers will find some of the most dangerous situations the Underdark has to offer. These boundaries are where the strong hunt the weak, where those shrouded in darkness prey on those unaccustomed to the new gradation of darkness beginning to envelope them.

While the size of each zone is variable, the Zones have a specific order: Twilight, Dusk, Gloom, Shadow, Void. This module assumes you are playing with a hex map, but these regions could just as easily be described with miles or time (100 miles, 4 days, etc). While traveling the party moves one hex a day. Each Zone also includes the Base DC for ability checks and saving throws that are made within each Zone.

| Zone     | Base DC |
|----------|---------|
| Twilight | 10      |
| Dusk     | 15      |
| Gloom    | 20      |
| Shadow   | 25      |
| Void     | 30      |

### ADDITIONAL RULES

Both Gritty Realism [Dungeon Masters Guide] and Extraordinary Actions [Xem's Guide to the



Underdark] are included in the rules.

## TRAVEL WITHIN THE ZONES

Much of the party's travel is handled using the rules in the PHB. The following guidelines apply to travel in the Underdark for this module.

### ILLUMINATION

The Underdark as the name suggests is shrouded in darkness, which some scholars argue is the original source of darkness in the multiverse. As a result, the potency of Darkvision is lessened the deeper you delve into the Zones, refer to the table below:

| Zone     | Light Level | Effect on Darkvision          |
|----------|-------------|-------------------------------|
| Twilight | Dim Light   | None                          |
| Dusk     | Darkness    | None                          |
| Gloom    | Darkness    | Darkvision range is halved    |
| Shadow   | Darkness    | Darkvision range is quartered |
| Void     | Darkness    | Darkvision range becomes 0    |

To illustrate the above effects consider the following examples for a creature with a darkvision of 60 feet.

**Twilight:** For up to 60 feet the creature can see as if it was bright light. For beyond 60 feet the creature can see as if it was in dim light and thus has disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks.

**Dusk:** For up to 60 feet the creature can see as if it was dim light and thus has disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks. For beyond 60 feet the creature can see as if it was darkness and thus suffers from the blinded condition.

**Gloom:** For up to 30 feet the creature can see as if it was dim light and thus has disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks. For beyond 30 feet the creature can see as if it was darkness and thus suffers from the blinded condition.

**Shadow:** For up to 15 feet the creature can see as if it was dim light and thus has disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks. For beyond 15 feet the creature can see as if it was darkness and thus suffers from the blinded condition.

**Void:** The creature can see as if it was darkness and thus suffers from the blinded condition.

As a consequence of the vision rules, encounters are set at the maximum vision range of the party. For example, if the party can

see up to 60 feet before being affected by the blinded condition, whatever objects or monsters in the encounter begin at 60 feet.

In response to this harsh environment, many inventions have been created to enhance or supplement the natural sight of creatures – acquiring them is quite tough as they are exceptionally rare. This does not preclude the plethora of spells that can be used to give creatures Darkvision, such as *guardians of nature*.

Since the creatures of the Underdark have evolved incredible sensitivity to the gradations of the dark, any change to the dark draws the creatures towards its source. Whether is it the light from a torch or the opaqueness of Tiny Hut interrupting the natural shape of the darkness, unless you are in dire straights it is best to keep a low profile.

Light effects generated during combat do not draw monsters towards you if the duration of the combat is less than one minute.

### THE LOSS OF CERTAIN MAGICS

Long ago, in one of their few moments of cooperation, the gods of Mount Celestia worked along side the devils of Nine Hells to cast powerful magics to keep the monsters of the Underdark from escaping to the surface. Spells that would normally allow creatures to teleport out or around the Underdark fail. Many divination spells cast within the Underdark provide false readings. These alterations are summarized in the Modified Spells table. Spells not included in the table might suffer similar alterations, at your discretion.

Magic that summons creatures or objects from other planes functions normally, as does magic that involves the creation of an extradimensional space. Any spells cast within an extradimensional space (such as that created by rope trick) are subject to the same



restrictions as magic cast in the Underdark.

| Spell                | Effect   |
|----------------------|--|
| Arcane Gate          | This spell fails.  |
| Astral Projection    | This spell fails.  |
| Augury               | This spell returns false readings for anything related to navigation.  |
| Banishing Smite      | The banish component of this spell fails.  |
| Banishment           | This spell fails.  |
| Blink                | This spell fails.  |
| Commune              | This spell returns "unclear" for anything related to navigation.   |
| Contact Other Plane  | This spell returns "unclear" for anything related to navigation.   |
| Dimension Door       | This spell fails.  |
| Divination           | This spell returns a random reading for anything related to navigation.  |
| Etherealness         | This spell fails.  |
| Find the Path        | This spells fails  |
| Gate                 | This spell fails.  |
| Locate Creature      | This spell returns a random direction.   |
| Misty Step           | This spell fails.  |
| Plane Shift          | This spell fails.  |
| Scrying              | This spell fails.  |
| Teleportation Circle | This spell fails.  |
| Transport via Plants | This spell fails.  |
| Tree Stride          | This spell fails.  |
| Wish                 | Attempting to teleport or assist navigation using this spell results in you being propelled backward in time to a period before the ancient magics were placed on the Underdark. |
| Word of Recall       | This spell fails.  |

## NOTICING THREATS

The passive Wisdom (Perception) scores of characters in the party count toward the noticing hidden threats only if the characters are able to see the threat or otherwise perceive it and aren't engaged in other activities, including navigating or mapping.

### Xem's Fishing Tips

If you aren't wet behind the ears, you'd know any fisherman worth their weight does all of their divining in the light of a Breach – that way they know where to cast their net!

## NAVIGATING

At the start of each new travel day, the navigator makes a Wisdom (Survival). The result of the check determines whether or not the party becomes lost over the course of the day. The base DC of check is based on the Zone the party is currently in and can be modified based on local terrain and other such modifiers. The base DC for this survival check is determined by the zone's base DC in Table [1].

If the check succeeds, the navigator knows exactly where the party is on the player's map of the Underdark throughout the day.

If the check fails, the party becomes lost (this is considered magical for the purposes of abilities such as the Ranger's Natural Explorer feature). Each hex on the map is surrounded by six other hexes; whenever a lost party moves 1 hex, the DM rolls a d6 to randomly to determine which neighboring hex the party enters, and does not divulge the party's location to the players. While the party is lost, players can't pinpoint the group's location.

If the party encounters an obstacle and decide they want to avoid it, they can make an additional Survival check with disadvantage. For example, the party encounters a terrifying monster, and decides that it is too dangerous to fight, they try to navigate around the monster and end up becoming lost.

While it is indeed possible to navigate the Underdark with just skill alone, the most seasoned adventurers and denizens have devised peculiar devices that assist, and in some cases trivialize, navigation. Certain creatures have a deep resonance with the darkness of their Zone and as such *compasses* can be created that when used reduce the base DC for navigation. In order to craft a compass, one must employ a master artificer that resides



### Xem's Fishing Tips

Sometimes even us fisherman need to be humble and know when to get a guide. Even though I am an expert in freshwater bait fishing, I don't know jack about fly fishing – you best believe I will get help!

within Deepbreach.

| Zone     | Monster Part        | New Survival DC |
|----------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Twilight | Bodak Foot          | 5               |
| Dusk     | Mindflayer Tentacle | 10              |
| Gloom    | Beholder Tooth      | 15              |
| Shadow   | Shadow Dragon Claws | 20              |
| Void     | Kraken Ink Sack     | 25              |

It is possible to enhance the utility of a compass to also indicate the direction of all Breaches within a Zone, colloquially known as *Breach Finders*. In order to do so, a ritual must be performed in a specific place within a Zone, in order to perform the ritual one needs a priest of the *Brothers of the Beholder* within Deepbreach.

## MAPPING

A character not focused on any other task can record the notable features of their journey and create a map. A map does not guarantee that characters can retrace their steps – the caverns, tunnels, and passageways are constantly changing as creatures or natural disasters alter the terrain. Having a map with the appropriate Breach Finder for the current Zone allows the party to navigate that Zone without any chance of becoming lost.

## RESTING IN THE WILD

**Short Rests** Players can take a Short Rest at the end of a travel day. During this time players can be performing down time activities and have opportunities to role play and discuss their journey. You can only take two shorts rests per long rest, however players can take them individually.

**Long Rests** Given the immense dangers of the Underdark, it is particularly challenging to find safe places to perform Long Rests while traveling. If the party comes across a potentially safe place, they can make ability checks with

the DC set by the Zone in order to fortify the camp against creatures. If the majority of the ability checks are successful the long rest proceeds without a hitch. Otherwise, the DM determines whether there is an encounter. If the Long Rest is interrupted by combat or by 1 hour of casting Spells, or similar strenuous activity, the rest confers no benefit and a new location must be found to rest; however, if the rest was at least 1 day long before the interruption, the creature gains the benefits of a Short Rest.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF TRAVEL

The focus of this module is to immerse the party in a gritty, deadly version of the Underdark where navigation is always challenging and the threat of darkness is always on the mind. In order to double down on these mechanics, we have forgone the inclusion of other aspects of travel as they took away from the DMs attention. These aspects include: variable travel pace, space and marching order, foraging, and time-keeping.

## TWILIGHT

Most turn back at Twilight, as it is the first true darkness one finds upon entering a breach. However, for those who forge a path in Twilight, there are peoples, riches, and adventure to be found. Most know of the Drow and the Duergar, two races native to this zone of the Underdark. Many settle their largest cities on the outskirts of a breach, just far enough from them for the light to be tolerable.

## DUSK

The deceptive zone of Dusk is often mistaken for Twilight. But by all accounts, it may be the most dangerous zone despite its illumination. Not only are the creatures here deadlier than in Twilight, but shapechangers, body snatchers, and memory thieves all make their homes in Dusk. Towns disappear in the dead of night – whole populations vanishing in the blink of an eye. Experienced adventurers and locals alike know these as signs of various creatures that seek to enthrall, abduct, or consume the unsuspecting wanderers who enter their midst.



#### Xem's Fishing Tips

The deeper ya go, the bigger the fish! Just cause they are bigger, don't make 'em tastier though... Trust me.

## GLOOM

Namesake of the Gloomstalker order of rangers, this zone is known for the monstrous beasts and deadly environs that fill it. Trolls, purple worms, and other monstrosities roam the windy caverns of a typical Gloom. Bold adventurers and trophy seekers create settlements from time to time, but just as often they are often abandoned as situations may demand.

## SHADOW

It's silent in Shadow, where the darkness envelopes even the sounds of footsteps and breathing. In truth, the silence is caused by Shadow Dragons that make their lair anywhere that Shadow touches. Legend tells of a Great Shadow Wurm, whose name, Silere the Absolute, is all but lost to the mortals of the Underdark. Its cult of undead horrors and scheming dragons roam Shadow in search of those who would serve the wurm. The husks of those slain or enslaved by this draconic cult wander the quiet expanse of the Shadows as undead and perverted monstrosities warped by madness and darkness.

## VOID

The true emptiness of Void is situated between the edges of the Underdark and the River Styx. Where one finds Void, one finds fiends of all kinds. Many powerful demons and devils have escaped across the River Styx into the Underdark, whether to exert their influence there or to seek refuge from the Blood War. Whether you seek an outcast Sibriex or a Demon Lord recovering from a battle of the Blood War, you will find them in Void.

## ALIGNMENT FOR NPCs

The majority of the humanoid denizens of the Underdark are neutral in alignment, wanting

nothing more than to be left alone. This is a direct result, of the waning power of Laduguer, Lolth, and other similar gods as the Demon Princes of the Abyss have increasingly vied for control of the Underdark, not to mention the Elder Brain and its illithoid servants with their scheming plans. As the Underdark became increasingly dangerous, the largest clans of Drow, Duergar, Deep Gnomes, and other humanoid denizens of the Underdark forged an alliance and created the city of Deepbreach. Racial tensions and past atrocities still keep the city fairly segregated, however the mutual safety the city provides keeps them working together. Distilled to the basic essence, humanoid denizens of the Underdark have a forced pragmatism born from the danger of surviving in this inhospitable place.

There are of course evil Drow, Duergar, etc, however they tend to be on the fringes of society. For example, while many Duergar may support the Sons of Gloom in their hearts, their outward behavior is that of scorn and belittlement – they know if these extremist views take hold, the majority of Duergar will be wiped out and centuries of technological progress will disappear.

Outsiders to the Underdark hold a special place in Underdark society, due to their clear demonstration of strength in adventuring in the Underdark, as well as their naivete of the true dangers that only natives would know of. Underdark denizens will be overtly friendly and request their help on a variety of matters.

## EXAMPLE CHARACTER QUESTS

- Investigating Xem's larger than life fishing persona
- A queen sends a scattershot of adventurers of different levels to acquire the tech from Deepbreach to help fight a war on the surface
- Monsters attacking town coming from a Breach
- Devil warlock patron sent down to get intel about demons, stirring the demon pot
- Father/mother/mentor went into underdark to fight the Umbral Gauntlet and you want to find them
- You heard about Barry's quest to shut



mindflayers out of the prime material and want to help him

- Sent by a god from Mount Celestia to help find the lost solar
- Retrieve a sample of crystalaerian (steam punk where the wood is replaced with crystals/minerals) ore/tech
- Someones village has been infected with cordyceps (a fungus like an intellect devorer) and they are seeking a cure/ way to stop it
- Searching for Gargod's library, legends of a library with every book known to man
- A town's mayor / leader was found to be an oblex, trail leads to a Breach, goal is to eradicate oblexes
- Pissed off a genie/owe a favor to a genie, get involved with the djinn politics



# EXTRAORDINARY ACTIONS

These actions provide new opportunities for extraordinary moments of heroism when the situation is most dire.

Everything in this document is optional. Each group, guided by the DM, decides which of these variant options, if any, to incorporate into a campaign. You can use some, all, or none of them.

## DIG DEEPER

As a bonus action, you can spend a number of Hit Dice less than or equal to your proficiency bonus. For each Hit Die spent in this way, you roll the die and add your Constitution modifier to it. You regain hit points equal to the total (minimum of 0). At the end of your turn, you suffer one level of exhaustion.

A level 1 wizard uses Dig Deeper after taking a near fatal blow the previous turn. Using their bonus action and their maximum of 1 Hit Die, they regain 5 hit points. At the end of their turn, the wizard suffers one level of exhaustion.

## HYPER FOCUS

As a bonus action, you can spend a number of Hit Dice less than or equal to your proficiency bonus. For each Hit Die spent in this way, you add 1 to your next ability check or attack roll. At the end of your turn, you suffer one level of exhaustion.

A level 18 fighter uses Hyper Focus to help land a crucial attack. Using their bonus action and their maximum of 6 Hit Die, they add 6 to their next attack roll. At the end of their turn, the fighter suffers one level of exhaustion.

## STRATEGIC WITHDRAWAL

You can make a Strategic Withdrawal when a hostile creature that you can see deals damage to you. To make a Strategic Withdrawal, you use your reaction to spend a number of Hit Dice less than or equal to your proficiency bonus.

For each Hit Die spent in this way, you may move 5ft without provoking an opportunity attack. At the end of this movement, you suffer one level of exhaustion.

A level 10 rogue is damaged by the first hit of an enemy multiattack. The rogue makes a Strategic Withdrawal. Using their reaction and their maximum of 4 Hit Die, they move 20ft without provoking an opportunity attack, after which the rogue suffers 1 level of exhaustion. Since the attacker only has 10ft of movement remaining, it is unable to finish it's multiattack on the rogue.

## LAST STAND

You can make a Last Stand after you roll an ability check or saving throw, but before the outcome is determined. To make a Last Stand, you use your reaction to spend a number of Hit Dice less than or equal to your proficiency bonus. For each Hit Die spent in this way, you add 1 to the ability check or saving throw. After resolving the ability check or saving throw, you suffer one level of exhaustion.

A level 5 barbarian makes a Intelligence saving throw with a result of 8. The barbarian makes a Last Stand. Using their reaction and their maximum of 2 Hit Die, they change their result to a 10. The DM then announces the outcome of the saving throw, after which the barbarian suffers 1 level of exhaustion.

## HEROIC ACTION SURGE

On your turn, you can take one additional action on top of your regular action and a possible bonus action. At the end of your turn, you suffer levels of exhaustion equal to your proficiency bonus divided by 2. Once you use this feature, you must finish a long rest before you can use it again.

A level 13 sorcerer uses their action to cast *fireball* and then uses a Heroic Action Surge to cast *fireball* again. In doing so, they suffer 2 levels



of exhaustion.