

# THE BLACK LOCH

AN OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY AND LORE OF THE LOCH

## ABOUT

The Black Loch is a small campaign setting in the underdark. Every location on the regional map has a map of its own. All maps are 5' per tile.

All of the maps for this setting can be found at [milbysmaps.com/blackloch](http://milbysmaps.com/blackloch). Free versions of all maps are available. More details on the lore can be found in the DM notes for the individual maps.

This lore was written to provide inspiration, not to handcuff anyone to my ideas about the setting. If any of this lore does not fit the story you want to tell, you are welcome to change or ignore any or all of it.

## LOCATIONS

**THE BLIND COLOSSUS** - The origin of this large, eyeless statue is unknown to most of the residents of the loch. The few who have seen it say it looks like a human.

They are correct. The colossus was built by a tribe of humans called the Ardyeni. The tribe was trapped underground several thousand years ago and built a small civilization in the Deep Reaches of the loch.

At some point, the Ardyeni discovered a method of communicating with an extraplanar being who they believed to be a god. This being was a powerful, evil entity known as Bylir. Bylir granted the Ardyeni a number of gifts, but demanded blood sacrifices in return. The uppermost level of the colossus contains the device used to speak to Bylir: a dark, floating orb. The rooms below were used to imprison and sacrifice victims to provide blood for Bylir.

**BRAZENTHRONE** - This dwarven city is not marked on the map, but is located several miles to the west, down the Blackrun River. Brazenthron is the capital city of a larger dwarven nation known as the Kingdom of the Twelve Mountains. Maps of the city and more detailed information are available separately.

**CHARWALL** - This community of dragonborn, kobolds and other draconic humanoids is built within the ruins of an ancient, burned fortress. Most

of the residents aren't from the underdark and can't clearly explain why they came to the settlement, other than to say that they felt drawn there by something. An ancient red dragon named Kaliphex lives near the settlement and the people of Charwall venerate her. While Kaliphex is almost certainly the source of whatever is drawing these dragonkin to the area, she herself doesn't understand what's causing it or why.

**THE CHESTERBORO ARMS** - This may be the worst inn in the world. Run by an ogre named Lim, it's located in a dangerous area, plagued by monsters and kuo-toan slavers who are known to attack sleeping travelers. Before Lim built the Chesterboro, those venturing through the area would often stay awake and moving for up to three days to avoid the risks of sleeping there. The Chesterboro may be god awful, but it's a safe place to rest. And the beer is surprisingly respectable.

**CINDERFORK FOUNDRY** - Cinderfork Foundry is a duergar outpost. Using the heat from an exposed magma vent to cast and forge steel, the workers here produce armor and mechanical constructs. Occasionally, duergar spies use the foundry as a base of operations to gather information on the Black Loch.

**CLOGWYN PRISON** - This ancient dwarven prison was once located on an island, but the rise in water level caused by the Great Breach has left it almost entirely submerged for the last 600 years. Currently, a sea hag named Wylissa lives here with her coven.

**THE CULL'THAINE ESTATE** - Located in the city of Vlyn'darastyl, this is the home of House Cull'thaine, the city's dominant noble family. While the house has several dozen nobles, only the Matron Mother Driadara Cull'thaine and her daughters reside at the estate.

**THE DEEP SPIRE** - This trading settlement is carved around a large column of stone in the eastern end of the loch. Unlike most settlements in the underdark, the Spire is populated by a mix of many races. Due to the rarity of such places, the Spire has become a haven for exiles and others looking to escape the societies into which they were born. Two groups jointly rule the spire: The orogs of Clan Tideborne and the drow nobles of House Vaerixas. The Tideborne are pirates and raiders, whose fleet is the loch's dominant naval power. Their unlikely allies, House Vaerixas, were once the ruling house of the drow city of Vlyn'darastyl. They live in exile in the spire as their matron mother, Ysri, plots her return to power over the city.

**DELARO'S MANSE** - This small manor is the residence of a human wizard named Delaro Montalos. Delaro came to the Black Loch to conduct research on extradimensional travel. Delaro has discovered a way to travel to other multiverses outside the planes of existence of this multiverse and spends much of his time exploring this other realm. The laws of physics and the very nature of reality itself are wildly different in this strange dimension. The human mind was not built to experience such a place and exposure to it has been slowly wearing away Delaro's sanity.

**EEL'S MAW STRONGHOLD** - This small fortress is controlled by the kuo-toan Bluescale Empire, most of which is to the south, along the Bluescale River. Vlorluc, the fort's commander, has been tasked with overseeing a project to create siege crabs. These titanic, thick-shelled beasts are capable of tearing through armor and crushing walls with ease.

Vlorluc has been successful and the first brood has recently reached maturity. The second brood will be fully-grown after they molt once more. When both broods are ready, the Bluescale Emperor intends to release them from the caverns below Eel's Maw and use them to aid his army in a conquest of the Black Loch.

**GLOGDOLP** - Glogdolg is a small kuo-toan village belonging to a larger kuo-toan nation known as the Bluescale Empire. Glogdolg is the empire's northernmost settlement, miles away from the Bluescale River, along which most of the empire lies. Glogdolg's two main industries are mollusk farming and slaving. Most slaves captured here are sent to a nearby kuo-toan temple known as The Mother's Eye to be sacrificed to their goddess.

**THE GREAT BREACH** - The Great Breach is a 300' (100m) wide hole in the roof of the loch's cavern. This hole leads to the bottom of a sea on the world's surface and water constantly pours in from above. As the water mainly falls around the sides of the breach, a few daring airship pilots have been known to maneuver their vessels down the gap in order to trade with the cities below.

The breach opened 600 years ago and caused the water level in the loch to rise, leaving some places submerged. Notable examples include Clogwyn Prison and the outskirts of Vlyn'darastyl.

**THE HALLS OF THE AWAKENED** - This is the hidden lair of a duergar cult known as the Architects of the Awakening. The cult believes that the duergar

race holds the psionic essence of the mind flayers within them, but that it currently lies dormant. The Architects seek to awaken this essence, empowering all duergar with the psionic potency of the illithids. The cult is led by a priestess of Deep Duerra named Astali.

**HYPHIS** - Hyphis is a myconid colony built around a huge, sentient mushroom known as the Red Warden. The Warden is not a myconid itself, but the myconids of the colony can communicate with it and regard it with great respect. The Red Warden has the ability to see and hear everything that happens in the vicinity of its spores, which have spread to nearly every corner of the Black Loch. This, combined with the Warden's almost perfect memory, means the mysterious mushroom can recall nearly anything that happened anywhere in the loch in the past 200 years.

**THE LAIR OF KALIPHEX** - Kaliphex is a truly ancient, 11,000-year-old red dragon. While most red dragons are evil, Kaliphex has burned, killed, destroyed and dominated so many people on so many worlds that it no longer interests her. The only thing she still finds pleasure in is watching over her hoard, which she has done for many years. Kaliphex has lived on several different worlds and other planes of existence and has amassed quite an impressive hoard. The crown jewel in her collection is a legendary hammer known as "Ghal-Maraz," which Kaliphex acquired from the last world she resided on, just before it was destroyed.

**LOST CATACOMBS OF AULDBAERN** - This is an ancient burial site built by the dwarves of Auldbaern. Auldbaern is the former name of the city that is now Vlyn'darastyl. While most of the tombs are those of commoners or lesser nobles, the royal tomb of Aron II, the last king of Auldbaern, is here as well.

**THE MOTHER'S EYE** - The Mother's Eye is a kuo-toan temple dedicated to the goddess Blibdoolpoolp. The temple is named for an important relic it houses, which is also known as the Mother's Eye. The relic is a large, black pearl about the size of a human fist and has the ability to control most non-sentient sea creatures.

Archpriest Galgool oversees the temple, spending much of his time performing the many sacrifices conducted here.

**OLLIN'S BOREHOLE** - Ollin's Borehole was a deep gnome sapphire mining settlement. The Borehole has been abandoned since a recent raid by duergar

bandits left the settlement wrecked and most of its inhabitants dead. According to rumors, the miners' stash of sapphires was never found.

**THE ROOST** - The Roost is a secret installation at the lower end of the Great Breach. The drow of House Cull'thaine use the facility to observe the airships passing through the breach, as well as the seafaring ships below. On occasion, airships deemed unwelcome have been destroyed while making the perilous descent through the breach.

In addition to the intelligence operation, an airship has been secretly under construction here. A deep gnomish engineer named Kanas Feldspar is overseeing the project. The airship has been named the Duskfall and it is almost finished.

**THE RUINS OF GYAN'DIS** - Gyan'dis was an illithid settlement that was destroyed about 150 years ago by the colony's own elder brain. In an attempt to build an army of thralls with which to conquer the Black Loch, Gyan'dis' elder brain-- known as Thariq-- unearthed an ancient piece of illithid technology known as "incepting tanks."

These devices were capable of modifying the genetics of humanoids and were used long ago to give the Gith their psionic powers. Thariq used them in a similar manner to empower his army of thralls. The resulting thralls turned out to be more powerful than Thariq had intended and revolted against their masters. Thariq, not wishing to release another race like the Gith into the world, unleashed a massive psionic shockwave throughout the city, killing itself and everyone else inside and leaving Gyan'dis in ruins.

**SANCTUM OF PSOR'IL** - This is the home of an ancient aboleth named Psor'il. Located at the far end of the rarely-traveled Deep Reaches, almost no one is aware of the aboleth or its lair.

A host of minions reside in the sanctum as well, with grimlocks, kuo-toa and stone giants among their ranks.

Lately, these minions have been set to the task of bringing a monstrosity called Yhaonim from its extradimensional home into this world. They create a substance called schismic flux, which weakens the barrier between dimensions, in order to allow Yhaonim to cross over. Their work is still incomplete and, at present, Yhaonim is stuck between the two worlds. While the beast is visible in this world, it is not yet tangible, making it a terrifying but largely

harmless sight.

**SCARHIDE YARD** - Scarhide Yard is a shipyard in the Black Loch. Deep gnomish engineers design the vessels and a tribe of grimlocks, known as the Scarhide Clan, perform the labor. The ships built here are regarded as among the best available in the underdark.

**SKATHA'S REST** - Skatha's Rest is a ruined building on Cairnhollow Isle. The orogs of Clan Tideborne use it as a meeting place, holding an event called "The Conclave of the Fleet" here. The Conclave is a yearly gathering of all the clan's ships, where the captains and crews meet, drink and discuss plans for the coming year. This event is the only time when the entire clan is ever in the same place at once.

**THE SMOLDERING ABYSS** - This undersea trench is the deepest part of the Black Loch. Named for its hydrothermal vents, which pump out black clouds of boiling hot water, its existence is known of by few people. Within one of the caverns that dot the sides of the abyss is an ancient crypt, holding the remains of ancient kuo-toan kings. Within another is the lair of the Whisperer, a great kraken-like beast that once terrorized the loch. Unseen for several centuries, many believe the Whisperer is dead. Unfortunately, they are wrong. The beast lives, hibernating deep in its lair, and will awaken before long.

**SPYR-ANAISZ** - Spyr-Anaisz is a small drow settlement built in and around a cluster of huge stalactites. A crane lift allows access to the village to travelers wishing to trade. The community subsists largely on fishing and mushroom farming.

Spyr-Anaisz is much less prosperous than the nearby drow city of Vlyn'darastyl and the residents of the city generally look down on the drow of Spyr-Anaisz as inferiors.

The only noble house in Spyr-Anaisz is House Mylgareth. Matron Mother Elzabra Mylgareth governs the village.

**THE TORRENTS** - The Torrents are a series of cascading waterfalls that run from the surface down into the underdark. The cascades begin when a river on the surface dips beneath a mountain, then tumble down for over a mile, ending in the eastern end of the Black Loch. The Torrents are not the safest way into the underdark, but they *are* one of the fastest. Someone at the top will reach the bottom in about an hour. And if they don't, their corpse will.

**VLYN'DARASTYL** - This drow city lies in the north-west corner of the loch and is the largest settlement on its shores. The city, which was originally founded by dwarves, was once known as Auldbaern before the drow conquered it 1200 years ago. Many of the original dwarven structures-- including the outer walls and the palace-- still remain. The city is home to several noble houses, but is largely ruled by the dominant House Cull'thaine. Due to its proximity to the Great Breach, Vlyn'darastyl does an unusually large amount of trade with the surface. Goods from above are more widely available here than in most of the underdark.

## NOTABLE PEOPLE

**YSRI VAERIXAS (DROW)**- Ysri is the Matron Mother of House Vaerixas, the drow noble house that once ruled the city of Vlyn'darastyl. House Vaerixas is unusual among drow nobility due to their devotion to Eilistraee, the drow goddess of freedom and beauty. Despite this, the family managed to live among, and even rule over, their fellow noble houses, all of whom followed Lolth. This was due to the strength, ferocity and mercilessness of their house, as well as to their willingness to allow other houses their faith without interference.

Yet Ysri's devotion to Eilistraee was more fervent and absolute than her predecessors and, when she rose to become Matron Mother, she began her rule of Vlyn'darastyl by abolishing slavery in the city. Several months later, the other houses launched an attack that killed most of her family and led her to flee to the Deep Spire, where she and the other surviving members of her house live in exile, plotting their vengeful return.

**LORD ADMIRAL VARL (OROG)** - Varl is the current leader of the clan of orog pirates known as the Tideborne. Along with Ysri Vaerixas, Varl rules the Deep Spire. They don't always see eye to eye, but both leaders recognize their dependence on each other for survival.

**LIM THE OGRE (OGRE)** - Lim, the proprietor of the Chesterboro Arms, is an unusually friendly ogre. He's also gigantic, even by ogre standards. He has no idea how to properly run an inn, but he can rip the head off a horse with his hands. And in the dangerous area where his establishment is located, that's probably more important than knowing how to clean bedsheets.

**THE RED WARDEN (???)** - The Red Warden is a

giant, sentient mushroom that lives among the myconids of Hyphis. No one-- the Warden included-- knows exactly what it is or whether there are others like it. The Warden was not always as large as it is now, having grown several thousand times larger as a result of the myconids feeding and fertilizing it. The Warden has a strange ability to see and hear everything that transpires in the vicinity of its spores. Since those spores have spread to nearly every corner of the loch, the Warden is aware of almost everything that happens in the area. It often shares stories of the things it has seen with the myconids, who talk to it regularly.

**KALIPHEX THE IMMORTAL (RED DRAGON)** - See "The Lair of Kaliphex," under "Locations."

**THE WHISPERER (SEA BEAST)** - A great sea beast, similar to a kraken, but only about a quarter of the size. The Whisperer was known for the strange beckoning that sailors would hear in their minds when the beast was nearby, urging them to jump into the sea. Many believe the Whisperer to be dead, as it has not been seen in almost 250 years. In fact, it still lives, hibernating in its lair in the Smoldering Abyss. The Red Warden (see above) may be the only being in the loch that is aware of this.

**ARCHPRIEST GALGOOL (KUO-TOA)** - Galgool is the kuo-toan archpriest in charge of the Mother's Eye temple. Galgool has been hearing voices recently and believes his goddess is speaking to him directly. In reality, the source of the voices is the aboleth Psor'il, who is attempting to manipulate Galgool into bringing him the powerful artifact kept at his temple.

**ASTALI (DUERGAR)** - Astali, a duergar priestess of Deep Duerra, is the leader of the cult known as the Architects of the Awakening. She is a powerful psionicist who seeks to awaken a dormant psionic gift hidden within the duergar, empowering her people with psychic abilities rivaling those of the mind flayers.

**BYLIR (EVIL ENTITY)** - Bylir is a powerful, evil entity, who once communicated with an ancient tribe of humans called the Ardyeni through a device located in the Blind Colossus. Bylir gave the Ardyeni gifts, but never without cost. Most notably, it gave them the ability to see in the darkness, but made them blind to the light.

Bylir is from a bizarre, hostile dimension known as the Far Realm. When an aboleth named Psor'il-- another being of the Far Realm-- came to the loch, Bylir helped it to psychically dominate the Ardyeni,

turning them into mindless servants. Today, many of the descendents of the Ardyeni still serve Psor'il. They are commonly known as grimlocks.

**DELARO MONTALOS (HUMAN)** - See "Delaro's Manse," under "Locations."

**DRIADARA CULL'THAINE (DROW)** - Driadara Cull'thaine is the Matron Mother of House Cull'thaine, the dominant noble house in Vlyn'darastyl. Driadara is the head of the city's ruling council, a position which she has retained ever since ousting Ysri Vaerixas and her house from power 200 years ago. Driadara and the rest of her house are loyal followers of Lolth.

**ELZABRA MYLGARETH (DROW)** - Matron Mother Elzabra Mylgareth is the ruler of the village of Spyr-Anaisz. Her noble house consists only of herself and her two children.

While House Mylgareth is easily the poorest and least-influential noble family in the Black Loch, Elzabra herself is one of the oldest Matron Mothers. At 742 years of age, she is a highly esteemed priestess of Lolth, entrusted with a degree of power only granted after many centuries of loyal devotion to the Spider Queen.

**WYLISSA, USKENDRA AND BOROTHY (SEA HAGS)** - Wylissa and her "sisters" are a coven of sea hags who reside in the underwater ruins of Clogwyn Prison.

**VLORLUC (KUO-TOA)** - Vlorluc is a kuo-toan priest who has been in command of Eel's Maw Stronghold for several years. A highly intelligent individual, his research and leadership has been instrumental in the creation of the siege crabs at Eel's Maw.

**PSOR'IL (ABOLETH)** - Psor'il is an aboleth who has lived in the Black Loch for thousands of years. Its home, the Sanctum of Psor'il, is at the far end of the Deep Reaches, where few others ever travel. While most residents of the loch have never heard of the aboleth, it regularly meddles in the affairs of the region, either through its agents or by using its powerful psionic abilities to manipulate others from afar.

Psor'il is served and protected by a great many minions. Most of these are grimlocks or kuo-toa, with smaller numbers of drow, duergar and deep gnomes. The aboleth is protected by two stone giants as well. Many of these minions live outside the

sanctum, gathering resources, spying or performing other tasks for their master.

**YHAONIM (EXTRAPLANAR MONSTROSITY)** - Yhaonim is a monstrous being from an extraplanar dimension called the Far Realm. The aboleth Psor'il is attempting to bring Yhaonim into the world, but the process is incomplete. Currently, the beast is visible in this world, but not tangible, making it a very terrifying, but largely harmless bit of scenery. Should Yhaonim cross over completely, it would wreak unimaginable havoc. The part of the beast that can currently be seen is not its head or body, but merely one of its limbs.

**GNORR BARLINZET (DEEP GNOME)** - Gnorr is a deep gnome engineer who founded the shipbuilding operation at Scarhide Yard. He is the chief engineer in charge of the shipyard.

**SCARHIDE CLAN (GRIMLOCKS)** - A tribe of grimlocks who serve as laborers in Scarhide Yard. 60 years ago, the Scarhides made an agreement with Gnorr Barlinzet and his team of gnomish engineers. The Scarhides build ships for the gnomes and are compensated with all the meat they can eat. The grimlocks have become skilled shipbuilders over the years, but the limitless supply of food has left them, without exception, tremendously overweight.

**KANAS FELDSPAR (DEEP GNOME)** - Kanas is a deep gnome engineer who was hired by House Cull'thaine to help them construct an airship in the Roost. Kanas is an expert in constructing mechanical engines, which is a trait that his employers had a hard time finding in a drow.

The airship, known as the Duskfall, is almost finished, but Kanas has delayed the completion of the project. Kanas believes his drow employers will kill him when the airship becomes operational and he is preparing to make an escape.

**KALISNA CULL'THAINE (DROW)** - Kalisna is the youngest daughter of Driadara Cull'thaine, the de facto ruler of Vlyn'darastyl. She has been assigned by her mother to oversee operations at The Roost. She hates her post and longs to return to the comforts of Vlyn'darastyl.

## VESSELS

**THE GRINNING WIDOW** - The Grinning Widow is a ship designed for the seas of the underdark. It has no sails or mast and is powered exclusively by oarsmen. The speed at which the ship will move is based

entirely on the number, strength and skill of these oarsmen.

**THE DUSKFALL** - The Duskfall is an airship which has been constructed in secret at The Roost. Built under the orders of Matron Mother Driadara Cull'thaine, the Duskfall is intended for use in launching nighttime raids on surface cities.

The Duskfall may be the only airship in the world to have been constructed in the underdark and it is a bit unusual. In order to limit the amount of sunlight penetrating the ship, the entire vessel is enclosed, with no outer deck. There is a hatch in the bottom to allow soldiers to drop into an enemy settlement from above, bypassing the walls and defenses. The Duskfall is not meant for long journeys and does not include facilities for sleeping or dining.

## **NOTES**

A blank version of the Black Loch regional map is included. I recommend using it as the players' map, marking locations on it as they are discovered.

If you run a campaign in the Black Loch, the party will probably need a ship. I suggest using The Grinning Widow, as it was designed for this purpose.

If you run a campaign in the Black Loch, don't limit yourself to using only the maps that are a part of the setting. The story you're telling is more important than the maps.