

Down Through the Darklands Player's Guide

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Setting



While it is nominally a bit of a spoiler to say that the campaign involves descending down through the Darklands, *it is in the title*, and this guide presumes that everyone knows that. Don't worry, it's about the journey, not the destination...

Northeastern Isgar

The story begins in 4721 AR in a backwater homestead located approximately equally distant from [Elidir](#), the Iron Rose Palace and the town of Breachill¹ (and its nearby former Hellknight fortress, [Citadel Altaerein](#)). This places it not far from the border with Druma in the northeast corner of the nation of Isgar, a client-state of [Cheliox](#).

Recent Events Impacting Isgar

4606 AR	Apparent death of the god, Aroden, ushers in the Age of Lost Omens
4701 AR	End of the Goblinblood Wars
4717 AR	Nirmathas and Molthune, to the northwest, are invaded by

¹ Jacobs, James. [Age of Ashes Player's Guide](#), "Breachill Gazetteer." pp. 6-10

This region is extremely rural, but it is not far from major trade routes that move through passes in the Menador Mountains from [Lake Encarthan](#) to the north, through Elidir and on to Cheliox and points south. Goods can be procured from the city if need be, so those who live here are certainly not stranded.

Isger is nominally a vassal state of Cheliox. Hellknights and other Chellish groups are not unknown here. However Cheliox has its own problems to be dealing with and Isger is generally given broad leeway to run their own business as long as trade continues to flow.

hobgoblin armies, re-igniting fears of a new war with goblinkind, though the Ironfang Invasion—as it came to be called—was defeated.

[4718 AR](#)

To the north, the demonic gateway, The Worldwound, is sealed, ending the Fifth Mendevian Crusade.

[4719 AR](#)

A battle against a powerful evil dragon takes place at Citadel Altaerein in eastern Isger. Tar-Baphon destroys the nation of Lastwall forming the undead nation of the Gravelands.

The Darklands

Player characters are not generally aware of the Darklands. If they have heard anything it is that there are dark and evil beings such as duergar and troglodytes (xulgaths to those with sufficient relevant Lore or Society to know the name they go by among Darklands folk) who find ways to the surface and raid innocent farmers and merchants when they get the chance. A few characters will have heard of Nar-Voth (see “Backgrounds” below) the upper-reaches of the Darklands, but starting player characters should not assume they’ve heard of any deeper regions (skill checks can be made in-game for relevant details as they come up). In fact, the name Nar-Voth might not even be known to those who do know about the region, simply knowing it as “the Darklands.”

Obviously, darkvision and other means of perceiving in the dark or creating light are valuable in such a context. Survival is also a key skill when dealing with any part of the Darklands.

Other Resources

This Adventure Path assumes that the players have access to the [Core Rulebook](#). It is highly useful to own the text either in print or PDF, but the rules can also be referenced and searched via the [Archives of Nethys](#).

For background the world and lore specific to this adventure’s setting, these books can be quite helpful:

- [The Lost Omens World Guide](#)
- [Age of Ashes Player’s Guide](#) for “Breachill Gazetteer” a town near the PC starting location
- [Into the Darklands](#); see [Darklands Lore](#), below, for restrictions

For specific character options, these books add a practical infinity of combinations of starting character alongside the *Core Rulebook*:

- [Advanced Player's Guide](#)
- [Lost Omens Character Guide](#)

The Call to Adventure

Player characters will be contacted by a travelling bard or someone they know will tell them about a bard's tale of potential adventure in northeast Isger. Perhaps this is someone met in a tavern before or after their performance. Perhaps it's someone met on the road. However it happened, they recounted the tale of a wealthy businessman who has retired into the country but has run into a den of troglodytes and worse in a cave near his property. He's offering a handsome reward for the adventurers that could end this menace and perhaps explore these caves for additional dangers they might present. The bard also mentions that one of the creatures might be an ettercap, but that seems like it must be an exaggeration.

Characters

Alignment

While there is plenty of room for evil in the Darklands, this campaign will assume that the players are either good or neutral. Where they fall on the lawful/chaotic spectrum will not make a character more or less viable, however. An evil PC will have substantial problems with fitting in early on, and if a character insists on running an evil PC they will have to clear it with the GM and perhaps the other players so as not to be disruptive to the game.

Ancestries

Most ancestries in Pathfinder are surface races. There are members of such races in the depths of the Darklands, but they are typically considered outsiders. A few notes are given below on specific ancestries that might encounter differences in the realms below:

Catfolk

These feline humanoids are almost unheard of in Isger. A player who selected this ancestry would almost certainly be from foreign lands.

Dwarves

One of the most numerous races in the upper reaches of the Darklands are the duergar. Given their tendency to kill dwarves on sight, choosing to play a dwarf may put a player at some disadvantage. While it is an allowed option, you are encouraged to discuss the potential pitfalls with your game master before selecting a character of this race.

Elves

Similar to the situation that dwarves are in, the drow of the Darklands tend to be hostile to their elven kin. However, the drow tend to be hostile to everyone, so playing an elf will be more likely to add flavor to the game than outright difficulty.

Hobgoblin

See Goblin. Because of the recent history, it is ***probably not wise to play a hobgoblin***. The level of hatred toward these more militant cousins of the common goblin is extreme in Isger.

Goblin

There are still a great many in Isger who hate goblins due to the history of the [Goblinblood Wars](#). Playing a goblin will therefore result in some hostile interactions, but should be fine, especially as the campaign moves beyond the surface where goblins are one of the few playable races that are not automatically assumed to be surface-dwellers in the Darklands.

Lizardfolk (Iruxi)

Lizardfolk are often mistaken for xulgaths in the surface world, but throughout this campaign, few Darklands residents would make this mistake given how often they are likely to interact with xulgaths.

Ratfolk

See Catfolk.

Tengu

See Catfolk.

Other Surface Ancestries

Other ancestries such as humans or gnomes are likely to be fairly neutral choices. They're not exactly rare in the Darklands, but neither are they common. Expect to be recognized as surface dwellers, but in a sense, that's what this adventure is all about!

Backgrounds

Some backgrounds would mix particularly well or poorly with the campaign. Any common background may be selected. Specific backgrounds that work well for the campaign are listed below.

Archaeologist - This background would synergize well with the campaign. Consider selecting Darklands or Geology Lore as your Additional Lore feat.

- Bookkeeper** - This background will synergize well with some of the downtime activities of the game, but discuss with your game master whether or not you would actually have an interest in roleplaying the financial dealings of an organization or community. With this background, you can use Society or an appropriate Lore skill as if it were Crafting to make money during downtime for this adventure.
- Bounty Hunter** - You might be after someone in particular. Consult your game master about this background and what hooks they might want to provide. The bounty hunter's skills are certainly relevant.
- Criminal** - You may take this background as written. But as a variant "**Darklands Smuggler**," replace Underworld Lore with Darklands Lore. In this case, you aided in smuggling Darklands goods at some point in your past.
- Detective** - As with Criminal, you can take this background as written or as the variant, "**Darklands Detective**," in which case you substitute Darklands Lore for Underworld Lore, representing your work in investigating Darklands-related crime such as smuggling illegal goods. As a party backstory hook, perhaps one PC with the Darklands Detective background first met another PC with the Darklands Smuggler background by foiling their operations...
- Hunter** - Similar to Bounty Hunter, this background is directly relevant to much of the game.
- Miner** - Of course a miner is likely to find uses for their skills in a campaign that deals with the Darklands.
- Nomad** - As a variation, "**Darklands Nomad**" uses Darklands as the Lore skill for this background and also gains a +1 bonus when using the Cover Tracks activity while underground.
- Prisoner** - Note that this includes past servitude. Slavery is not uncommon in the Darklands, and so a background as a slave might lead to a very different perspective for a player character. A "**Darklands Slave**" gains Darklands Lore as a trained skill.
- Refugee** - As a variation, "**Darklands Refugee**" uses Darklands as the Lore skill for this background and gains a +1 bonus to Streetwise checks in underground communities.
- Root Worker** - Your background with herbalism will come in handy when trying to identify strange fungi and their potential uses. The normal penalty for identifying Darklands flora does not apply for you in Nar-Voth.
- Ruin Delver** - This Abomination Vaults background can be adapted to the Down Through the Darklands Campaign. Replace the text of the description with "You have been eager to explore potential Darklands sites for much of your life and have spent time gathering lore and trivia about such locations." Also replace the Roseguard Lore skill with Darklands Lore.
- Trailblazer** - An especially useful background for this campaign.

Classes

Every class has the potential to be useful in this campaign, but those that rely on above-ground ecologies, urban settings or animal companions that aren't comfortable underground might not do as well as others.

Any animal companion that requires a specific environment or which cannot squeeze through tight spaces will probably not be viable for substantial portions of this adventure.

On the other hand, not *all* of the campaign is spent underground, so any class feature that makes a character less functional on the surface will still come up, just not as often as in most campaigns set on the surface.

Skills

Lore

Lore specializations that may be of particular value in this campaign:

Darklands - Available only with an appropriate background (see above) or GM approval. Player characters cannot advance in proficiency rank with this lore skill except as directed by the GM, but expect to be able to advance one proficiency rank per Chapter of the story at most.

Herbalism - Though many Darklands plants and fungi are unique to that environment (giving a -2 penalty to checks involving them) any basic knowledge of what is hazardous and what is safe may come into play. If this skill is taken or increased in rank after encountering the Darklands, remove the -2 penalty.

Engineering - A knowledge of basic construction techniques is likely to be applicable

Geology - As with Mining, an understanding of the environment is always of value.

Mining - Obviously knowing how underground tunnels are made and maintained is likely to have an influence in a game that takes place largely underground, but knowledge of types of ore and crystals may also be of value.

Nature

Always useful when coming up against strange new animals! This and Herbalism Lore can be used to identify many of the strange species of fungus in the Darklands.

Survival

Any adventure that is about exploration is likely to find many uses for this skill.

Pathfinder 2e For New Players

Are you a Pathfinder 1e or D&D 5e player who wants to play in a Down Through the Darklands campaign? This section is for you! If you haven't played tabletop RPGs at all, this probably won't be much help, but most people have come across *something* in a gaming system before.

First off, there are some great videos out there:

- [Nonat1s Pathfinder Second Edition Beginner's Guide](#) (playlist)
- [How It's Played's Basics for Gamers series](#) (playlist)
- [Taking 20's Pathfinder 2e Fast Start](#)
- [Classic_DM's Pathfinder 2e - How to Get Playing](#)

But videos aren't everything. There are definitely some things in this game that need to be explained. Here are the top items that I find new players getting confused by:

1. When creating a character, the approach in Pathfinder 2e is subtly different from many other games. You might think first in terms of your ancestry and heritage ("race" in previous editions). This, in combination with your background will tell you what your options are for attributes, so you don't need to think about your character in terms of numbers at the outset.
2. Feats in Pathfinder 2e are broken up into Class Feats, Ancestry Feats, Skill Feats and General Feats. The first two are really the ones that have a major impact on your character. The other two are more about rounding out how you interact with the world. So don't be shocked when General Feats and Skill Feats aren't all that amazing.
3. [Downtime](#) (*Core Rulebook pg. 500*) isn't just when you update your spellbook. It's a major component of the game. Yes, mechanically it's a bit sparse, but you should be thinking of your character's downtime as a time for character growth. Don't just make a couple of die rolls, collect your few silver and move on. Talk to the GM, roleplay those scenarios as much as makes sense. Dig into what's going on in the world!
4. Exploration mode is really helpful! This is where you identify an activity that your character is engaging in while on the move and the GM tells you how that plays out. Activities are detailed in [the rules for encounter mode](#) (*Core Rulebook pg. 479*) but they can include things like searching, detecting magic, tracking and so on. Each character determines their activity then the group decides where the party wants to go. Then the GM tells them what each activity resulted in as they move and if there's any hazards that cause them to exit exploration mode and go into encounter mode. It's a good policy for the party to agree on exploration mode activities as a group so that they synergize with each other and provide comprehensive coverage for whatever might come up.
5. Many things you might want or need to do with a skill require a specific proficiency such as trained or expert. Advancing your most used skills is an important consideration.

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