

The Drow of Waterdeep

Introduction

Vali would not ordinarily be allowed to venture out into the city of Waterdeep alone. She ought to have spent her days cleaning, fetching tea, and occasionally learning at the museum; and her nights at the halfway house, living with the other girls learning to make their ways in the world. Vali was half-drow, however, and so gently insistent and so in horror of anything approaching trouble that an exception was made. She was permitted to visit the temple of Eilistraee to perfect her still-childish undercommon.

On those nights that she wasn't staying late at the museum, she would stand in the back of the temple, listening. Vali had read in a book that the best way to learn a language was to use it exclusively, and she went far to avoid speaking in the common tongue there, pushing down her frustration at being unable to express herself clearly.

Temple was the only place she could imagine singing, where her soft, clear voice was hidden beneath many others. Drow hymns were ethereal, punctuated by bursts of harsh aggression that she found thrilling when she could manage them. Devotions to Eilistraee almost always began with whispers, honoring the deadly secrecy with which she must be worshipped below. From there they would build, slowly and haltingly, in volume and in defiance.

The songs from the low country (as the other drow referred to the Underdark) were stranger, and when they were sung, the congregation would replace that fell Goddess' name with silence.

In Waterdeep's South Ward, near the intersection of Soothsayer and Snail, there is a temple to Eilistraee. It does not look like a temple. It used to be a grocer's warehouse, and in its storefront one can now find goods made by the drow, using techniques and practices adapted from the Underdark.

Inside the warehouse proper there is storage, and workshops, and quarters for both permanent residents and the slow trickle of refugees seeking solace and safety from the Demon Queen. The second story loft serves as the temple, with newly built stairs to the roof, for services best performed under a moonlit sky.

The inside spaces are dim, but not dark, for the drow of Waterdeep do not fear the light, however unaccustomed to it they may be. All save the cellar, which serves as a farm for strange fungi and light-shunning herbs.

Most drow new to the surface world who find themselves in Waterdeep pass through this place, where they are taught to tell Lloth's lies from Her truths, and prepared to live

among those that they were raised to think of as Her enemies. Many settle elsewhere in the city, but a few stay on to run the shop, and make themselves available for those who arrive with hands shaking, eyes watering, desperate to maintain the sense of amorality and power that protected them in their previous life.

They are possessed of a deep yet gentle cynicism, and an earnest desire to discover what is best in their hearts. They are the drow of Waterdeep.

Culture

Vali sings softly in her crisp, clear voice – the melody is slightly haunting, with quiet passages that seem to imply unshared secrets, and sharp stabbing passions. She pauses to explain the old drow song to her companions.

“You see, he is of an old family. Respected, but approaching...unfashionable? Or perhaps uninteresting. A little too stable.” Vali considered before continuing. “She is from a very minor family, but it is one that is talked about. One that will most likely fall prey to another, but may rise to great heights. If they survive. Hers is an exciting family, and she – she specifically – is well loved by the Demon Queen.”

Another passage is sung, ending in a long humming, like the beating of wings against a web. “There is a mutual attraction, but he is concerned that the match will be foolish, and he will lose respect when her family falls. Or that she will rise so quickly due to the Demon Queen’s favor that she will need to dispose of and replace him. He considers how he will support her elevation while at the same time moderating her acceleration, so to speak – so that he can establish power and means in step with her.”

The next is the most beautiful and the most chilling, and Vali struggles once to match the boundless confidence that she is meant to inhabit, but only once. “She is torn. He is charming, but almost too perfectly poised as a stepping stone to power, and she senses a trap. She is also loath to murder a high house’s scion, even a husband, until she is more firmly established. They are a low country equivalent of star-crossed, though of course they would hardly reference the stars.”

Clearing her throat, she continues. It is clearly meant to be a duet, and she lowers her voice slightly for the male parts. Her voice is taunting, cruel, and exultant. It segues into a gentleness that is rife with an amused tension.

Vali pauses after she has finished, struggling to summarize. After a few false starts, she says flatly, “They decide to wed,” and then quickly continues.

There are rarely more than several hundred drow in Waterdeep at any one time, and most of them in the city proper. Nearly all have some connection with Eilistraee’s temple, though for some that is less a place of worship and more a social center of their community.

Aruvanti is the oldest drow in Waterdeep. She does not claim the title of priestess, but the temple's clergy defer to her. When there is a dispute between the city's drow, it is usually her word that settles it. Aruvanti is said to have friends in high places, and that may be true. All agree that she is clever, and wise, and devoted to making Waterdeep a place where her people can heal from the scars of the Queen below.

In Waterdeep, drow refer to the underdark as “the low country” and the surface as “the high country”. Most prefer to say little of their time in the low country, as the memories of those they've left behind are painful, and they fear that some hurt that they visited upon another will follow them into their new life, inciting yet another cycle of rivalry and revenge. Better, most feel, to let that past life lie, and it is considered rude to probe. It is not unusual for a drow to adopt a new name, entirely or in part, especially if their family name is renowned for its fealty to the Demon Queen, or its cruelty.

Newly arrived drow spend several months in the temple, learning to live in this strange new world, and to forgive themselves for the things they have done as part of the cult of Lloth. The method of this transition is Aruvanti's invention, centuries in the making, and has only recently come to the attention of the city's physicians and alienists.

There are drow and half-drow born in the city who know nothing of the low country except what they have been told, and tensions sometimes arise between them and those who have escaped it. These are the subject of many of the newer drow poems and songs, which tend to the intellectual and the sardonic. The hymns to Eilistraee, by comparison, are sad and beautiful.

D'ravvt is the most accomplished drow bard in the city (of four total), and he works diligently to collect and set down the songs and stories of his people. He is adamant that these works not be sanitized or abridged, believing that to forget the fell beauty of the low country is a dangerous thing for generations to come. He often works with Aruvanti to present and publish these works in a proper context.

Drow claiming to be Aevendrow or Lorendrow are met with mild suspicion by Waterdeep drow. Many drow have told lies on their journey to Waterdeep, for their own safety, and occasionally to themselves. Most of the drow of Waterdeep do not believe in Callidae or Saekolath, but if those beliefs help another drow get through the day, so be it.

Economy

"Sit, dear." Aruvanti was tall, and unbowed by her centuries. She had night-black skin, swollen hands, and a network of lines on her face that emerged at her every expression. Vali had the dove grey skin of a half-drow. She nodded primly to the oldest elf she'd ever met, seating herself beside her.

Aruvanti asked quietly, "Did you know him?"

Vali replied. "I had met him, but I could not say that I knew him." Vali looked up at the older elf, and continued, "You know everyone." It was not a question.

Aruvanti sighed. "Some days it seems that way." She seemed to look inward before speaking again. "He was born in Waterdeep. He showed promise as a weaver. He drank too much, he liked dogs, and now he is dead."

Vali had no idea what to say, so she said nothing. She had seen many drow cry in this temple, but none here today. The mood was subdued, but not somber. Hesitatingly, Vali whispered, "Why does no one cry?"

Aruvanti seemed surprised, and then smiled very gently down at Vali by her side. "To be a drow living free from the Queen's web of lies is to grieve the living." She looked down at her feet, prompting Vali to do the same. "Below there are many, and few will ever see the light. Do not think us heartless, my dear. We are..."

Her eyes lifted to take in the drow of Waterdeep, those who she thought of as her people. Her voice softened, and Vali thought she heard it crack as she finished, "We are merely practical. Bringing light to the dead is a task for the Gods. The living are our burden, and it is heavy enough."

Together, now in silence, they watched and they listened as Eilistraee took the responsibility for a weaver - who drank too much, and loved dogs - out of their hands and into Her own.

Historically, when visitors from a new culture find themselves in Waterdeep, they support themselves primarily through trade, followed closely by cuisine. Not so with the drow. Trade with their homeland is hardly an option, and most of Waterdeep considers drow fare to be an acquired taste. There is a small market for Blackmoss Whiskey, and a slow appreciation for a few drow spices that are making their way into more traditional dishes, but thus far there is little coin in street cookery for the drow.

Educated drow serve as sages, or assistants to sages, helping others to better understand the ecology, hazards, and cultures of the underdark. A few serve as translators, or tutors in Undercommon. Drow wizards often fund their arcane research through the sale of permanent or rechargeable *Faerie Fire* light sources, the production of which were a routine part of their arcane training.

Erivashny the Grey is among the most established of the city's drow wizards, a diviner approaching his two hundredth birthday. He has lived in Waterdeep for nearly fifty years, currently in the North Ward, where he takes on occasional apprentices. Erivashny is not a bad sort, but he is a testy misanthrope who occasionally requires Aruvanti to remind him of his obligations to his people. Erivashny's current apprentice, **N'yarleena**,

is a former priestess of Lloth whose arcane interests were impossible to pursue in her former life. She finds great joy in her new work as a conjurer, but is impatient to achieve mastery in it. Finding herself a beginner in a subservient role when she is well into her seventies is a bitter pill for her. Though she would never admit it, it has shaken her confidence in herself.

Mushroom leather goods are perhaps those most associated by the general populace with the city's drow. Their bags, boots, and purses are looked upon as affordable luxury items. Drow leather armor is highly sought after, and produced in collaboration with **Edwina Longbottom**, a halfling leatherworker and armorsmith. *Longbottom's Perfected Protections* is a well-established family business, one long associated with innovation. The drow armorsmiths have need of Edwina's factories, and her company's access to raw materials, some of them unusual. Edwina has a cordial relationship with the temple and her drow employees, but she's a businesswoman first and foremost, and she would prefer to keep the market for mushroom leather armor cornered.

In the underdark, light is scarce, and what light there is tends to be monochromatic. As a result, drow fabrics depend more on differences in luminance, rather than differences in color, to produce an aesthetic. To those without darkvision, a fine drow scarf looks like plain, dark, textured silk. Only those with darkvision can appreciate the subtle weavings of luminance; beautiful patterns that almost seem to glow in contrast to the matte of the basic silk. Drow silks are highly sought after by the not-insignificant fraction of Waterdeep whose eyes can appreciate them.

The temple has a few looms, but for the production of specialty fabrics and particularly fine weaves, drow turn to *Heddlewright's Fine Fabrics*. **Lydia Heddlewright** is a half-orc who grew up in Waterdeep. Well cared for in one of its orphanages, she is committed both to her business and to various charitable causes. When she can, she hires out time on her looms (at a modest fee) to artisans in need. Lydia is well liked by Aruvanti, who was a source of comfort to her when her wife passed suddenly several years ago. They see each other only occasionally, but with great pleasure.

Adventure Hooks

An Ill-Considered Venture

Below the temple, in a corner of the mushroom farm, an excavation broke into the tunnels below Waterdeep. Drow adolescents, themselves born on the surface, snuck into the tunnels, hoping to see the Underdark that they know only through whispers and

fables. Aruvanti hires the adventurers to rescue them. They have been captured by a group of Zhentarim treasure hunters who are wondering if they're worth randoming.

The Lost Apprentice

N'yarleena is missing, and Erivashny is involved in a tense negotiation, unable to find her himself. She went below Waterdeep in search of a lost spellbook and was captured by a duergar raiding party.

The Spiciest Moss

The drow yearn for a staple spice available only deep below. Once they have a sample of the S'scoveelmoss, they will be able to reproduce it in the farm below the temple. One recent refugee knows of a nearby place where the moss can be found, but the area is too near a hook horror nest to reach safely. Aruvanti knows that the moss would improve morale in the community and possibly be popular outside of it, and is willing to invest in a group of adventurers to retrieve it.

Undergris

Erivashny hires the adventurers to collect samples of undergris, a substance produced by an aboleth that has feasted on myconids. Erivashny has heard that several weeks ago, an aboleth capsized a myconid fishing raft on an underground lake beneath Waterdeep. He hires the adventurers to hunt the aboleth and bring him its undergris.

The Gaps in Her Web

A collector of dubious virtue has an original of *The Gaps In Her Web*, a satirical epic by the high elf Kashadar Llewnishtae excoriating Lloth and Her cult. The popularized version has had its ending rewritten by the cult, blunting its impact. D'ravvt wishes to hire the adventurers to steal the original from this eccentric collector, so that he can publish it under a pseudonym.

NPCs

Aruvanti (drow, very old, wise, potentially lethal)

D'ravvt (drow, early 60s, handsome, earnest)

Erivashny the Grey (drow, mid 190s, crotchety, gaunt)

N'yarleena (drow, early 70s, determined, cocky)

Edwina Longbottom (halfling, mid 70s, rich, self-satisfied, a bit ruthless)

Lydia Heddlewright (half-orc, late 20s, kind, well-dressed, melancholy)