



# Character Themes: Fringes of Drow Society

By Doug Hyatt

*Illustration by Craig J Spearing*

At first glance, the drow of Menzoberranzan might seem like a homogeneous populace of conniving, evil creatures united in fanatical devotion to the Spider Queen. But look a little deeper, and one might notice something different. A slender form clad in black leathers slips through the window of a noble house, whispering a quick prayer to a forbidden god as he draws a blade dripping with venom. In dark caverns beneath the city, a woman with feverish eyes cackles madly as she runs her fingers along slime-covered walls. In a secret chamber, a richly clad human requests a favor from a drow matriarch, and she is pleased to grant it.

This article presents options for those who inhabit the fringes of drow society, including drow who have traded the worship of Lolth for a way of life that better fulfills their own needs.

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## Ooze Master

Few drow are mad enough to forsake the ways of Lolth for Ghaunadaur, the elder evil that rules over the disgusting filth of the world. Those who do might become lords of the slime-covered caverns of the Underdark, and command oozes, jellies, puddings, and other aberrations to do their bidding. An ooze master regularly forsakes the comforts of traditional drow society to venture into the cold, wet, dark, and abandoned places of the earth. There, an acolyte of That Which Lurks can study the slimes of the Underdark, with only Ghaunadaur's insane whispers to keep him or her company. When an ooze master walks the halls of drow cities and settlements, he or she strives to keep a low profile, because strange mannerisms and a fascination with aberrant creatures serve only to draw unwanted attention.

An ooze master must fight constantly against whispers of madness that seek to consume the mind. Ghaunadaur desires only to devour the world, and Ghaunadaur's worshipers claim to hear his voice inside their heads, urging them down a path of destruction. With arcane power gifted by the ancient god, an ooze master calls forth corrosive goo to scar and maim opponents. An adherent that is lucky enough to retain some semblance of sanity normally exhibits only a few symptoms of Ghaunadaur's madness, but an episode of full-blown insanity can still strike at a moment's notice.

Worship of Ghaunadaur is forbidden in Menzoberranzan. Even the maddest of acolytes knows better than to invoke foul magic in the presence of Lolth's servants. Traveling with an ooze master is dangerous; many of the Spider Queen's agents have been trained to recognize the telltale signs of insanity.

### CHARACTER THEMES

Your character's theme is a career, calling, or identity that describes who he or she is in the world. Just as race and class create basic definitions about who your character is, theme adds a third character component to help refine your story and identity.

For information on using themes as part of character creation and rules for how to gain and use theme powers and features, see "Heroes of Nature and Lore," the first article in this series, from *Dragon* 399.

### Creating an Ooze Master

Most ooze masters are wizards, psions, invokers, clerics, or others who have a bookish nature, a strong mind, and a penchant for magical study. An ooze master is usually a disaffected drow, forced to hide dark urges from the bulk of drow society. Sometimes, however, Ghaunadaur seduces humans, tieflings, and members of other races with whispered promises of power.

### Starting Feature

Ghaunadaur delights in the suffering of others, especially when scarring his enemies with acid. By channeling arcane power, you can create an explosion of hideous green slime that sears your opponent's flesh and hinders movement.

**Benefit:** You gain the *sudden slime* power.

### Sudden Slime

### Ooze Master Attack

A sudden explosion of green slime covers your opponents in corrosive acid.

**Encounter ♦ Acid, Arcane, Evocation, Implement Minor Action** Area burst 1 within 10 squares

**Target:** Each creature in the burst

**Attack:** Highest ability modifier vs. Fortitude

**Hit:** Your highest ability modifier acid damage, and the target is slowed until the end of your next turn.

## Additional Features

### Level 5 Feature

You have spent a great deal of time researching oozes and slimes, as well as studying them in their natural habitats. As such, you have become an expert at foraging and surviving deep beneath the earth, and you have become adept at recognizing oozes, slimes, and other aberrations.

**Benefit:** When you make a Dungeoneering check, you can roll twice and use either result.

### Level 10 Feature

Ghaunadaur blesses his chosen servants with protection from oozes and slimes. Not only is your skin resistant to their acid, your own acid becomes more potent.

**Benefit:** You gain acid resistance equal to 5 + one-half your level. In addition, when you hit a creature with an acid attack, it grants combat advantage until the end of your next turn.

## Optional Powers

As a worshiper of Ghaunadaur, you have an affinity for oozes, slimes, and other abominations. Your magic can call forth toxic mucus from the dark places of the world in your time of need.



## Level 2 Utility Power

Locked chests and barred doors do not hinder you. You can secrete a highly acidic substance that corrodes even the toughest of metals.

### Scouring Palm

Ooze Master Utility 2

*Your hands become coated in a caustic acid that eats through whatever you touch.*

**Daily ♦ Arcane**
**Minor Action**
**Personal**

**Effect:** Until the end of your next turn, you gain a +5 power bonus to Thievery checks and to Strength checks made to force open, break, or bend wood objects and metal objects.

**Sustain Minor:** The bonus persists until the end of your next turn.

## Level 6 Utility Power

When time is of the essence, you \$summon a large, slick patch of jelly that accelerates the movements of all who tread upon it. Imbued with arcane power, the ooze whisks its occupants across the battlefield at breakneck speed.\$?

### Celerity Jelly

Ooze Master Utility 6

*You smear the nearby ground with a slick jelly that accelerates your party's movements.*

**Encounter ♦ Arcane, Zone**
**Minor Action**
**Close burst 2**

**Effect:** The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of your next turn. The zone is difficult terrain for your enemies. When you or an ally starts his or her turn in the zone, that character can move from one square in the zone to another as a free action.

## Level 10 Utility Power

Slimes and puddings have no eyesight, and rely on sound and vibrations to detect their prey. You can establish an arcane conduit with an Underdark pudding and use its senses to detect the movements of creatures near you.

### Pudding Sight

Ooze Master Utility 10

*You gain the senses of a pudding and can detect the faintest vibrations of your enemy's movements.*

**Daily ♦ Arcane**
**Minor Action**
**Personal**

**Effect:** You gain tremorsense 10 until the end of the encounter.

## SECRET APOSTATE

Some Menzoberranzan drow yearn for a life free from the tyranny of the Spider Queen. These apostate drow have renounced the teachings of Lolth and embraced a philosophy based on individuality and free will. Existence for these secret apostates is dangerous, because they live in constant fear of discovery by Lolth's many spies. If their true nature is discovered, they face certain torture and death.

A secret apostate values freedom and choice, and each pursues personal goals independent of those dictated by other members of drow society or its dark mistress. By no stretch of the imagination does this imply most secret apostates are noble or good; they remain just as selfish and avaricious as other drow. They believe that their aspirations and desires trump those of an overbearing and controlling theocracy.

After renouncing Lolth, a secret apostate usually travels one of two paths. Some develop such a strong hatred for their own society that they actively work to undermine and destroy it. Specializing in elaborate schemes and intrigues, such an apostate might foment a slave rebellion or create conflict between two houses by assassinating a high-ranking official of one house and framing the other for the deed.

Other secret apostates become loners, seeking to avoid others of their kind and to forge their own destinies. One might travel to the surface world, only to wander through foreign lands inhabited by those who distrust or wish to destroy the drow.

Regardless of the path taken, a secret apostate loathes other drow as much as any surface-dweller

and does not hesitate to kill members of his or her race if the occasion demands it.

For those who follow the arduous and lonely road of the secret apostate, it is better to risk torture and death as a free drow than to endure an existence of servitude. Let the weak-willed sheep bind themselves to the Spider Queen. A secret apostate lives a life unfettered, or dies trying.

## Creating a Secret Apostate

Secret apostates hide in every corner of drow society, linked only by their renunciation of Lolth. Most have some weapon training: fighters, warlords, and rogues slightly outnumber bards, swordmages, and warlocks. Few secret apostates worship gods, so divine classes are rare, but those who do worship a deity favor the gods of the surface-dwellers.

**Prerequisite:** Drow. All secret apostates are drow who have turned against Lolth.

## Starting Feature

A secret apostate cherishes freedom and despises servitude. Through years of training and a formidable desire never to be shackled to another's will, you can cast off any chains that would seek to bind you.

**Benefit:** You gain the *apostate's freedom* power.

### Apostate's Freedom

Secret Apostate Attack

*You break free of the bonds that hold you and move swiftly to punish your foe.*

**Encounter ♦ Martial, Weapon**
**Standard Action**
**Melee or Ranged weapon**

**Effect:** Before the attack, you can make a saving throw against a single immobilizing effect on you that a save can end. You also shift up to 2 squares.

**Target:** One creature

**Attack:** Highest ability modifier vs. AC

**Hit:** 1[W] + highest ability modifier damage.

**Level 21:** 2[W] + highest ability modifier damage.

## Additional Features

### Level 5 Feature

If agents of Lolth discover your true nature, they would not hesitate to enslave or destroy you. You have become expert in avoiding the scrutiny of others, as well as deceiving those who would question you.

**Benefit:** You gain a +2 power bonus to Bluff checks and Stealth checks.

### Level 10 Feature

You have honed your mental discipline to razor sharpness. It is difficult for others, especially those of your own kind, to influence you to do their bidding.

**Benefit:** When a creature makes a charm attack against you, it must roll twice and use the lower result. If that creature is a drow, you also gain a +2 power bonus to the defense targeted by the attack.

## Optional Powers

A secret apostate strives to stay away from the Spider Queen's spies. Your training focuses on hiding from those who would destroy you and then striking back.

### Level 2 Utility Power

Every apostate dreads that his or her true nature will one day be discovered. When your efforts at deception fail, you must act swiftly to avoid capture.

#### Caught in a Lie Secret Apostate Utility 2

*You make one final effort to deceive your enemy. If that fails, you prepare to make a run for it.*

**Daily ♦ Martial**

**Free Action**

**Personal**

**Trigger:** You fail a Bluff check against an enemy.

**Effect:** You reroll the Bluff check and use the second result. If you still fail the check, you gain a +6 power bonus to the next initiative check you make within the next hour.

### Level 6 Utility Power

Many apostates dedicate their lives to the study of Lolth's servants. You have learned to exploit the weaknesses of her drow and spider followers, and you have spent hours defending against their attacks.

#### Bane of Lolth Secret Apostate Utility 6

*When facing your greatest enemies, you become a relentless force of destruction on the battlefield.*

**Daily ♦ Martial, Stance**

**Minor Action**

**Personal**

**Effect:** You enter the bane of Lolth stance. Until the stance ends, you gain a +2 power bonus to all defenses, as well as a power bonus to damage rolls against drow and spiders equal to your highest ability modifier.

### Level 10 Utility Power

Secret apostates stay vigilant and are always on the move. When your enemies are closing in, you can beat a hasty retreat, leaving behind a swiftly conjured cloud of magical darkness.

#### Dark Retreat Secret Apostate Utility 10

*You glide nimbly across the battlefield, leaving a patch of inky blackness in your wake.*

**Encounter ♦ Martial**

**Move Action**

**Personal**

**Prerequisite:** You must have the *cloud of darkness* power.

**Effect:** You shift up to your speed. If your *cloud of darkness* power is not expended, you can use it at any point during this movement as a free action.

## SKULKER OF VHAERAUN

The power of the priestesses of Lolth in Menzoberranzan is almost absolute, but some residents worship the patron god of male drow, Vhaeraun. Primarily spies, assassins, and thieves, adherents of Vhaeraun slip stealthily through the shadows of the city on missions for the Masked God of Night. Open worship of Vhaeraun is forbidden, so his followers must conceal their allegiance. Many cannot endure the constant fear of capture and flee to the surface world.

Almost all skulkers of Vhaeraun are disenfranchised male drow who are disappointed by their lack of authority and power in Menzoberranzan's matriarchal society. Although some have renounced the evil ways of their people, many Vhaeraun worshipers remain true to drow nature, and they readily lie, steal, and betray if it serves their needs.

A skulker of Vhaeraun excels at getting into and out of hostile areas unnoticed. Consider an assassin who infiltrates a noble manse to slay its occupants with poisonous blades. Imagine a thief slipping into a temple of Lolth to steal a priceless treasure or cutting a dangling purse from an easy mark in a city street. Picture an accomplished spy, who might pose as a consort to a loyal priestess to glean information from her, or who might accept employ in a rival house's guard to overhear secrets. Each of these individuals might worship the Masked Lord.

Poison is the favored weapon of Vhaeraun's servants. A skulker excels in its use, coating his blades and arrows with drow sleep poison or other exotic poisons such as black lotus extract or spotted toadstool venom. The Masked Lord's followers delight in discovering new poisons and pay handsomely to acquire them.

## Creating a Skulker of Vhaeraun

Most of Vhaeraun's faithful are surface-dwelling drow. Many skulkers are rogues and assassins, although bards and warlocks might also serve as spies for the Masked God of Night. Divine practitioners are also common. The vast majority of those who serve Vhaeraun are male drow, but a few females also revere him.

**Prerequisite:** Drow.

## Starting Feature

An assassin of the Masked Lord employs deadly toxins to dispatch his or her enemies. By invoking the name of Vhaeraun, you can increase the virulence of your poisons and weaken your opponent's resistance.

**Benefit:** You gain the *skulker's venom* power.

### Skulker's Venom

### Skulker of Vhaeraun Utility

*Your tools drip with the dark malice of the Masked Lord.*

**Encounter ♦ Divine, Poison, Shadow**

**Minor Action                      Personal**

**Effect:** Until the end of your next turn, when you hit an enemy with a weapon attack and that enemy is granting combat advantage to you, the enemy takes 4 extra poison damage.

*Level 11:* 8 poison damage.

*Level 21:* 12 poison damage.

## VHAERAUN AFTER THE SPELLPLAGUE

During a prolonged conflict between Lolth and Eilistraee, who is the patron goddess of good-aligned drow and Vhaeraun's sister, Vhaeraun attempted to assassinate his sister. His plan backfired, and Eilistraee claimed his life. If your DM's campaign takes place after this event, which occurred ten years before the Spellplague, you should discuss how a skulker of Vhaeraun might fit into the campaign.

Some drow, either ignorant of Vhaeraun's death or in denial of it, continue to worship the Masked Lord, and your character might be one of these. You might be dedicated to trying to restore your god to life, channeling divine power that comes from your own dedication to that aim rather than from the god. Or perhaps the power you wield comes from a vestige of Vhaeraun's divine energy—or from another god who has decided to impersonate Vhaeraun and manipulate his followers.

If your DM's campaign takes place before the Spellplague, Vhaeraun and his worship are alive and as healthy as the practice of a forbidden faith can be under the oppressive rule of Lolth's priestesses.

## Additional Features

### Level 5 Feature

Masters of stealth and secrecy, skulkers of Vhaeraun are often called upon to infiltrate well-guarded houses. You can scale the walls of a noble's compound, leap across rooftops with ease, and duck into the shadows to avoid notice if the need arises.

**Benefit:** You gain a +2 power bonus to Acrobatics checks and Stealth checks.

### Level 10 Feature

Skulkers of Vhaeraun strike with deadly precision and grace. When using the Masked Lord's preferred weapon, your attacks enfeeble your enemies.

**Benefit:** When you deal poison damage to a creature, it takes a -2 penalty to the next attack roll it makes before the end of its next turn. This is a poison effect.

## Optional Powers

A skulker of Vhaeraun must avoid detection by the priesthood of Lolth, as well as other formidable enemies. In your capacity as a spy and a thief, you rely on powers that conceal your identity and enable you to evade capture in enemy territory.

### Level 2 Utility Power

As an expert cat burglar, you can disable mechanical devices and open troublesome locks with finesse and ease. When a dangerous trap threatens you and your companions, however, you rely on the power of the Masked Lord to ward off the bulk of its effects.

## Grace of the Masked Lord

Skulker of Vhaeraun Utility 2

*With the blessing of Vhaeraun, you and your allies carefully avoid traps that threaten your group.*

**Encounter ♦ Divine, Shadow, Zone**  
**Minor Action**      **Close burst 2**

**Effect:** The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of your next turn. While in the zone, you and each ally gain a +3 power bonus to all defenses against traps. In addition, each ally who starts his or her turn in the zone can make a saving throw against an effect caused by a trap that a save can end.

**Sustain Minor:** The zone persists until the end of your next turn.

## Level 6 Utility Power

When stealth and trickery fail, a skulker of Vhaeraun attempts a quick escape. Slipping away into the shadows, you confound pursuit and cloak yourself in a cloud of foul-smelling green poisonous gas to discourage those who would follow.

## Noxious Step

Skulker of Vhaeraun Utility 6

*You step into the shadows and emerge elsewhere, wreathed in a toxic cloud.*

**Encounter ♦ Aura, Divine, Poison, Shadow, Teleportation**  
**Move Action**      **Personal**

**Effect:** You teleport up to 5 squares. Until the end of your next turn, you have partial concealment and an aura 1. When an enemy ends its turn in that aura, that enemy takes 5 poison damage.

## Level 10 Utility Power

Devotees of the Masked Lord often need to hide their true forms, both to evade agents of Lolth and to infiltrate enemy houses. With a clever illusion wrought from divine magic, you create drow disguises for you and one of your companions.

## Guise of the Faithful

Skulker of Vhaeraun Utility 10

*You and your comrade assume the forms of Lolth's faithful servants.*

**Daily ♦ Divine, Illusion, Shadow**  
**Minor Action**      **Close burst 3**

**Target:** You and one Small or Medium ally in the burst  
**Effect:** You transform the auditory, tactile, and visual qualities of the targets' bodies and equipment. Each target assumes the appearance of a drow, and you can choose to provide a target with the appearance of a specific drow whom you have seen.

The illusion lasts for 1 hour, or you can end it as a minor action. A creature can recognize a target's form as illusory with an Insight check opposed by that target's Bluff check. The Bluff check is made with a +5 power bonus.

## About the Author

**Doug Hyatt** is the author of several recent articles in *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines, including "Gond's Way: Artificers of the Realms" in *Dragon* 403 and "Bestiary: Dao and Marid" in *Dungeon* 199. When not designing for D&D INSIDER™, he enjoys chess, MAGIC: THE GATHERING®, and his latest obsession, *Dominion*. He is a computational biologist living in Tennessee, and he has occasionally been known to tweet pearls of wisdom (@doug\_hyatt).

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