

SECOND EDITION

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SKY KING'S TOMB

ADVENTURE PATH

PLAYER'S GUIDE

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Living Among Legends

With a continuous history stretching back more than 9,000 years, the Five Kings Mountains and its dwarven culture are truly ancient—and they know it. Statues of legendary heroes, friezes of grand victories, and even millennia-old graffiti remind residents of their storied past, inspiring them to emulate and even surpass their ancestors. Yet that same past can bring stagnation. Cleaving to tradition, dwarven society is often slow to change and slower to question its own shortcomings until some new discovery threatens the status quo.

They don't yet know it, but your player characters are about to make just such a discovery!

The Sky King's Tomb Adventure Path explores dwarven history and the Darklands, taking your PCs from levels 1 to 10 as they uncover forgotten lore, challenge old legends, and discover a mythical site that could change Five Kings Mountains culture forever. Despite the dwarven focus, this campaign isn't exclusive to dwarves; PCs of almost any ancestry can excel and become engaged in the story. Whether they already live in the metropolis of Highhelm or are honored guests of the dwarven Clan Tolorr, the PCs begin the adventure in Highhelm and later explore a wide range of subterranean sites.

This document provides you with an overview of Highhelm and dwarven history, followed by recommendations for designing your PCs. It concludes with the "Adventuring in the Dark" article, which provides extensive advice for spelunking adventurers braving the lightless caverns ahead.

QUEST FOR SKY

Though dwarves rule the Five Kings Mountains, their history began far beneath the surface. Popular legends tell of the god Torag creating dwarves and a subterranean realm for them to inhabit. Early on, Torag prophesied to them that in the far future, dwarves would receive a sign calling them to leave their home and travel upward until they found the sky. Untold lifetimes passed before the earth shook like nothing the dwarves had ever experienced. Unbeknownst to them, the *Starstone* had crashed into Golarion, killing many on the surface and beginning the Age of Darkness. What they did know was that this quake fulfilled the first part of Torag's prophecy.

With heavy hearts, most dwarves packed up their belongings and began the long ascent through unfamiliar tunnels. It wasn't a smooth operation. Dead ends meant that dwarves had to carve

WHERE ON GOLARION?

The Sky King's Tomb Adventure Path begins in Highhelm, a fortified dwarven metropolis built within a mountain. For more information about the Five Kings Mountains surrounding Highhelm, see pages 125–126 of the *Pathfinder Lost Omens World Guide*. This guide provides an overview of Highhelm, though you can learn much more in *Pathfinder Lost Omens Highhelm*.

passages where none existed. For years at a time, the vast caravan had to settle temporarily or scatter into smaller groups to forage and rebuild strength. The hardships caused countless deaths, and over time, many began doubting Torag's plan. The first to defect did so



High King Taargick

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almost immediately, staying deep underground and becoming what most call hryngars. Others gradually split off, migrating to other parts of Golarion or dying in obscurity. The so-called Quest for Sky might have failed entirely were it not for a young dwarf whose compassion, charisma, and decisiveness rallied the majority to push ahead.

That young dwarf was Taargick, whose steady leadership over the next century finally brought dwarves to the surface. As they spread out, claimed territory, and raised the mighty Sky Citadels to fortify their new home, they named Taargick their high king. Blessed with supernatural longevity by Torag, Taargick ruled for several centuries, abdicating once he was confident the growing dwarven empire was prosperous and safe.

After that, his legend becomes ambiguous. It seems the aging monarch departed on a final expedition underground, disappearing on a personal quest he confided to few. The mystery has fed various theories, such as him still battling evil to this day or having created a secret sanctuary to house his remains. No matter his ultimate fate, Taargick's legend is truly famous and is taught to any young dwarf growing up in the Five Kings Mountains.

GETTING STARTED

At the start of this campaign, you and your party members have arrived in Highhelm as guests of Clan Tolorr, known for its dedication to uncovering, preserving, and teaching history. The six unique backgrounds presented on pages 11–13 present various reasons your PCs might have been scouted, recruited, or invited to visit (as well as a contact you have as a result). While you aren't required to choose one of these backgrounds, your character's backstory should involve some reason Clan Tolorr respects and has reached out to you.

CLAN TOLORR

Size: 1,080 dwarves across 102 families

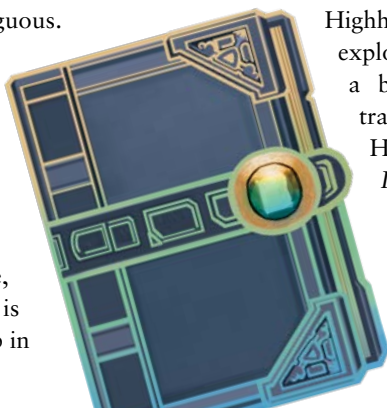
The Goldhilt Clan Tolorr considers itself the living repository of Highhelm's history, a tradition that stretches back thousands of years. Their clan hall in King's Crown was built during the kingdom's founding, and its archives extend back to the Quest for Sky and even, in pieces, before. From earliest childhood, the

dwarves of Clan Tolorr memorize oral sagas, learn archaic scripts, and study techniques for restoring and preserving ancient manuscripts.

Yet not all is dusty reverence for bygone days. Clan Tolorr also holds that history must be relevant to the living, and its members find many ways to teach Highhelm's ordinary citizens about the grandeur and tragedies of their past. Clan Tolorr holds lavish puppet shows, ceremonial dances, and martial demonstrations as well as fascinating public displays of centuries-old sculpture, smith work, and battle machinery, all of which have been carefully preserved and, in some cases, replicated for demonstration purposes.

HIGHHELM

The PCs begin this Adventure Path in Highhelm and have ample opportunity to explore the city. The following provides a brief overview of the city and its traditions. More information about Highhelm and Clan Tolorr appear in *Pathfinder Lost Omens Highhelm*.



Clan Tolorr Symbol

HIGHHELM

SETTLEMENT 14

LN METROPOLIS

Ancient dwarven city embodying the essence of dwarven culture in its architecture, arts, and social organization while gradually becoming more cosmopolitan.

Government Monarchy with a council

Population 41,527 (83% dwarves, 7% humans, 5% elves, 5% other)

Languages Common, Dwarven, Elven, Terran

Religions Torag, Folgrit, Grundinnar, Kols, other deities of the dwarven pantheon, Abadar, Pharasma

Threats aberrant horrors and monsters from the Depths and Darklands, evil orcs, infighting, natural disasters

Of Dwarven Make Uncommon dwarf items, including magic items, are common within Highhelm.

Forged with Power Highhelm offers higher level access to weapons and armor thanks to the city's forges; armaments of up to 17th level are available.

Borogrim the Hale (LN male dwarf magnate) High King of Highhelm and convener of the Gathering Council of leaders from other Five Kings Mountains' dwarven city-states

Arridor Orridus (LG male dwarf cleric of Folgrit) Head priest of Folgrit and co-head of the powerful religious council called the Nine-Eyed Hammer

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Vanth Orridus (LN female dwarf cleric of Torag) Head priestess of Torag and co-head of the powerful religious council called the Nine-Eyed Hammer

Kaltan the Pike (LN male dwarf battle master) General of the Highhelm First Army

Geralde Brightfist (LN female dwarf ruffian) Head of the Blacknoon Thieves' Guild, Highhelm's largest gang

Culture: Dwarven culture draws heavily on its history. Without exposure to the weather, stone statues and inscriptions dating back millennia survive in Highhelm, preserving their wisdom and legends for current generations. Historical figures are honored through song, and many dwarves aspire to attain that same level of battlefield prowess, crafting mastery, or unshakable integrity that would see them remembered in the same way. Non-dwarven residents tend to share this dedication to their crafts and community, which is often what drew them to Highhelm in the first place.

In general, dwarves have a reputation for dourness toward strangers, rarely displaying the unbridled warmth they show to friends and family. But in Highhelm, residents feel particularly at ease, showing their emotions more openly and extending that camaraderie beyond their inner circles.

Among Highhelm's oldest traditions is its clan and caste system. Most dwarves belong to one of the major clans, each of which has about a hundred families and a few thousand individuals. Many others belong to much smaller clans, and a minority are clanless, carving their own destinies without the support or obligations of an extended family. Castes are largely a formality often reflected in a clan dagger's design, with the Goldhilt, Steelhilt, and Ironhilt designations applying to the various clans based on their specialties. Goldhilt clans consider themselves guardians of dwarven culture, favoring political, religious, and academic roles. Steelhilt clans often specialize in elite crafts, warfare, and trade. Ironhilt clans usually handle essential trades that are considered the "least dwarven," such as farming, herding, and heavy labor. Even though every dwarf's labor earns respect and contributes to the whole, Goldhilt activities often command the most respect, and Ironhilt work earns the least. Still, a clan's caste doesn't bar a dwarf from pursuing other trades, and expressing any prejudice or disrespect based on caste is uncouth.

Daily Life: The Highhelm workday starts early and involves little socializing. That changes after lunch, when social business prevails, like meeting clients,

negotiating deals, and making plans. Dwarves work hard and play hard; in the evening, taverns are filled, sporting events roar, and contests of all kinds make Highhelm echo with delight.

Geography: Nearly all of Highhelm is built inside a mountain, spread across three main layers: King's Crown at the top, King's Heart in the middle, and Stonebreach at the bottom. Slivers of each layer extend onto exterior ledges, yet the only practical entrance into Highhelm from the surface is through the large cave for which Stonebreach is named. A swath of tunnels and caverns beneath Stonebreach forms an informal fourth district known as the Depths. A massive spiraling ramp called the Clamber winds through Highhelm's center, connecting each layer. However, savvy residents know secondary stairwells and shortcuts that bypass this hub, including a variety of sanctioned messenger tunnels and illegal smuggler paths.

Light: With its numerous openings to the outside world, King's Crown enjoys sunlight throughout the day, with some parts of the cavern ceiling fitted with mirrors or prisms to redirect rays to otherwise darkened areas. Other districts see sunlight rarely, if at all, relying on magical lights in public areas to accommodate non-dwarven residents. Thanks to its population's overwhelming access to darkvision, entire blocks might not be illuminated. That said, most residents keep lamps and other light sources handy when those without darkvision visit.

Exploring dark environs is a recurring theme in this Adventure Path. Familiarize yourself with the "Adventuring in the Dark" article that begins on page 15.

Character Suggestions

Though you're free to make any kind of character you like for the Sky King's Tomb Adventure Path, taking the following suggestions into consideration will help you get the most out of this campaign.

ALIGNMENTS

In general, Sky King's Tomb takes a heroic approach to adventuring; player characters have many opportunities to help others, thwart evil, fight for the common good, de-escalate lethal situations, and challenge tired prejudices. While Highhelm's inhabitants don't all worship the dwarven pantheon—most of which are lawful good, neutral good, or lawful neutral—those gods' edicts and values shape much of dwarven society.

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SUGGESTED CHARACTER OPTIONS

	Ancestries	Classes	Languages	Skills
Strongly Recommended	Dwarf Gnome Human	Bard Champion Cleric (any dwarven god) Fighter Investigator ^{APG} Oracle ^{APG} Ranger Thaumaturge ^{DA}	Common, Dwarven, Elven, Undercommon	Athletics, Crafting, Diplomacy, Religion, Survival
Recommended	Aasimar ^{APG} Aphorite ^{LOAG} Elf Ifrit ^{LOAG} Kobold ^{APG} Oread ^{LOAG} Ratfolk ^{APG}	Alchemist Druid Magus ^{SoM} Psychic ^{DA} Rogue Sorcerer Summoner ^{SoM} Swashbuckler ^{APG} Wizard	Aklo, Draconic, Orcish, Sylvan, Terran	Acrobatics, Deception, Nature, Occultism, Performance, Society, Stealth
Appropriate	Catfolk ^{APG} Fleshwarp ^{LOAG} Goblin Halfling Hobgoblin ^{LOCG} Leshy ^{LOCG} Lizardfolk ^{LOCG} Orc ^{APG} Skeleton ^{BotD} Sprite ^{LOAG}	Barbarian Gunslinger ^{G&G} Inventor ^{G&G} Monk Witch ^{APG}	Caligni, Celestial, Elven, Gnomish, Goblin, Ignan, Jotun, Ysoki	Arcana, Intimidation, Medicine, Thievery
LOAG LOCG APG BotD DA G&G SoM	See the <i>Pathfinder Lost Omens Ancestry Guide</i> . See the <i>Pathfinder Lost Omens Character Guide</i> . See the <i>Pathfinder Advanced Player's Guide</i> . See the <i>Pathfinder Book of the Dead</i> . See the <i>Pathfinder Dark Archive</i> . See the <i>Pathfinder Guns & Gears</i> . See the <i>Pathfinder Secrets of Magic</i> .			

As a result, any non-evil alignment is a good fit for Sky King's Tomb. Good-aligned or lawful-aligned PCs might find they connect especially well with elements of dwarven culture; however, since this Adventure Path travels beyond that Sky Citadel, a wide range of alignments might thrive elsewhere.

LANGUAGES

In Sky King's Tomb, the PCs begin in Highhelm and later travel deeper into the Darklands.

Highhelm Languages: Nearly everyone in Highhelm speaks Common, but visitors are far more likely to overhear everyday conversations in Dwarven. Depending on the neighborhood, a PC might also encounter Draconic, Elven, Gnomish,

Ignan, Terran, Undercommon, or Ysoki. Some scholars learn languages like Celestial or Utopian, as some dwarven contracts, records, and academic literature incorporate these languages to better describe esoteric topics or record very specific terms. Although rarely spoken in Highhelm, many dwarves are familiar with Goblin, Jotun, or Orcish, languages that have been traditionally used by enemies of the Five Kings Mountains.

Darklands Languages: Many languages appear in the subterranean wilds. The humanoid inhabitants of Nar-Voth and Sekamina might speak Caligni, Draconic, Dwarven, Elven, Gnomish, and Undercommon. Those fey who favor caverns often speak Sylvan, though many prefer Aklo, Terran, or Undercommon.

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FAITHS

As the de facto center of Avistani dwarven culture, it's no surprise that worshipping the dwarven pantheon is extremely popular in Highhelm. Torag (*Pathfinder Core Rulebook* 440) presides over that pantheon, which in turn includes his spouse, siblings, and children. This section presents deity entries for each of these deities, drawn from *Pathfinder Lost Omens Gods & Magic*, should your character want to worship one as their patron. Not listed is Droskar, an evil deity cast out of the pantheon ages ago for stealing credit for others' creations. Worshipping him openly is unheard of in Highhelm, comparable to brazenly venerating Norgorber in polite society; it's inadvisable that your PC worship him, as his tenets and history clash with this adventure's premise.

Other popular deities in Highhelm include Abadar, Cayden Cailean, and Pharasma. Abadar's orderly objectives align closely with dwarven culture and commerce. Though Magrim plays a more immediate role in maintaining and sanctifying graves, Pharasma's presence in Highhelm is as ubiquitous as anywhere else in the world. She and Magrim are often invoked and portrayed together. Cayden Cailean's carefree antics chafe slightly at dwarven norms, yet his bravery and brews have earned him converts over time. His followers are respected so long as they avoid recklessness.

In Sky King's Tomb, most good- and neutral-aligned deities are appropriate. Be aware that the campaign takes place almost entirely underground, so deities with strong connections to the sun, stars, and sky might feel uncomfortably distant or even irrelevant as the PCs delve farther from the surface.

ANGRADD [LG]

Whereas Torag focuses on defensive strategy, his brother Angradd believes in taking the offense. His is the righteous fire that will illuminate and then burn away evil.

Edicts seek and destroy evil, study evil to learn the best way to destroy it, train others in righteous ways

Anathema allow weaker evils to survive due to the presence of larger evils, deceive others outside of tactical gain

Alignments LG, LN

Divine Font heal

Divine Skill Athletics

Favored Weapon greataxe

Domains fate, fire, protection, zeal

Cleric Spells 1st: *burning hands*, 2nd: *blistering invective*, 3rd: *fireball*

BOLKA [NG]

Daughter of Torag and Folgrit, Bolka is a beautiful maiden who oversees marriage, courtship, and romance.

Edicts encourage those seeking love, seek the beauty in others, support others' relationships

Anathema betray your spouse, disrupt a genuine marriage, prevent a suitor from seeking a partner

Alignments LG, NG, CG

Divine Font heal

Divine Skill Diplomacy

Favored Weapon mace

Domains confidence, family, healing, passion

Cleric Spells 1st: *soothe*, 4th: *creation*, 3rd: *collective transposition*

DRANNGVIT [LN]

Few adore Dranngvit, yet this goddess of debts and vengeance earns wary respect. Compared to Kols, Dranngvit's brand of justice favors grudges, retribution, and dogged persistence.

Edicts help reclaim just debts, seek appropriate vengeance against transgressions

Anathema allow a slight to go unpunished, avoid paying a debt, force others into debts you know are unpayable

Alignments LN, LE

Divine Font *harm* or *heal*

Divine Skill Intimidation

Favored Weapon light pick

Domains knowledge, might, travel, vigil

Cleric Spells 1st: *longstrider*, 2nd: *knock*, 5th: *passwall*

FOLGRIT [LG]

Wife to Torag and mother of many demigods in the pantheon, Folgrit likewise oversees family, children, and parental love in dwarven society. Among the often dour gods, she's a lively presence who encourages recreation and recuperation, lest their responsibilities sap their energy.

Edicts maintain the sanctity of a home, remain patient with others, take in those without families

Anathema abandon your family, fail to defend your neighbors

Alignments LG, NG, LN

Divine Font heal

Divine Skill Medicine

Favored Weapon staff

Domains cities, family, protection, repose

Cleric Spells 1st: *endure*, 4th: *fire shield*, 9th: *resplendent mansion*

GRUNDINNAR [LG]

Dwarven grudges are infamous, yet their friendships are as unshakable as stone. Ever the diplomat, Grundinnar

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encourages friendship and peace. He's quick to de-escalate a fight, and he's equally quick to investigate and resolve whatever caused the fight in the first place.

Edicts attempt to bridge the gap between feuding sides, maintain just treaties, maintain relations with neighbors

Anathema sow discord among friends and allies, attack during parley

Alignments LG, NG

Divine Font *heal*

Divine Skill Diplomacy

Favored Weapon light hammer

Domains confidence, family, protection, truth

Cleric Spells 1st: *anticipate peril*, 4th: *resilient sphere*, 6th: *wall of force*

KOLS [LN]

Kols is the embodiment of dwarven honor and oaths, holding mortals to their word. He's protective and politely forthright, and he expects the same from his disciples. His no-nonsense tenets aren't just intended to keep order; he adores the bonds that mortals form when they communicate honestly and honorably with each other.

Edicts seek those that break oaths and enforce just restitution, uphold your promises

Anathema lie, dishonor yourself or your family, shirk your duties, break an oath

Alignments LG, LN

Divine Font *harm or heal*

Divine Skill Society

Favored Weapon light hammer

Domains duty, knowledge, might, truth

Cleric Spells 1st: *unseen servant*, 4th: *suggestion*, 6th: *unrelenting observation*

MAGRIM [LN]

Magrim oversees the dwarven afterlife, making him a patron of dwarven ancestor reverence and communion. He takes a special interest in damaged souls, which he repairs so that they might be reborn. He deeply respects Pharsma, often offering her his services to sustain the cycle of souls.

Edicts perfect a craft or trade, carve runes, destroy undead, aid others with completing unfinished tasks

Anathema treat gravesites irreverently, mistreat your tools, create undead, damage a soul

Alignments LG, LN, N

Divine Font *heal*

Divine Skill Crafting

Favored Weapon warhammer

Domains death, duty, fate, glyph

Cleric Spells 1st: *temporary tool*, 2nd: *expeditious excavation*, 9th: *earthquake*

TRUDD [NG]

Youthful and muscular, Trudd can physically overpower any other member of the pantheon, yet he's a gentle and protective soul. He encourages his followers to develop their own strength and share it with the world, making him an informal patron of dwarven adventurers.

Edicts offer your strength to aid others, protect those weaker than you

Anathema engage in petty showcases of strength, use your strength to take advantage of others

Alignments LG, NG

Divine Font *heal*



Magrim

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Divine Skill Athletics

Favored Weapon warhammer

Domains confidence, duty, might, protection

Cleric Spells 1st: *endure*, 3rd: *haste*, 4th: *stoneskin*

ANCESTRIES

Although built and maintained as a majority-dwarf city, Highhelm welcomes visitors, businesspeople, and immigrants of countless backgrounds.

Common Ancestries

The following ancestry choices have noteworthy representation in Highhelm.

Dwarf: Highhelm is the nexus of Avistani dwarven culture, and dwarves comprise most of the Sky Citadel's population. The primary element of social structure is the clan; the largest typically include a few thousand members divided among a hundred or so families. Twelve major clans operate in Highhelm, each with a professional focus that's become part of that clan's identity: Aringeld (trade), Breakiron (invention), Firecask (brewing), Gelderon (farming), Grimmark (defenses), Ironfist (smelting), Molgrade (smithing), Oriddus (religion), Runebinder (magic), Stonefist (military), Tolorr (history), and Vanderholl (labor). In addition, a host of less influential clans operate in Highhelm, as do various clanless dwarves. Even though clan and profession influence a dwarf's capital, connections, and opportunities, dwarves frown on classist rhetoric and celebrate the upstanding accomplishments of any dwarf.

Elf: The Five Kings Mountains and Kyonin recently began vigorous defensive coordination and training to better thwart the nascent demon lord Treerazer and the dread necromancer known as the Whispering Tyrant. Elven delegations, merchants, scholars, and small military training detachments are increasingly common in the Five Kings Mountains, to the overall delight of dwarven residents.

Gnome: Highhelm's crafts and historical records are among the finest in Avistan, drawing hundreds of gnomes who are captivated by dwarves' masterful artistry, lore, and magic. Even though few gnomes live here for more than a few decades before seeking excitement elsewhere, Highhelm's professionals deeply respect gnome ingenuity, industriousness, and drive.

Goblin: Highhelm's people have taken great steps toward accepting goblins, and while few goblins live there, they come and go with minimal prejudice. Even so, dwarven myth remembers goblins mostly as arsonists, kidnappers, and raiders, with a fair number

of refugees having fled to Highhelm following Isger's Goblinblood War in recent memory. However, goblins' acceptance in Absalom and some goblins' noble contributions against the Whispering Tyrant have softened many dwarves' hearts.

Human: In the distant past, the Five Kings Mountains controlled and exploited what's now Druma as a colony, which drove millennia of rebellion and resentment from the mostly Kellid inhabitants. Over 2,000 years of trade and close partnership since has repaired nearly all those grievances. The Five Kings Mountains hosts numerous humans of Kellid and Taldan ancestry, drawn from places like Druma, Taldor, Andoran, and the River Kingdoms. The vital Sellen River also passes nearby, carrying people from countless lands near the border, so humans of any origin periodically grace Highhelm's caverns.

Uncommon Ancestries

Neighbors, politics, and opportunities have drawn a variety of other species to Highhelm.

Aasimar and Aporite: Thanks to the predominantly good-aligned and lawful-aligned dwarven pantheon, Highhelm maintains ancient traditions of communing with, summoning, and drawing magic from celestials and aeons. Even where a distant immortal ancestor isn't involved, the trace holiness that accumulates in Highhelm sometimes imbues a child with sacred vitality as an aasimar or reconfigures their physiology to become an aporite. Citizens respect aporites and aasimars, considering them a blessing.

Catfolk: A lively population of amurruns reside in Highhelm's Stonebreach district, where their tight-knit social proclivities have ingratiated them with the dwarven majority—despite amurrun children's rambunctious antics. Over generations, amurruns have earned respect in the Five Kings Mountains, having mobilized independently to fight in its defense on numerous occasions.

Geniekin: Not only does Highhelm's subterranean design create an upwelling of primal energies from the Darklands, but part of the city even maintains portals to the Plane of Fire for metalworking and trade. Ifrits and oreads are relatively common here, whereas sylphs and undines are quite rare. Like with aasimars and aporites, dwarven families and society celebrate these geniekin children.

Hobgoblin: When hobgoblins recently founded the small nation of Oprak across Lake Encarthan, they took care not to conquer the nearby Sky Citadel Kraggodan. While this proved the hobgoblins weren't an immediate

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threat to the Five Kings Mountains (and might even be allies against the Whispering Tyrant), Highhelm holds Oprak at arm's length. The hobgoblins' provocative politics unnerve most dwarves. Even so, hobgoblin diplomats, merchants, and adventurers occasionally travel to Highhelm, slowly changing attitudes about the dwarves' distant neighbor. In particular, hobgoblin alchemists have developed a tense, fruitful collaboration with Clan Breakiron, with both parties eager to learn from each other while not yet being willing to share all their hard-earned secrets.

Kobold: While considered more of a nuisance in Andoran to the south, kobolds have developed a cordial relationship with Highhelm. This didn't come without conflict early on, but centuries ago, dwarven leadership weighed the costs and benefits in favor of peace. After all, kobolds are exceptional miners, engineers, and scouts, bolstering the dwarves' intelligence and mastery of the Darklands. Plus, kobolds' residential needs differ enough from dwarves' that the former happily occupies some of the Stonebreach district's more claustrophobic neighborhoods.

Leshy: With its limited sunlight, Highhelm tends to make most leshies uncomfortable within a few weeks. However, fungus leshies thrive in the upper Darklands, including in Highhelm. A few dozen reside here at any given time, either sharing discoveries from deeper underground, trading rare reagents from forgotten tunnels, or seeking a diversion. Because they're among the more acerbic and macabre of leshies, the prevailing assumption in Highhelm is that leshies are irreverent and eccentric.

Orc: Half-orcs regularly visit Highhelm, though few live there permanently. Over time, dwarven societies have reconciled their conflicts with many cultures, most of all in cosmopolitan Highhelm. However, conflicts with orcs are so central to and prevalent in dwarven history that many in Highhelm can't shake their unconscious bias. When Belkzen's orcs defied the Whispering Tyrant a few years ago, the Five Kings Mountains began recalibrating its stance on orcs and considering ways to open diplomatic channels with the eminent leader, Ardax the White-Hair.

However, popular dwarven sentiment doesn't pivot so quickly. While an orc or half-orc player character could defy expectations, earn widespread respect, and challenge Highhelm's narrative in this Adventure Path, such a PC might experience moderate prejudice early in their career. While the dwarven history of fighting orcs plays some role in Sky King's Tomb, actually

roleplaying that prejudice isn't necessary at all to enjoy the story. When creating an orc or half-orc PC, talk with your GM about how the group might approach orc bias, and consider implementing safety tools (*Core Rulebook* 485) to ensure everyone has an enjoyable experience.

Ratfolk: To the west, Druma's economic opportunities drew ratfolk in droves, and as these entrepreneurs pitched their wares in the Five Kings Mountains, many chose to relocate there permanently. A sizable population of ratfolk lives in the Depths, Highhelm's deepest district, where the countless tunnels provide ratfolk opportunities to forage, prospect, serve as guides, and invent new devices far from spying eyes.

Rare Ancestries

Sky King's Tomb presents several exciting opportunities for rare ancestries.

Fleshwarp: More than a mile below Highhelm, deros and other evil scientists infamously experiment on unwilling subjects, creating aberrations. Test subjects periodically escape, and those who approach the surface might seek refuge in Highhelm. The city accommodates and rehabilitates these rare victims, though only half stay. Dwarven compassion often translates as pity, discouraging some from staying. Those who remain, though, find a welcoming home and ample opportunities.

Skeleton: Without a doubt, the dwarven pantheon disapproves of undead, and even Magrim encourages his followers to destroy the unliving. However, the ancient rivethun tradition of spirit communion has instilled a deep respect for those rare unliving beings who cling to the mortal realm because they're driven by unfinished business. The Sky King's Tomb story involves delving deep into the past, often to undo or challenge past wrongs. As a result, a dwarven skeleton PC sustained by some past injustice could be an exceptional fit for the campaign. With Clan Tolorr's sponsorship, they would be free to conduct business in Highhelm with the twin understanding that their behavior is held to a high standard and that eventually the PC will depart for the afterlife. Under similar conditions, skeletons of other origins might also thrive in this Adventure Path.

Sprite: Highhelm's orderly society often clashes with freewheeling fey sensibilities. That said, subterranean sprites periodically appear in the Sky Citadel, finding outlets for their creativity, magic, and energy. Highhelm's melixies most often resemble burrowing beetles, and their industrious inventiveness earns

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them many friends. The vibrant bat colonies scattered throughout the region also attract nykteras, some of which residents mistake for domovoi and other house sprites thanks to the nykteras periodically sneaking into homes, cleaning up, and baking treats.

CLASSES

The Sky King's Tomb Adventure Path presents a balanced mix of adventuring styles, ranging from exploration to intrigue to combat. As a result, any character class will enjoy the spotlight regularly. The following explores several campaign themes and which classes might excel.

Exploration: There are many tunnels riddling the Darklands, but very few roads. Expect journeys through lightless tunnels and uneven paths where athleticism and wilderness knowledge can keep the party alive. Classes with excellent survival skills excel, such as druids, investigators, and rangers. Muscle might be key to clearing a path, catering to the skills of barbarians, champions, and fighters.

Infiltration: The good news is that many settlements dot the Darklands. The bad news is that many of these settlements pose a risk to surface travelers. Being able to blend into a crowd, gather information, and respect local customs can help the PCs avoid danger, playing well to the talents of a bard, investigator, rogue, or sorcerer. With the right tools, anyone can become an infiltrator, whether that's a shapeshifting druid, a mutagen-swigging alchemist, or a psychic charming guards with words and magic alike.

Tradition: Not only are the PCs guests of a dwarven clan dedicated to history, but also they begin the adventure in Highhelm, a center of dwarven culture. Certain professions and adventuring styles enjoy prestige in Highhelm, whether the PC is a dwarf or not. Dwarves are famous for their honorable warriors clad in metal armor, which might appeal to fighters, champions, maguses, and even clerics with the warpriest doctrine. Anyone versed in dwarven performance or craft finds friends and employment easily, making alchemists, bards, inventors, and oracles welcome. Finally, given the age and historical richness of dwarven treasures, investigators, thaumaturges, wizards, and others versed in studying the past will thrive.

SKILLS AND FEATS

As with any campaign, it's great to select skills and feats that complement your character concept. That said, there are several skill categories that will be especially useful in the Sky King's Tomb Adventure Path.

Exploration: Moving around underground is tough, and a rugged adventurer stands a better chance of surviving the dangers of the Darklands. Skills like Acrobatics and Athletics will help you navigate tunnels. Nature, Survival, and Thievery can prevent getting lost, identify hazards, and disarm traps left by malicious creatures. Don't discount Occultism, which helps identify many creatures that dwell underground. Finally, remember that you'll spend some time away from settlements and need to be self-sufficient, so skills like Crafting and Medicine could patch up your gear and allies enough to get to safety.

Subtlety: Your PC's adventures will regularly lead them to large cities, where cunning could open more doors than combat would. Being able to negotiate with Diplomacy could earn unlikely friends, and many Darklands inhabitants respect Intimidation tactics. Because Deception includes not only lies but also disguises, that skill can help you avoid confrontation in hostile settlements just as readily as Stealth might. Finally, know your surroundings; skills like Society can help you understand local customs and identify useful contacts.

Dwarven Lore: This adventure explores dwarven culture and features many dwarf NPCs, and being versed in their many traditions could help win friends and overcome obstacles. Skills like Crafting, Performance, Religion, and Society will all help a PC understand and fit in among dwarves. It should come as no surprise that Lore skills like Dwarf Lore, Highhelm Lore, and Lore tied to dwarven deities feature regularly during your adventures.

BACKGROUNDS

Though you can choose any common background for your character (including the ones starting on page 60 of the *Core Rulebook*), the following new backgrounds are designed specifically for the Sky King's Tomb Adventure Path. You can use these backgrounds to inspire personality traits and details that tie your character to Highhelm and Clan Tolorr.

Most of the following backgrounds provide a connection to someone in Clan Tolorr—likely the person who advocated for the PC's addition to the upcoming Family Festival guest list. In addition, each background slightly modifies your party's starting Reputation Points total in Highhelm; your party starts with 0 Reputation Points, adjusted by each PC's background, though this can't increase the score above 4 or below -4. During your adventures, you'll

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gain many more Reputation Points, so this starting adjustment just provides a minor effect until the PCs makes a name for themselves!

CHILD OF NOTORIETY

BACKGROUND

UNCOMMON

One or more of your ancestors committed a grave atrocity, and even though you've tried to live your own life, your family's grim past looms over you like a relentless shadow. You might have traveled a thousand miles to escape the legends, learned how to ingratiate yourself to others, just tried to ignore the everyday accusing glances, or even accepted the notoriety just to be left alone. You didn't commit the crime, yet it haunts you. Whether you're proving the world wrong, proving to yourself that you're no monster, earning wealth to pay reparations, or just driven to do some good with your life, it's time to break free of the past. That journey begins with understanding.

Clan Tolorr preserves the deeds and misdeeds of dwarven legend. With their help, you might not only understand dwarven crimes and reparations, but also learn how to accept your past and leave the world a little better than when you found it. You've corresponded with Clan Tolorr, but your most recent message came instead from one of the clan's guests: a lizardfolk mystic named Valahask who studies the dead and is eager to meet you. He has lobbied on your behalf, earning you an invitation to Clan Tolorr's upcoming Family Festival.

Choose two ability boosts. One must be to Constitution or Charisma, and one is a free ability boost.

Choose whether you've navigated your past through kindness or notoriety thus far. For the former, you're trained in the Diplomacy skill and the Genealogy Lore skill, and you gain the Group Impression skill feat. For the latter, you're trained in the Intimidation skill and the Underworld Lore skill, and you gain the Intimidating Glare skill feat.

Connection: Valahask, an iruxi mystic

Reputation Points: -1

CLAN ASSOCIATE

BACKGROUND

UNCOMMON

You already have a close connection to Clan Tolorr, such as having been born into the clan, worked as an esteemed contractor for them, or married into the clan (even if you chose to retain your prior clan affiliation). Whether through dedicated study or just overhearing your fellows' academic debates, you've absorbed boundless trivia about history—especially local lore. Beyond Tolorr halls, your affiliation earns you respect in Highhelm. Your clan expects you to behave well, as your actions reflect on them.

Choose two ability boosts. One must be to Constitution or Wisdom, and one is a free ability boost.

You're trained in the Society skill and the Highhelm Lore skill. You gain the Multilingual skill feat.

Connection: You have no special connection or sponsor in Clan Tolorr.

Reputation Points: +2

CONSERVATOR

BACKGROUND

UNCOMMON

Some history survives only so long as its physical remains do. You've developed robust museum skills to identify relics, preserve artifacts, recreate ancient technologies, and even rebuild shattered treasures—often with painstaking patience, a steady hand, and even a little magic. Your contributions don't end there, as whether you've mastered diligent recordkeeping or helped uncover smuggling rings that are looting archaeological sites, you've made an impression. Hearing of your promising abilities, representatives from Clan Tolorr contacted you, inviting you to study with their museum masters and share your own techniques, all while helping preserve over 10,000 years of history!

Choose two ability boosts. One must be to Dexterity or Intelligence, and one is a free ability boost.

You're trained in either the Crafting skill or the Thievery skill, and you're trained in either the Accounting Lore or the Underworld Lore skill. If you selected Crafting, you gain the Quick Repair skill feat. If you chose Thievery, you gain the Assurance (Thievery) skill feat.

Connection: Ria, an oread gnome curator who studies rivethun traditions

Reputation Points: +1

DEDICATED DELVER

BACKGROUND

UNCOMMON

Filled with predators, pitfalls, and other perils, the Darklands rightfully scares off most travelers. Not you! Whether you're a veteran Darklands caravanner, a cartographer seeking safer paths through dangerous territory, or just a spelunker who loves to escape the surface and hear the caverns sing, you're adept at navigating underground obstacles and finding your way back to civilization.

Clan Tolorr specializes more in studying the past than extracting it from dangerous areas. Its leader, Arghan Tolorr, was an avid explorer in his youth, and he's begun an initiative to befriend, recruit, and train subterranean daredevils who can extract relics responsibly. You're one of his candidates for this pilot program. Helping administrate recruits is Ria, a gnome curator and close Tolorr confidante who helped arrange your travel to Highhelm.

Choose two ability boosts. One must be to Strength or Dexterity, and one is a free ability boost.

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You're trained in either the Athletics skill or the Survival skill, and you're trained in the Cave Lore skill. If you selected Athletics, you gain the Combat Climber skill feat. If you chose Survival, you gain the Terrain Expertise (Underground) skill feat.

Connection: Ria, an oread gnome curator who studies rivethun traditions

Reputation Points: +0

ECLECTIC SCHOLAR

BACKGROUND

UNCOMMON

Understanding history isn't just about translating old laws and reading about who invaded whom; it's also packed with magical outbursts, extraplanar interventions, and unexplained oddities not yet understood by modern science. You have a knack for absorbing esoteric trivia and unraveling past supernatural events. Your studies recently drew you to the dwarven city of Tar-Kazmukh, whose Blue Warders maintain an eclectically magical library. Perusing its shelves didn't answer your most burning questions, but it did earn you some friends, expose you to a dizzying array of dwarven religious lore, and introduce you to some intriguing mysteries buried in Highhelm's history.

Believing that Highhelm might provide you with greater opportunities, a Blue Warder named Rosha Coppervein facilitated introductions between you and their adoptive clan, Clan Tolorr. It seems your credentials and whatever Rosha wrote on your behalf made an impression; within a week, you received an invitation to Highhelm and travel funds to study with Tolorr sages! The shy Rosha has stayed in Tar-Kazmukh for now, enjoying its relative quiet, but you know that they'll join you in a few weeks for Tolorr's Family Festival.

Choose two ability boosts. One must be to Intelligence or Wisdom, and one is a free ability boost.

You're trained in the Occultism skill and the Dwarven Pantheon Lore skill, an uncommonly broad Lore skill that pertains to Torag's faith and those faiths of his divine family. You gain the Quick Identification skill feat.

Connection: Rosha Coppervein, a Blue Warder who married into Clan Tolorr

Reputation Points: +0

HISTORICAL REENACTOR

BACKGROUND

UNCOMMON

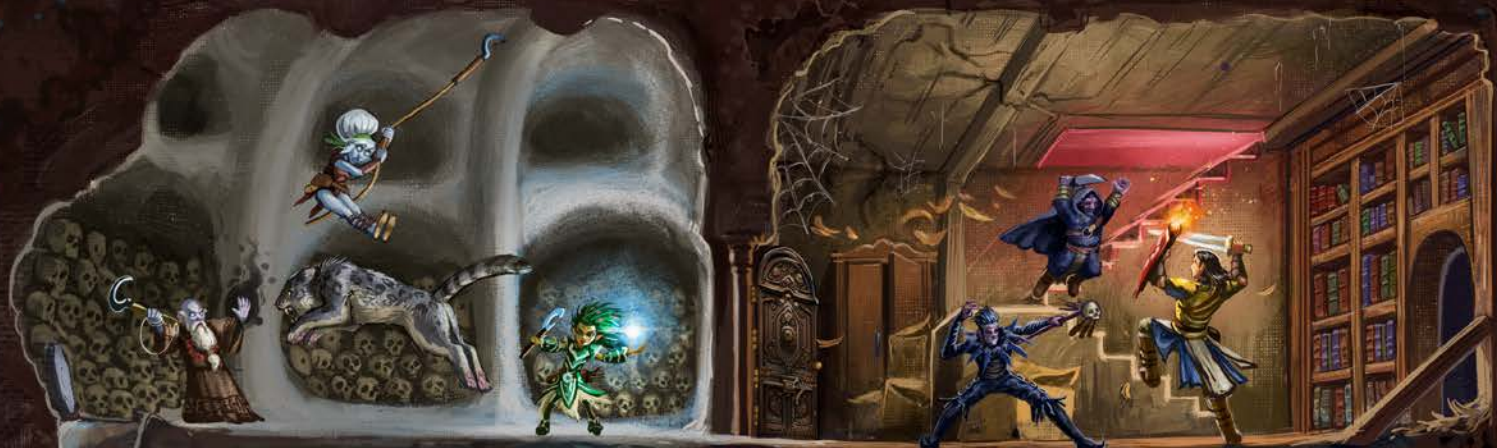
To Clan Tolorr, history shouldn't be dry and boring; it deserves to be engaging and made relevant to the living. You couldn't agree more! Whether it's your hobby or career, you've developed a reputation for translating the past into the present through demonstrations, period performances, acting out famous events, donning replica armor, and other feats of living history—filling in a few historical blanks if it makes a better show. Having learned of your passion, Clan Tolorr has sponsored your visit to Highhelm so that you can learn from each other. It's a wonderful opportunity, and Tolorr puppetry arts, storytelling, props, and historical rigor are the stuff of legends. Already, you've begun researching dwarven history so that you're prepared for whatever lies ahead.

Choose two ability boosts. One must be to Strength or Charisma, and one is a free ability boost.

You're trained in either the Performance skill or the Society skill, and you're trained in the Dwarf Lore skill. If you selected Performance, you gain the Impressive Performance skill feat. If you chose Society, you gain the Dubious Knowledge skill feat.

Connection: Bulgra Veldollow, a matriarch in Clan Tolorr and accomplished puppeteer

Reputation Points: +0



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ADVENTURING IN THE DARK

To those born in light, the sun seems as vital as air or water—a thing all life needs to survive. But those born in the Darklands recognize light for what it is: a tool, a resource, an option.

A privilege.

One rarely afforded to the true survivors of the world. Beyond cave mouths and brazier-lined dwarven halls, the endless, twisting passageways of the Darklands exist in an umbral haze, and its societies and creatures thrive.

Below the surface of Golarion, light is a foreign ware, something natives will trade when convenient, but even the youngest dero knows never to depend on it. Only outsiders cling to flames and spells for safety, always to their detriment. Surface folk trust what they can see, and robbed of illumination, all becomes uncertain. Predators hide in the shadows, but so do sheer drops, rushing rivers, and broken ankles. They depend on their sight for everything, from crafting to navigation to understanding the subtleties of speech. While individual humanoids can and have overcome this dependency, society at large centers upon vision to the exclusion of all other senses.

Those who need the light to thrive can survive below, too, through innovation, adaptation, and bargaining, as they have for thousands of years. Adventurers plumb the depths for treasure and glory, and whole societies have found sanctuary within the earth's dismal embrace. Adventuring below Golarion's surface brings a host of new challenges revolving around the lack of light and all the comforts it brings. However, those

challenges inspire new strategies and innovations that drive the mortal spirit ever forward.

And downward.

Dark Locales

Surface dwellers think of the Darklands as another world—an alien realm of unnatural conditions. But darkness is the default state of the cosmos, interrupted only by insipid pinpricks of light. Gloom persists in the world wherever light can't shine, and so resourceful survivors know to always be prepared in the different places where murk prevails. Wary survivors recognize the shadows for the advantages they provide, understand how to exploit them, and, most importantly, understand where to find them.

NATURAL DARKNESS

Natural darkness is the most common danger adventurers encounter. Caves and canyons—including the unseen expanses of the Darklands—make natural nests for a wide variety of monsters and hiding places for those evading the law, and in turn, they become common destinations for hired muscle, glory seekers, and bounty hunters. In addition to their natural denizens—who are better adapted to the lightless world—these tunnels abound with cliffs and pits, bad air, and labyrinthine corridors designed by random chance rather than practical need. In the winding depths, small inconveniences like becoming lost, running out of food, and small injuries can become life-threatening ordeals as the darkness compounds every challenge with no end in sight.

More common than caverns, however, is the night. While the full moon and stars provide dim illumination ideal for those with low-light vision, an overcast night,



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new moon, or forest canopy blots out even this soft benefit and plunges adventurers into a featureless void. Many dangerous creatures stalking a community use the cover of night to conceal their thefts or murder sprees. Conversely, adventurers can take advantage of the night for their own needs, moving on enemies unseen or escaping pursuit. The benefit of night is its predictability—the sun sets and rises in a cycle, so no matter how bad things get, light is only a few hours away. But that same cycle means the night—and anything that lurks within it—always looms. And at the Crown of the World, winter nights can last for weeks at a time, with only short reprieves of twilight in between, creating endless opportunity for creatures adapted to the darkness.

While not the same looming black as nightfall, dense fog presents the same general hazard as darkness: limiting adventurers' vision. Swamps, river valleys, moors, and coastlines all struggle with dense banks of mist that obscure sight lines and hazards, often with aquatic dangers rarely found underground. When a traveler can't see more than 30 feet, even familiar roads become unremarkable and confusing. Worse, light can actually make the haze worse, eliminating the most common escape from the dark.

The sea likewise swallows light, and adventurers diving beneath the waves must consider not only how they'll breathe, but how they'll see. Little sunlight filters down beyond a few hundred feet—far less in murky waters—and even adventures below the open ocean make visibility an issue. Underwater, the easiest and most reliable source of artificial light—fire—is impossible, while the solutions nature provides, like electrosensitivity and echolocation, are difficult for adventurers to mimic.

UNNATURAL DARKNESS

Like caves, mortal structures and buildings blot out the light. Windows can illuminate outer rooms, but large palaces, fortresses, and other sprawling complexes must provide alternative lighting. Humans fill their strongholds with candles and oil lanterns, elves rely on magic and bioluminescence, and halflings provide an abundance of cozy hearths, but most of these sources require constant attention and fuel (or food). Once abandoned or ruined, light gives way to dark, and adventurers must treat these places as they would any natural cavern.

Worse by far are the tunnels dug by mortal hands—siegeworks, mines, sewers, and cisterns—where light

is never considered a permanent fixture. Adventurers can't simply add new fuel to a brazier and instead must carry their light with them. Like natural caverns, ruins make ideal homes for dangerous creatures and contain perilous drop-offs, but artificial structures are far more prone to collapse. Those places humans neglect in the darkness might even attract dangerous creatures while still in active use.

PRETERNATURAL DARKNESS

In some rare cases, darkness is a force unto itself rather than an inert default—an aggressive thing that tears away at light and asserts itself against intruders. The Shadow Plane is the most overt of the variety of preternatural darkness that adventurers might encounter. The nature of reality here swallows up light and generates pockets of gloom so intense even normal darkvision can't penetrate it. Locals see illumination not only as an intrusion, but as an offense. Deadly outsiders lurk within the lightless depths outside common material reality; attracted by the heretical light adventurers need to survive, these entities can bring esoteric dangers like magic to bear on trespassers in addition to claw and fang. The Negative Energy Plane similarly generates a hostile and overwhelming darkness—this one so intense it drains the very light of creation from visitors and annihilates them from reality.

Magical effects can reproduce the persistent effect of the Shadow Plane in the mortal realm. Spells like *darkness* can briefly recreate this effect but rarely dominate an entire adventure unless facing foes like caligni or ayindilar elves who can unleash it at will. Powerful curses and profane events might plunge an entire region into perpetual night or extend the effects of a *darkness* spell over an entire building or prolong its effects into hours, days, or seasons. While the gloom of these effects complicates even normal tasks, the far greater danger is the source of such powerful magic.

Born to Darkness

Surface cultures often—mistakenly—worship the sun as the source of all life. In their limited perspective, the sun nourishes plants, animals eat the plants, and humanoids eat both. These same cultures mark the passage of time by the sun's rise and set and trust their holy days to its specific positions. Robbed of this convenience, they imagine the world will end.

But the Darklands run by cycles all their own, and life finds new ways to thrive.

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CYCLES OF LIFE

The Darklands have neither a sunset to mark when creatures should sleep nor a sunrise to wake them. No noon alerts them to eat, and no midnight marks the height of danger. The mundane cycles of life run different for every living creature—sleeping when they're tired and eating when hunger strikes. Those who come from the surface still carry a memory of the sun in their bodies and maintain a roughly 24-hour cycle thanks to a lifetime of habit, but native creatures run their own cycles ranging from short 10-hour days to achingly long cycles of sleep that last centuries.

A few cycles still mark the passage of days underground for those who pay attention. On larger lakes and subterranean seas, the pull of the unseen moon still generates tides sailors must plan around. Large communities use massive pendulums to track the planet's rotation as well, using them as public timepieces in much the same way surface communities rely on sundials. Many of the glowing plants that dwell in the deep seem to thrum in time with this 24-hour cycle, likely responding to the same gravitational tug as waterways, and glow brighter and softer at different periods of the day.

Without the sun and clouds, seasons look very different in the Darklands. Late spring and early summer bring rainfall and snowmelt on the surface, which feed creeks and springs into raging rivers far below ground. Endemic societies mark the spring and autumn by the reversal of wind patterns: the warming temperatures of spring lowers the air pressure at cave entrances and pulls cooler air up from deep below, while the falling temperatures in autumn reverse the process. The biannual "changing of winds" marks the beginning or end of various activities underground—for example, scaling back hunting and warfare in the spring to prepare for flooding and the new growth season that it brings.

Visitors from the surface will need to bring their own system for tracking time. Many simply trust their circadian rhythms and mark the passage of days and meals by when they feel a need to sleep, but these indicators grows increasingly unreliable over extended periods. Even a few minutes' variation can add up over weeks or months belowground. Many rely on candles—a single candle lasts 8 hours and even a knife

and an unsteady hand can notch individual hours along its length—or else the steady burn of an oil-lamp clock, which consumes a pint of oil at a steady rate and can track individual hours over the course of a full day (with a flame too small to cast a useful amount of light); larger and more expensive versions can track the time over 10 days before being refilled with 10 pints of oil. Darklands expeditions with gold to burn—and few expeditions enter the Darklands short on cash—rely on mechanical devices like the pocket watch. Other adventurers turn to magic to track the time; divination spells like *scrying* allow the caster to see a creature on the surface and read the position of the sun and stars to estimate the date, while *sending* allows them to contact topside peers for that exact information. More practical spellcasters can use the fixed duration of longer-lasting spells to track the passage of time—three castings of *alarm* each day, for example, can mark the passage of a full day.

FOOD

To some extent, the surface feeds the Darklands. Nutrients—decaying organic matter and even whole bodies—wash downstream through caves or filter through the groundwater to deliver precious fertilizer. This bounty primarily feeds decomposers and scavengers. These harmless fungi and arthropods make up most of the subterranean ecosystem, who in turn feed larger beasts. In the absence of light, life takes its energy from other available sources.

Chemosynthetic bacteria live in volcanic pools and fissures, feeding on heat and exotic chemicals to form the foundation of a new food web. Many fungi have adapted to feed off radiation instead, basking in the sickening light of the Darklands' many irradiating minerals in a parallel to surface plants' dependence on the life-giving sun. Hardy crickets, beetles, isopods, and foraging oozes graze on the fungi and bacterial matter, which in turn feed spiders, centipedes, and steadily larger predators.

Many of the strangest denizens in the lightless depths don't need food in the conventional sense. Some, like xorns, can feed on raw minerals, magically converting them into nutrition and then shedding organic scat upon which scavengers feed. Others, like ayindilar elves, use magic to create bounty on a large enough scale that their garbage and waste support life well beyond their cities' borders.

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These foundations support a complex food web, but with calories in shorter supply than on the surface, predators and grazers alike must adapt. Prey species must be able to scrape every last bit of nourishment from the rocks, and many have developed symbiotic relationships with bacteria, fungi, or plants they carry with them to supplement their diets. For example, the iconic slurk's disgusting grease is actually produced by a symbiotic bacteria that feeds on the toads' waste. Predators conserve energy by lying dormant for extended periods and employing low-energy ambush hunting techniques. Many grow to incredible size—paralleling the surface phenomenon of “island gigantism”—to better defend their hunting grounds and endure famine or hibernation.

Strangers in this strange land, even those well-versed in living off the land, should bring their own food supply or means of magically creating sustenance. Many of the endemic fungi in the Darklands are toxic or must be carefully prepared to neutralize psychoactive or radioactive properties. Countless native creatures survive thanks to mutualistic infections to which humanoids have no resistance, making their meat inedible. Even benign foodstuffs, such as the omnipresent cave crickets and beetles, are unappetizing to nearly everyone but perhaps kobolds.

NAVIGATION

Where the sky avails itself, navigation depends on celestial bodies. Sailors and caravans track the movement of the sun for general reconnaissance and the position of stars to learn their location, while anything titanic enough to block the sky, from mountains to city skylines, provides a landmark by which to chart their movement from miles around. But the Darklands presents no stars and blocks sight lines beyond a few dozen feet, and any bright light one finds can herald danger as much as salvation.

Darklands creatures most often navigate via landmarks, though the tight confines mean noting tunnel features every few hundred feet rather than every few miles. Bodies of water, especially long-standing rivers, provide useful highways, but also dangerous hunting grounds for carnivores. Air currents, especially if one understands the local weather patterns, provide truer reckoning with fewer hunters. Many sophisticated humanoids and earth-aligned creatures supplement this by reading the planet's natural magnetic field; large mineral deposits can disrupt the normal pull of north and south, but

these unseen features become landmarks in their own right. Many animals rely on scent, especially in this lightless realm, to mark their territory and highlight safe passage.

Adventurers visiting from above find the twisting caverns confusing—every rock looks the same to surface dwellers in much the same way every tree looks the same to a hryngar. Until they learn to gauge the subtleties of color and texture that distinguish chambers, humanoids rely on detailed maps for distance travel and safety lines strung between them when exploring away from the party—a few hundred feet of cord is often the only thing keeping a neophyte caver from a slow and lonely death. Specialized lenses, alidades, and barometers can help a team better assess their depth and location via dead reckoning, but these tools are the first choice of only the most optimistic explorers, as the rigors of the Darklands take their toll on delicate scientific instruments. Wise adventurers make friends to learn the lay of the land, and practical adventurers steal that knowledge whenever friendship fails; most underground societies know not only their own territories, but their enemies' as well, and they have their own secret techniques for navigating in the dark. For example, kobolds use ‘assay bowls’ made from rare stone. By pouring water into it and studying the liquid's swirls as it drains out the bottom, they can sense the directions and distances to known elemental hot spots used as landmarks.

Dark Designs

Mechanically, darkness and light impose straightforward mathematical consequences. Dim light requires a DC 5 flat check when targeting a creature to avoid automatically missing, while darkness calls for a more punishing DC 11 flat check for the same, assuming you can first locate your target with an inaccurate sense (hearing for most humanoids, but the Scent ability adds an additional option). Low-light vision and darkvision negate these penalties, respectively. If darkness is going to feature prominently as an element in your adventure, carefully review the rules for **Perception** on pages 464–467 of the *Core Rulebook*.

In practical terms, dim light and darkness represent an extra 20% or 50% drain on your player character's resources—spells, ammunition, and, thanks to prolonged combat, Hit Points—particularly when facing opponents who can operate freely without light.

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This can turn minor enemies like goblins or kobolds into more dangerous threats and make retreat hazardous or impossible. Even if travelers bring their own lanterns, opponents with darkvision can stand beyond the glow's radius and snipe with arrows or spells. This miss chance means that darkness tends to extend combat encounters, meaning your group will fit up to one-quarter fewer encounters into a gaming session. Ideally, a GM plans accordingly and considers when environmental conditions—illuminated highways, phosphorescent fungi, and strange weather conditions—might provide light for an encounter, even deep underground.

The concealment provided by darkness applies to objects and obstacles as well, so heroes fighting under poor illumination can easily stumble into walls, pits, and traps. Hazards are especially deadly because they might not have a scent or sound and so can't be noticed with imprecise senses. Likewise, dropped objects—

especially lanterns—can be difficult to recover even when a hero knows where to search.

Countering darkness opens up new tactical options. Party members with darkvision must take up the role of spotters, informing their comrades of enemy positions and local hazards. Adventurers without darkvision must consider long-term light sources—such as lanterns and *everburning torches*—as well as quick options to shine additional light during battles like alchemical flares and *dancing light* cantrips. Archers don't benefit from their weapons' greater range when they can only see as far as a torch shines. Opponents, meanwhile, adjust their tactics to snuff out or destroy sources of light rather than attack a hero directly.

Spells that affect an area are the major exception to most of the penalties darkness imposes. So long as a spellcaster has a general idea of where to aim, they can still unleash broad swathes of damage. Snares, which don't depend on their user's senses, can likewise threaten attackers in the dark without restriction.

Darkvision isn't a perfect escape from the complications of darkness. While creatures with darkvision can see without light, they only see in black and white. This can apply penalties when differentiating color would be useful, such as when searching for creatures in the environment. Alternatively, it might make some activities that rely on color—such as identifying fungi and oozes or sorting alchemical bottles—impossible. The people of the Darklands carry their own lanterns for good reason.

Dealing with Darkness

With how often darkness complicates the lives of adventurers, clever travelers should prepare with a variety of countermeasures.

Coordination: The best defense against any emergency is preparation, so adventuring parties should establish procedures for handling darkness long before it comes up. Something as simple as a roll call helps locate every teammate (or identify missing teammates) when a crisis begins, while party members with darkvision might have short commands they can yell to warn teammates of danger or aim their attacks.

Expanded Senses: Darkvision is handy in the dark, and the *Core Rulebook* provides several ancestries that can begin with this ability.

Spells like *darkvision* and *dragon form* and alchemical elixirs like the darkvision elixir



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provide it briefly in an emergency. But don't limit your solutions to darkvision. Scent is also available to some ancestries and is accessible both through spells like *animal form* and alchemical items like the bloodhound mask; dwarves can also develop tremorsense with the right ancestral feats. The cat's eye elixir provides no additional senses but radically reduces the penalties imposed by darkness. Solutions such as *ooze form*, while extreme, give a suite of new senses that make darkness and light a non-issue. All these senses provide additional options when circumstances beyond darkness rob adventurers of their sight.

Ingenuity: Sometimes simple solutions can overcome complex problems. Adventurers worried about falling over unseen cliffs can lash themselves together with lengths of rope. Throwing a torch or casting *light* onto an arrow before launching it can illuminate hidden threats at range. A humble whistle can help a lost traveler's allies find them, and a thrown stone might confuse the tremorsense of a slaving cave worm.

Magical Light: Travelers in the Darklands depend heavily on magical light. *Continual flame* in particular is endlessly useful, not only for creating an *everburning torch*, but also for casting on weapons, lanterns, arrows, *aeon stones*, and other objects that can be drawn or concealed quickly. *Shining ammunition* and *flaming weapon runes* provide similar benefits. Even simple cantrips like *light* and *dancing lights* provide long-lasting illumination to brighten surprisingly large areas. While the *Core Rulebook* doesn't explicitly describe them as light sources, spells like *fire shield*, *wall of fire*, and other energetic effects might also produce light as a torch. Instantaneous effects like a *fireball* and *lightning bolt* only provide a moment's illumination, requiring a whole team to coordinate their attacks to take advantage of the brief flare.

Mundane Light: While magic seems miraculous, wary travelers never rely entirely on one tool. Lanterns, candles, sunrods, and even torches and campfires provide illumination that can't be snuffed out with a casting of *dispel magic* or an *antimagic field*. To those who can tend them, the phosphorescent fungi of the Darklands are a source of light, food, and potential camouflage all in one. And every alchemist knows that an enemy ignited by enough alchemist's fire sheds light as a torch.

Outside Assistance: Familiars and eidolons can possess darkvision and other extraordinary senses,

while many animal companions possess low-light vision and scent. Most summon spells call outsiders gifted with darkvision, and some conjured creatures can cast *light* and similar spells at will. A rare few summoned creatures like fire elementals can even shed their own light. Any of these creatures can protect a traveler against lurking predators or warn them of unseen hazards. An adventurer can share their companion's senses via a *collar of empathy*—a particularly useful item for familiars who can ride on their partner's shoulder.

Adapted to the Darkness

From deep-sea fish to sightless cave spiders, life constantly finds ways to adapt to a lightless world. Some of best-adapted survivors in the Darklands include the following.

Blindheim: An exquisite example of adaptation, blindheims have developed both the ability to survive without light and the power to generate light to communicate and lure prey. As animals, they make potentially trainable companions for adventurers.

Caligni: In the Darklands, one of the most common survival strategies is making magical bargains with powerful outsiders, and caligni fully embody this strategy. In exchange for worship, they gained innate magic and heightened senses that made surviving underground trivial. An extreme caste system also helps them survive by enforcing order and ensuring a clear division of resources.

Dero: Having adapted to the darkness too well, deros are inhibited from living aboveground, and they desperately covet the surface world. While they possess many of the common survival traits of Darklands species—darkvision, stealth, innate magic—their truest asset is a keen, analytical mind that applies a blend of magic, alchemy, and deviousness to every challenge.

Cave Fisher: While variations exist across different climates and species, the cave fisher survival strategy relies on extreme conservation of energy. After setting a lure, each arthropod can lock its joints and sit motionless for days, with a few extremophiles even able to enter a torpor for months at a time, only to snap into readiness the moment prey stumbles across their sticky filament. Their large size helps them survive these long dormant periods and overpower even humanoids.

Gogiteth: Among the largest predators in the Darklands, gogiteths stand out because they eschew

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the usual strategy of conserving energy. Their long legs, powerful claws, and abundance of fast-twitch muscle fiber allow them to move and react at incredible speed. They even have multiple mouths and digestive organs to quickly devour prey and move on. Combined with their extremely adaptable diet, they've found their niche by hunting literally anything that can't outrun them, from slurks and oozes to driders.

Gug: An extreme example of extraplanar symbiosis is infernal magic's effect on gug society. This magic sustains them between meals, plays a crucial role in their reproduction, and can mature over time to grant them innate occult spells, allowing these giant-like aberrations to survive in squalid conditions that could never support true giants.

Slurk: These frog-like creatures are the backbone of many Darklands ecosystems. Slurks prey upon arthropods of all sizes and, in turn, are the favored prey of many larger predators. The variety of excretions they produce demonstrates extreme evolutionary pressure from both ends, developing techniques both for binding prey and for escaping quickly when threatened.

Urdefhan: Urdefhans are the Darklands' most successful artificial species, having been created thousands of years ago by powerful daemons. Their extreme aggression has shaped their unique society: a complex, multi-tiered regime that relies entirely on hunting to survive. They also exhibit another common survival trait of Darklands societies: fanatical devotion to a social order that helps push them forward through fear or privation.



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