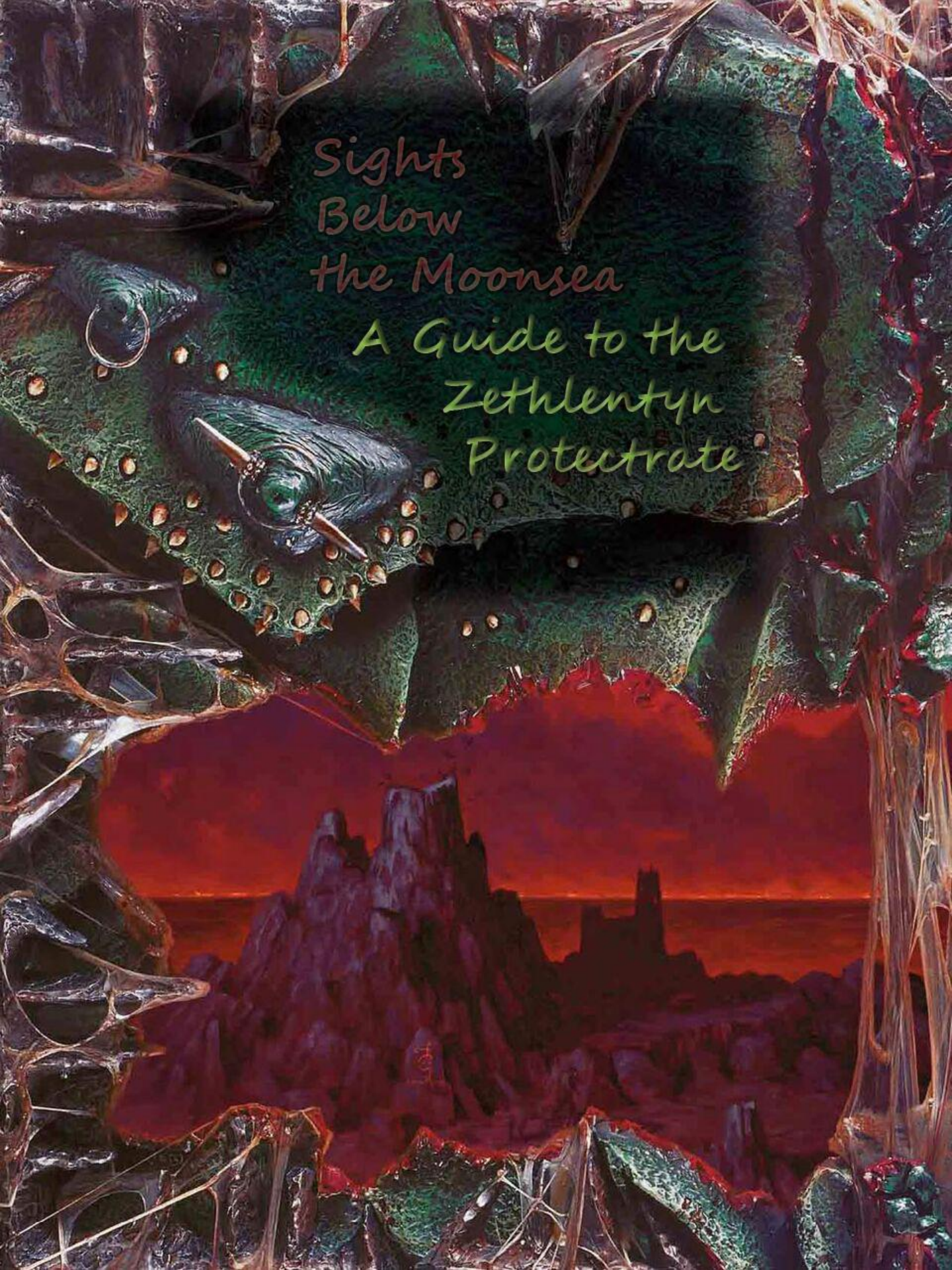

Sights
Below
the Moonsea
A Guide to the
Zethlentyn
Protectrate

About This Guide

This guide is far from exhaustive. It is a living document that receives updates as more areas within the Protectorate are explored and developed. The guide serves two purposes.

Firstly, it provides background that could be useful for dungeon masters who are running the *Swords and Spies Below the Moonsea* series of adventures as well as the future adventures set in the area. The guide is not required to run the adventures, but can provide extra information for games with curious players who wish to delve deeper into the background.

Secondly, the guide serves as a common base for anyone wishing to set adventures in the area. A hidden chapter (available by request) has additional information on some of the long term plans for the setting and some of the hidden machinations happening behind the scenes.

Please excuse the incomplete nature and enjoy. More to come.

Andrew B.

Art Credits: James Austin, WoTC, Inkarnate, Corey Johnston, Daniel Comerci

Chapter 1: Protectorate Overview

The Zethlentyn Protectorate is a state of allied drow houses located in the Deep Wastes region of the Middledark. Although colloquially referred to as a city, Zethlentyn actually encompasses several settlements, many with their own borders and protections.

Geography

The Deep Wastes are a large and mostly uninhabited area of the Underdark that lies below regions of the Moonsea, Thar and the Galena Mountains on the surface.

The Protectorate itself is nestled in a well-defensible area of the Deep Wastes, only two major approaches by land and a well-defended passage to the shores of the Moondeep Sea. Though never an ally, the closest major known city is Maerymidra, which lies far to the southwest.

Politics

Unlike most drow settlements, Zethlentyn is not dedicated to Lolth and allows the worshippers of all deities, including those of the Spider Queen. The Protectorate was founded on the principles that Drow superiority over others can be best attained by drawing on the strengths of all Drow and that in their superiority, Drow can find strength and dominance in any pursuit.

Typical of the drow, the Protectorate is comprised of various Houses that number into the dozens and is ruled by the representatives of the “great houses”, of which there are ten. The “Council of Eleven” is comprised of the rulers of these houses, with the top house having two representatives. The majority of the council’s work and decisions have to do with external politics and common defenses.

The Xaelaryss

One notable decision made by the council is the precise ranking of the houses of the protectorate. This complex annual process is called the "Xaelaryss", a word that translates roughly to "rank-binding". The Xaelaryss takes into account military and commercial power wielded by individual houses.

The weeks leading up to the day are marked by various shows of force – from lavish parties and parades to vicious attacks and assassinations. When the ranking is finally issued, it is marked by a celebration throughout the common areas.

In truth, the Great Houses have little chance of being toppled through the Xaelaryss, so the whole process is seen by the more cynical as a way for those houses to exert influence over the lesser houses seeking to improve their standing.

The Prime Laws

To allow each of the member houses their opportunity to pursue power, the laws of the protectorate do not actually protect the houses from each other, nor do they restrict any activities that those houses may participate in. To these ends, the protectorate has two prime laws:

- The law of internal conflict: Protectorate ground – protectorate business. House ground – house business.
- The law of external threat: All serve the protectorate.

The essence of the first law is that anything goes, so long as it happens on the grounds of one of the houses and not on the common ground of the protectorate. The essence of the second law is that all houses contribute capable – and often best – members of their house to the protectorate's independent defense force, called the Sald'iar.

The Sald'iar: Defenders of Zethlentyn

The Sald'iar report directly to the Council of Eleven and will swiftly and mercilessly deal with any violence or chaos that happens on common grounds. As the only ones actually authorized to inflict violence in areas designated as common grounds, they are quick to set an example and are thus much feared.

Members of the Sald'iar are recruited from all houses – great and small – and give up their house standing when they join. Being recruited into the ranks of the Sald'iar is a position of privilege in terms of both social and financial standing and something that many drow – especially in the lower houses – aspire to.

The Sald'iar wear black uniforms with a dark Zethlentyn emblem. They also frequently wear masks in public.

The Sald'iar are the core of Zethlentyn's external defense force and serve as both border guards and command structure for the individual house forces in the event of external attack.
When a matter is urgent and there is no time to convene a council, the Sald'iar can be dispatched by House Zethlentyn, though even then, the commanders retain some autonomy and may demand that a council be called.

Enclave to Empire: Brief History of the Protectorate

Though the date of the original settlement of the area by the newly founded house Zethlentyn dates back over 400 years, it is only in the last 150 years that the protectorate has grown into what it is today.

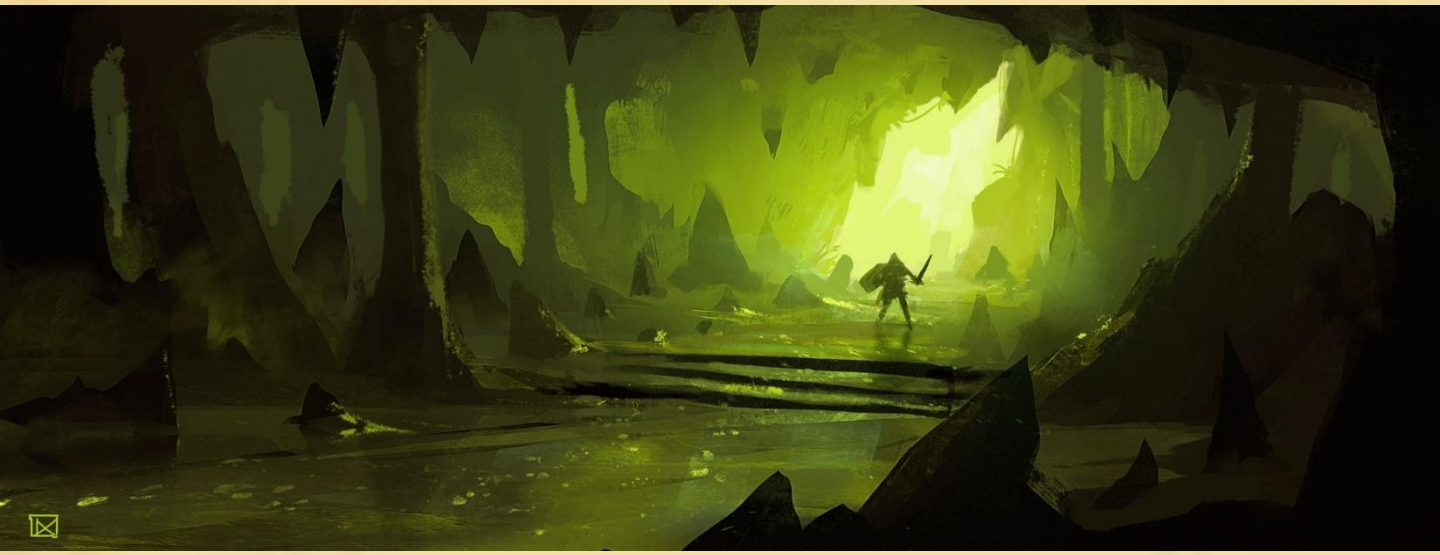
The giant stalagmite that now represents the grand center of the protectorate known as Zethlentyn Prime was first discovered and used as an exploration base by House Zeth of Menzoberronzan. As political affairs and Lolth's dominance forced house Zeth out of the City of Spiders, they formed an alliance with another band of exiles in House Lenteen. Joining forces, they relocated to the Deep Wastes and founded their own small enclave, calling it House Zethlentyn.

Dissatisfied with the way that Mendoberranzan had a habit of eating its best and brightest, House Zethlentyn took a more accepting approach and even as various factions wanted to split off to form their own houses, they were encouraged to remain and settle in the area, forming an autonomous ally rather than an unpredictable enemy. Though of course with drow being drow, the latter were hardly in short supply.

While Zethlentyn grew with these small offshoot houses and occasional allied settlers, it wasn't until the Silence of Lolth caused massive upheaval in the majority of the great Drow cities that Zethlentyn saw a true surge in population and power. Over the course of two decades after the silence, powerful refugees or exiles from cities such as Eryndlyn, Chad Nasad, Sschindylryn and even Mendoberronzan itself arrived at Zethlentyn and saw it as an opportunity for a new start free of their past. Several such refugee houses continue to prosper and form the high houses of today.

Chapter 2: Select Houses of the Protectorate

Reader Note: This section is mostly spoiler-free as it details the state of the houses as it stood at the first mention of the Zethlentyn Protectorate during the events of *Six Summoned Swords* and includes houses that may have subsequently undergone changes.



The First House: Zethlentyn

The founding house of the protectorate remains its core, strength and in many ways personality. House Zethlentyn has been ruled by the same duumvirate since its inception.

Though many of the older drow remember the Rilarra and Rylatar Zethlentyn as separate people that formed the duumvirate centuries ago, their identities have become almost interchangeable since. The change is intentional. Seeking to unify the drow people and to weaken their reliance on the matriarchy, the rulers of Zethlentyn sought both enchantments and training and now appear identical to the point of being easily mistaken for twins. To this end, they both wear the same hairstyles and identical armor which does not betray their gender. Thought they celebrated their one-ness, they are not humourless and will occasionally don different looks for the right occasion. Such events are rare and create much buzz in Zethlentyn`s social sphere.

House Zethlentyn is located in the enormous stalagmite and while it is technically called Zethlentyn Prime, that name over the years has come to refer to not only the noble house, but the general metropolis of common grounds that has grown up around it.

House Zethlentyn is not dedicated to Lolth and her worship is rare among its members as those that wish to worship the spider queen inevitably end up to leaving to join one of the houses that is fully dedicated to her.

The Second House: Auvrymtor

The second house of the protectorate remains its most secretive. Its members seemingly do not worship Lolth or any of the Dark Seldarine. It is one of the few houses that deals with devils. The Auvrymtor drow are typically calm and remain neutral in their dealings. One of the more senior members of the house, Talabaste Auvrymtor. is a foremost arcane researcher in Zethlentyn and is often called up for her expertise.

The Third House: Ouss'Nassath
House Ouss'Nassath was formed by refugees that had fled the city of Chad Nasad over a century ago. Fully dedicated to Lolth, the house is ruled by Matron Waerlyx Ouss'Nassath. The house has a unique affinity for dragons and it is rumoured that the Matron herself can transform into a deep dragon. This house appears in the advenuture *House of Webs.*

The Fourth House: Kencharith
House Kencharith is another house fully dedicated to Lolth. They serve as both staunch allies of House Ouss'Nassath as well as their chief competitors for the Spider Queen's favour.

The Fifth House: Quiltrin
House Quiltrin was established by traders from Sschindylryn. Realizing over the years that they've found an where males are able to achieve even higher prominence than in their home city, a number of merchants split off to found an official houses. Their connections outside the Protectorate quickly allowed them to dominate many mercantile affairs. Success in external trade was of course good for the Protectorate as a whole and greatly contributed to its recent growth.

The Sixth House: Claddatar
The Sixth House is a militaristic, male-dominated house dedicated to the deity Selvetarm. It would be unthinkable in a Lolth-worshipping city that an entire house would worship her enslaved protector. In Zethlentyn, however, those who were once indentured or of low rank and prayed to the enslaved, have now risen to a position of great power.

Those of House Claddatar worship Selvetarm not out of pity for their lot in society, but due to his battle ferocity and unmatched combat prowess.

Over the years, House Claddatar earned great respect among the drow of Zethlentyn, and many warriors – males especially – yearn to join the House.

While it's still somewhat taboo for a female drow to worship Selvetarm, some who wish to focus their efforts on melee combat have joined over the years.

A typical House Claddatar warrior is known for their unflinching calm- they are not quick to anger, yet when one's ire is incurred, they fight like possessed beasts. Another distinguishing feature is their typical appearance. While all drow typically prize appearance, House Claddatar male warriors especially exemplify this – to any that might find male drow physically attractive, these are just about perfect specimens. This house is encountered in *House of Blades* and other adventures.

The Seventh House: Vith'tyl
House Vith'tyl joined the protectorate shortly after the Silence and is distinguished by their choice to openly associate with devils. The nature of the pact that is allows this association is not known, though most believe that it comes from Qu'thil Del'Valsharess – the leader of the house. Calling herself a "Scion of Valsharess ", Qu'thil rules the house with determination and grand ambitions, raising the house's status by every means available.
In a recent bid to increase their standing, House Vith'tyl has become patron to the lower House Axcelon, taking a partnership stake in that house's successful diamond mining operation. Along with House Axcelon, this house is at the center of the *Swords Below the Moonsea* trilogy.

The Eighth House: Tor'Erhyl
The Eighth House is dedicated to the good drow goddess Eilistraee. It is ruled by Matron Meriele Tor'Erhyl. With a cadre of highly-trained sword dancers, House Tor'Erhyl works to spread Eilistraee's message of peace and redemption. More about is revealed in the *Spies Below the Moonsea* series.

The Ninth House: -
The ninth house of the Protectorate has not yet made an appearance.
Ooh - mystery!

The Tenth House: Zaunmice
The Tenth House is – much to the chagrin of several others -- dedicated to the death goddess Kiaransalee. Operating on the outskirts of Zethlentyn, they are allies to none within, yet seem to be content with taking what they want from the battles without. This house is the main subject of the adventure *House of Revenance*.

The Eleventh House: Briz'belar
One of the protectorate's oldest houses, House Briz'belar has – by drow standards – a strange history. For more than 50 years, the house toiled tirelessly at one seemingly foolish task – digging miles through solid rock in order to create a passage from Zethlentyn to the Moondeep Sea.

The unusual part was that the drow themselves did much of the tunneling. This unfit work for their race garnered them nicknames such as a "dirters" and "moles". It also nearly bankrupted and ruined the house. It wasn't until they switched tactics and took a full clan of dwarves as slaves that the tunnel was finally completed.

Yet the history grew stranger still. Enamoured with their creation and wanting to make it grander still, the dwarves made an unheard-of alliance with the drow. Calling themselves Clan Moontunnel, the dwarves not only continue lifelong improvements to their creation, but also provide high-end building services to the rest of the protectorate.

With the tunnel complete and their former slaves turned into staunch allies, the fortunes of HouseeBriz'belar have turned around. Ships to sail the Moondeep Sea were built and new avenues for trade became open and profitable. As centuries passed, the nicknames of "dirters" and "moles" have been replaced by a reputation as fearless sailors who dare to cross the calm yet dangerous Moondeep Sea.

As many non Briz'belar ships were lost at sea, rumours began of the house having made some dark pact with the mysterious "deep ones", and this has only served to ensure their dominance of the sea trade. Those of House of Briz'belar have embraced these rumours and now adorn their ships with tentacled figureheads and perfor strange rituals during the crossings for all to see. House Briz'belar has close ties to the mercantile House Quiltrin. This house is the primary subject of the adventure *House of Silent Tides.*

The Twenty-Seventh House: Axcelon
An old house dedicated to Lolth, house Axcelon was once dedicated to arcane research. In the recent centuries, however, all efforts have been diverted to their lucrative diamond mining operation. The now-massive Axcelon mine has resulted in the house's rise, but has also required them to seek patronage of a larger house (Vith'tyl) to stave off rivals.