

Advanced
Dungeons & Dragons[®]
ACCESSORY

VAN RICHTEN'S
Monster Hunter's
COMPENDIUM

VOLUME THREE



VAN RICHTEN'S Monster Hunter's COMPENDIUM

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and made them very happy indeed.

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IN MEMORIAM: DR. RUDOLPH VAN RICHTEN



Dear Reader,

The book you now hold in your hands is the final volume in our compendium of Dr. Rudolf Van Richten's many works. As readers of earlier volumes know, the good doctor spent the latter part of his life describing the monstrosities that plague our world, as well as the means to rid ourselves of such nightmarish creatures. While editing his papers was troubling enough in previous works, the difficulty of this task was magnified by the troubling contents of this particular tome.

First, he confronts the gravest threat to all humanity: demons that corrupt and feed on mortal souls, and even destroy reality as we know it. To even believe that such creatures could exist challenges our sanity and reason, and to read what Dr. Van Richten reveals about their vast powers and limitless evil strikes out at all our foundations of hope. We questioned for a time the value in republishing this material. A single demon seemed to be an unstoppable foe to all but to the mightiest of heroes. Still, our task is then our task is to educate those heroes and set them on the right path to free us all from demonic destruction.

Second, our beloved doctor confronts the manifold horrors of his own past, managing at the end to come to terms with not only his terrible losses and the ceaseless quest for revenge that consumed his later life, but the dreadful deeds to which he confesses full responsibility, performed in the name of dark vengeance. He writes here not of monsters, but of human beings—people who live among us yet keep their lives and ways separate, people with unique abilities and powers as well as crippling defects.

Third, we have managed to recover an unpublished document from Dr. Van Richten's voluminous files: a treatise on witchcraft and monstrous hags, which most people (including ourselves) assumed had no existence outside old books of fairy tales. As

with previous guides, this one opens a hitherto unsuspected door into the true horrors lurking in our world, though it also reveals potential allies, people with magical skills that could be a boon to us all if we could but open ourselves to their differences. Perhaps because we are sisters and female (and thus ready prey to such vile things as hags), we found this portion of the present volume to be the most disturbing, and our sleep has been sorely troubled from the moment we dove into its contents.

It must be admitted that we have had to face our own demons in putting this last book together. We have come to realize that Dr. Van Richten, whom we fondly called "Uncle," is almost certainly dead. We held out every hope of seeing him alive, but we are now reconciled to the fact that this will never happen. To set such words into type has nearly put us both into mortal despair.

But—life must go on. We two, now deprived of his person, can do nothing greater to honor his name and memory than see his words cast aboard again into the world, across all lands and realms. Evil exists, it lives and breathes, and it cannot be denied. As such, there lays upon us all a dread responsibility to set ourselves against evil and see it stopped, to declare ourselves for the cause of righteousness and work toward the joy and security of all. This is the greatest task of any that we could take up. To such ends we devote ourselves, as did our "Uncle" before us.

Dr. Rudolf Van Richten is gone, but in his words he will live always—and through his words will evil be confronted and laid low, wherever it may be and in whatever form, mortal or not.

Good reading all, and good hunting.
—Jennifer and Laurie
Weathermay-Foxgrove,
Mordentshire,
Year 755

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This volume is a compilation of two AD&D® products previously published as Van Richten's Guide to Fiends [TSR #9477] and Van Richten's Guide to the Vistani [TSR #9496]. These RAVENLOFT® products, once out of print, are back, reedited and corrected, and with new art, a new graphic treatment, and a new format. As a bonus, a previously unpublished manuscript is presented: Van Richten's Guide to Witches.

The Van Richten's Guides redefined various categories of horrific monsters and villains in the AD&D game to make them more effective and interesting opponents for player-controlled heroes. By giving each monster a history, personality, plans, and goals, it gains depth and flexibility, even a certain element of realism. Such a villain inspires rich, exciting adventures. Such a foe is the kind that the players look forward to fighting, running from, and battling until they finally overcome it in the campaign.

What is the Ravenloft Setting?

The RAVENLOFT campaign is the classic horror setting for the AD&D game, founded on well-known tales of horror and mystery such as Dracula, Frankenstein, and The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. By various means, the campaign suggests, rather than blatantly displays, an atmosphere of suspense and terror. When an AD&D game player thinks of the RAVENLOFT setting, a likely image is that of a lonely, mist-shrouded castle atop a dark moor, lit only by a cloud-obscured moon. Things are not as they seem, and the unexpected can bring a terrifying death.

The original RAVENLOFT setting takes place in an otherworldly land referred to by game players as the Demiplane of Dread ("Ravenloft"). Here, various realms are governed by evil monstrosities of skill and intelligence. However, a Dungeon Master can apply the basic rules and guidelines of the RAVENLOFT campaign to any other world or setting to gain a similar atmospheric effect. Locations from the accursed demiplane are used as examples in this work. For more about the RAVENLOFT setting itself, pick up *Domains of Dread* (TSR #2174), the hard-bound rulebook for running full-fledged RAVENLOFT campaigns.

Several key elements define a good RAVENLOFT scenario, the most important of which is description. When the players' heroes explore a ruined castle, a talented RAVENLOFT game Dungeon Master does not merely list the contents of each room;

instead, the Dungeon Master describes them. Tell the players how dark the room is, and what the heroes hear, smell, and see, but do not make accurate identifications for them.

For example, never give the true name of any creature the players' heroes encounter. "The form of the huge ash-gray dog warps and shifts until the creature becomes a bipedal monstrosity so large that it towers over you all!" is much more effective at creating thrills and suspense than saying, "The werewolf now shapechanges into its hybrid form." Use of the game terms "werewolf" and "shapechanges" break the suspenseful mood you tried to create by reminding the players that this is, after all, only a game. Other useful guidelines appear in Chapter Thirteen of *Domains of Dread*.

Additional Information

Fear, horror, and madness checks are simple, optional mechanics unique to the RAVENLOFT setting. While Chapter Six of *Domains of Dread* gives full rules for these checks and their effects, a simpler method is presented here. When the text or the Dungeon Master says the time has come for a check, each affected hero must make a saving throw vs. paralysis. Effects of failure are left for the Dungeon Master to determine, to include fleeing, rage, obsession, and shock. These checks are optional; use them only when the players' roleplaying falters.

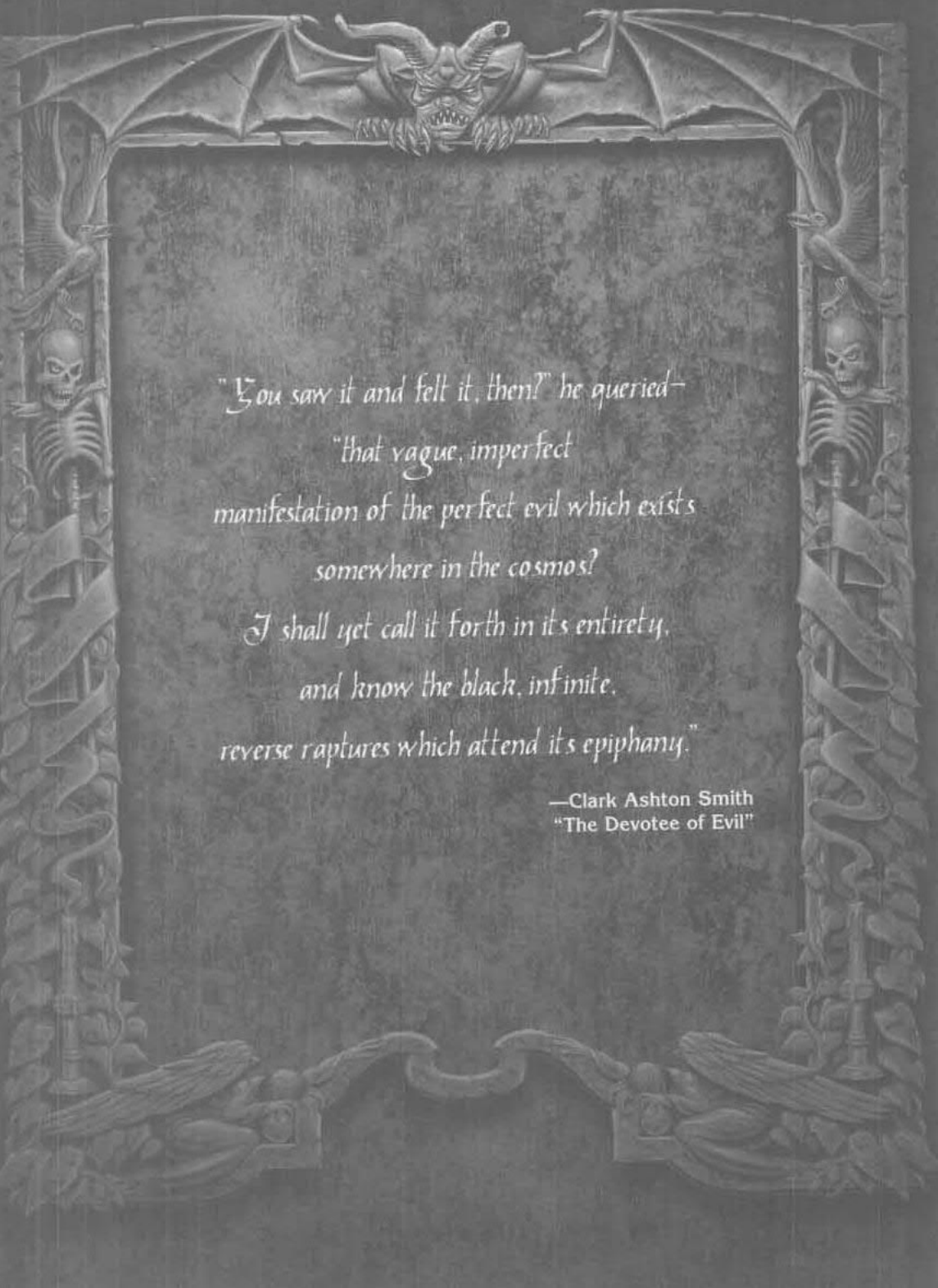
Information directly pertinent to a RAVENLOFT campaign is set aside in boxed, gray-screened text throughout this book. In addition, an appendix at the end of each section is given solely for the Dungeon Master's use in creating adventures suitable to any Dungeon Master's RAVENLOFT campaign. Players should learn of this material only through game play.

The powers ascribed to various monsters herein are those that belong to natives of the RAVENLOFT campaign. Refer to the *MONSTROUS MANUAL*™ tome for more information regarding these beings as they appear in standard AD&D campaigns.

References to some out-of-print AD&D and RAVENLOFT campaign items are given in square brackets in the text, in the event that the reader has access to those materials.

Compilers' notes from the Weathermay-Foxgrove sisters, acting for the editor, bear the sisters' initials (GWF or LWF) and appear in italics.

Demons



*"You saw it and felt it, then?" he queried—
"that vague, imperfect
manifestation of the perfect evil which exists
somewhere in the cosmos?
I shall yet call it forth in its entirety,
and know the black, infinite,
reverse raptures which attend its epiphany."*

—Clark Ashton Smith
"The Devotee of Evil"

SECTION, THE FIRST:

"I saw something was rising up through the middle of the 'defense.' It rose with a steady movement. I saw it pale and huge through the whirling funnel of cloud—a monstrous pal-lid snout rising out of that unknowable abyss. It rose higher and higher. Through a thinning of the cloud curtain I saw one small eye...."

—William Hope Hodgson
"The Hog"

INTRODUCTION



My name is Dr. Rudolph Van Richten, and I have spent over half my lifetime exploring the darkest places this land and its people have to offer. I fancied I knew the

extent of evil, that I had plumbed its depths. As I have discovered during the last year, I was wrong. There are things out there, things so foul that I now believe the philosophers who maintain that evil itself can be made manifest in the world.

I have battled evil in its myriad forms, from the cadaverous mummy to the vampires who first set my feet on the road I now travel. Through it all, my keen powers of observation, the support of able and brave companions, and the fact that I was fighting the good fight, kept me going. Yet in the face of these monstrosities, which fellow scholars call "demons" after old folk tales and religious legends, my skills amounted to naught. Not since the loss of my beloved wife and son have I felt despair weigh so heavily on my heart. I have faced a single demon in mortal combat, and my defeat has resulted in a loss that will be felt by many in our land.

I cannot, however, allow myself the luxury of succumbing to despair. I must press ever forward, and I must alert all that dwell in our land to the threat presented by these demons.

Based on my studies, I doubt that in all the time that civilized peoples have lived on our world, more than a half dozen demons have blighted our homeland. This mere handful of creatures has spread more suffering than all the Falkovnian invasions of Darkon combined.

Demons possess not only brute strength that is almost beyond comprehension, but they have the power to insinuate themselves into the very minds of the unwary or the wicked. Further, their lives span centuries, perhaps even millennia, and thus they draw on experiences that cover the rise and fall of civilizations. Finally, unlike the ghosts, vampires, and werebeasts that plague us, demons have no link to the mortals who dwell around them. On some level, the lesser horrors wish for the continued existence and prosperity of both our world and mortals who dwell here; after all, their existence is tied to both in a twisted fashion. Demons have no such connection and no such desire. To the demons that wander our lands, we and our homes are at best toys, and at worst obstacles to rip apart until we are lost even to memory.

Compilers' Note: While Dr. Van Richten attests that few demons have invaded our fair home, my sister and I have come to believe that the number is far greater than a half dozen. Just as vermin hide beneath a cool stone, so do demons conceal their presence on our world. For evil to reveal its presence is to court the attention of champions of light. Thus, we suspect, demons hide like spiders in the cracks and shadows of society, spinning webs of deceit to trap and corrupt mortals who stray from the goodly paths.

—GWF

The Inheritance

I became aware of the existence of demons through a library bequeathed to me by Aimon Davidovich, a respected

colleague and fellow expert on the unnatural. It took Aimon's servants three wagons and one week's labor to transfer the contents of his vast library from his home in Darkon to my own small establishment in Mordent. Although I had known Aimon for many years, I had not realized the true extent of his collection.

Along with the basic tomes on medicine, alchemy, philosophy, mathematics, and natural studies that all truly educated possess, Aimon's library contained a treasure trove of information on the arcane. In documents ranging from the uncommon to the utterly obscure, Aimon had carefully catalogued texts by mystics, adventurers, wizards, priests, and others whose writings centered on their experiences with creatures who defied all known types of categorization. In addition to his meticulous cross-referencing, Aimon was creating a thesis of his own regarding these individual manifestations of evil and malice, which he called "fiends."

At once horrified and intrigued by Aimon's theories, I immediately plunged into my own research, indexing his library, determined to come to my own conclusions. I confess that I hoped Aimon's legendary mental acuity had begun to fade in his declining years, and that his final, unfinished work was the combined result of a lifetime studying evil and the paranoia that sometimes affects the old and sickly. These thoughts were unworthy of my fond memories of Aimon, but if his postulations were correct, an evil beyond all that I had yet fought was loose in our world.

I should never have allowed such doubt to color my thoughts, for it slowed my ability to absorb and accept the truth of Aimon's observations. Still, after three weeks ensconced among the dusty parchments that were the final testament to a valiant man's time on this earth, my intellectual training and experience could only lead me to the conclusion that my old friend's thesis was correct: There were beings from another world among us!

Still adjusting to this realization, my tired eyes fell on a series of tomes. The books, sixteen total, were written by a clan of purported mystics over the course of centuries. It seemed that in each generation, one member of the family would continue the writings of his uncle or father. Aimon had labeled this series the Madrigorian, for the Madrigore family that was responsible for its existence.

Although the works were extensive, they appeared to be the collected ravings of a family cursed with hereditary insanity. At first, Aimon felt, they were not worthy of further inspection. However, his final note made me turn to the strange series of works.

In the margins of his workbook, Aimon had written: "Despite no evidence of formal education, the members of the Madrigore family write with a surprising facility and seemingly instinctive grasp of vocabulary and its proper usage. Even more intriguing is the amazing symmetry in writing style and penmanship found among the authors across the generations. I must consult Farringer on how such symmetry of thought and style could be achieved across so many years."

In reading these notes, scrawled awkwardly in my old friend's ever-abysmal penmanship, I was reminded of the writings of the vampires, liches, and other creatures that live far longer than the normal span of a mortal life.



SECTION, THE FIRST:

Could these Madrigores actually be a single, unnatural, hopelessly insane individual?

With this initial theory in mind, I turned to the two piles of tomes, each neatly arranged stack reaching almost to my chest in its height. Although not relishing the possibility of working my way through ages of rambling insanity, I could not help but feel that there was something of importance to be gained by such an exercise.

Over the course of the next nine days and nights, I did little else but read and reread the incredible words of the mad Madrigores. At first, I agreed with Aimon that the entire effort must have resulted from a congenital or environmentally incurred mass psychosis. The writings in no way indicated the thought processes I have become so familiar with in liches, vampires, and other ancient creatures whose paths have crossed my own. Yet, the constancy and clarity of the writing, and of the mad ideas they espoused, were too internally consistent to dismiss out of hand. No lunatic I have ever met was capable of such sustained, complex, and organized thought processes, let alone multiple generations of lunatics! Thus, performing the action Aimon had considered, I sent my new assistant, Samuel, with an invitation for Dr. Ottelie Farringer to meet with me regarding an intriguing puzzle that seemed suited to her skills.

Those readers familiar with Dr. Farringer's works undoubtedly grasped why Aimon thought to question her about the Madrigorian. For those unacquainted with the *great lady's* accomplishments, I recommend acquiring a copy of her *Illustrated Manual of Linguistic and Scripted Aberrations Indicative of Mental Disease*. Dr. Farringer's expertise in tracing identities and psychological propensities through linguistic and handwriting analysis is widely recognized, and she pioneered its study at the universities of Mordent, Darkon, and other lands. Not a few dark creatures have been exposed through her labors.

Dr. Farringer resided in a village less than half a day's journey from my home, and her vigorous energy is well known to any who have met the remarkable woman. Therefore, it did not surprise me when she arrived on my doorstep the very next morning.

I told her about my puzzlement over a series of tomes I had recently acquired. I refrained from telling her that the tomes were purportedly written over the course of many generations, merely furnishing her with a number of sample pages from the tomes.

With her famed intensity of concentration, Dr. Farringer bent to the task of analyzing the excerpts of text. After working through the afternoon and past the supper hour, she finally arrived at her conclusion: The same individual wrote the text. Before I could comment, she also asserted that the individual in question might appear to be a lunatic to the inexperienced observer, but that she doubted this actually was the case. "Instead, Rudolph, I believe the author to be a singularly evil, brilliant, petty, and malicious creature! Now, show me the rest of the texts that you have hidden from me while you tested your theory."

At this remark, I could not help but laugh, and without further ado, I proceeded to explain the known history of the Madrigorian and its supposedly multiple creators. I also revealed Aimon's theories on "fiends."

Being younger and sharper-eyed than myself, Dr. Farringer had no trouble setting at once to reading the first of the sixteen tomes. While she immersed herself in the collection, I arranged with Samuel to ready the guest bedroom for a long stay.

Six days later, Dr. Farringer had completed her examination of the Madrigorian. Of course, I had not wasted this time, using it to peruse a number of other works Aimon had catalogued as containing information of possible value in the study and understanding of the demon.

Over the course of the next fortnight, Dr. Farringer and I debated, theorized, researched, argued, and worked out a

number of initial hypotheses concerning the nature of demons. Although I believe that working in tandem was a new and rewarding experience for both of us, the information we gleaned was so sobering that we could not properly appreciate the intellectual collaboration. I will always regret that.

At the end of the second week, Dr. Farringer set off for home, her carriage laden with a large percentage of Aimon's documents. While Dr. Farringer laboriously attempted to separate truth from fiction, I turned once more to studying the Madrigorian and the Madrigore family itself. For during our collaboration I had reached one theory I had withheld from Dr. Farringer: that the entire Madrigorian had been written (and was no doubt still being written) by a demon.

Within the week, I was off to search out the Madrigores. If I were correct, then my dwindling hope that demons were merely the fantastical delusions of a number of crazed or misguided individuals would have to be false. If Aimon's collection of lore proved true, and if Dr. Farringer's assessment of the Madrigores was accurate, then there are nigh-eternal creatures among us who prey on the evil we all allow to fester in our hearts. These creatures lead both the weak and the strong onto a path of evil that inevitably ends in the destruction of all we hold dear.

Yet, in the horrific event that the frustrated, arrogant author of the *Madrigorian* was an actual demon, I would at least have an invaluable tool at my disposal: his autobiography. It was my hope that the Madrigorian and the insights and confessions found therein would give a mere mortal a chance to defeat a foe almost too powerful to comprehend.

Unfortunately, my hopes were dashed, even as my deepest fears came to fruition.

A Personal Note and Warning

This volume reveals the results of my research and my personal experience, small as that may be. Due to this dearth



of face-to-face encounters with demons, I have been forced to rely on the vast research amassed by Doctor Aimon Davidovich, as well as the documents uncovered and interviews recorded by Doctor Ottelie Farringer and others.

For readers familiar with my previous works, the scholarly style of this treatise may seem a bit unusual, lacking as it is in the practical applications of many theories. In lieu of these, and in addition to relying on a number of quoted sources, I have endeavored to aid my readers by including large portions of notes made as I tracked down the demon I now know as Drigor. The notes contain personal as well as clinical information, and I have debated long and hard whether to include them in this volume. However, I have concluded that my personal discomfort is unimportant when weighed against my obligation to show the potential demon hunter the personal hardships of the struggle.

Too often, even experienced champions of good think only of the pain of the claw slicing flesh, or other immediate physical agonies and dangers they must face. However, these are but small things when compared to the agonies of the spirit and the heart which confront the demon hunter.

Those who fight the good fight always risk the possibility of wounds of the spirit, wounds that may never heal. Once you have glimpsed the mangled recesses of my heart, and if the

SECTION, THE FIRST:

In this compendium, "demon" is used broadly by Dr. Van Richten to include all evil-natured supernatural beings of extraplanar origin. The less troublesome term "fiend" will be used in boxed text for the Dungeon Master. In past AD&D products, "demon" referred exclusively to the group of chaotic evil creatures native to the Abyss. ("Demons" became "tanar'ri" in time.) Lawful-evil baatezu (previously called devils) came from the Baator ("The Nine Hells"), neutral-evil yugoloths (daemons) came from the Gray Waste ("The Three Glooms of Hades"), chaotic/neutral-evil gehreleths (demodands) came from Carceri ("Tartarus"), and so forth. The reader should make the necessary mental adjustments while reading the good doctor's report.

Van Richten refers to "humans" throughout this text. Unless otherwise noted, the term also encompasses

demihumans (elves, dwarves, etc.) found in any campaign world.

While Van Richten believes "demons" are individual creatures with unique powers, he does not know that many different sorts of fiends exist (lawful, neutral, chaotic, etc.), and this has led to false assumptions and conclusions. Van Richten's descriptions of fiendish powers are not always correct. Where his descriptions differ from the gray-screened text, the gray-screened text takes precedence.

Note also that the powers ascribed to fiends in this text are those which belong to only those fiends currently trapped in the RAVENLOFT campaign world. Dungeon Masters may refer to the MONSTROUS MANUAL™ (TSR #2140) or the PLANESCAPE Monstrous Compendium Appendix (TSR #2602) for more information concerning these creatures as they appear in other AD&D campaigns.

prospect of such suffering is too terrible to contemplate, look to some other, safer pursuit. For those of you prepared to face the possibility of unending pain, forever tainting any satisfaction you may feel, I commend you. You will preserve our future.

Everything humanly possible has been done to assure that the information contained within this work is valid. Yet, any who wish to make use

of this information, however valuable it may be, must ever employ their own critical faculties in determining its usefulness.

It cannot be stated too many times that each demon is a unique individual and must be treated as such! To rely unquestioningly on any single source of information is to clutch onto a fellow swimmer foundering in the waves. Perhaps he can pull you both to safety, but more than likely you will drag each other to your dooms. Swim with him, help each other, and rely on yourself and all the resources at your disposal. Perhaps you will prevail where I, as of this writing, have not.

It must be possible to defeat these fell creatures, and it falls on only the most brave and able of adventurers to accomplish this task. If noble men and women allow fear and horror to keep them from standing in the face of evil, evil will surely triumph. We must ever strive to keep evil out of our hearts, our homes, and our lands if we are to pass our civilization and its many wonders on to the next generation.



Therewith the earthquake was stilled, and there remained but a quivering of walls and floor and the wind of those unseen wings and the hot smell of soot and brimstone burning. And speech came out of the teeming air of that chamber, strangely sweet, saying, "Accursed wretch that troublest our quiet, what is thy will?"

—E. R. Eddison
The Worm Ouroboros

CHAPTER ONE: ENTERING THE LANDS



any medical professionals will tell you that before one can effectively treat any disease, one must first attempt to define its root cause or point of origin. It is my experience that creatures of darkness can be viewed in much the same way as malign tumors.

So, what are the circumstances surrounding demonic origins and the source of their vast powers? In previous works, I have mentioned the theories relating to the negative and positive energies that feed the life force of several unnatural creatures that stalk our land. It would be convenient if I could once again draw on those underpinnings in this discourse, but the monstrosity of demons is too great.

Demons do not appear to draw strength from the Negative Material Plane, the source that sustains the likes of vampires and lichens. They do not exhibit any of the characteristics of the undead. By the same token, they do not seem to draw on the Positive Material Plane, as they do not share traits with the ancient dead. From where, then, do these demons acquire their might? The answer is most likely found in a cosmic philosophy so vast that it nearly defies definition.

Philosophers have long held that there are realities beyond number existing alongside our own. I have always doubted such grand, even limitless, visions of existence; yet, the presence of demons among us seems to prove that there must be some type of alternate realities somewhere.

Demons possess a degree of individualism that, when I study them, reminds me of a room full of vicious warriors. Although they all share a skill with arms, each has a unique personality and style. The same can be said of demons. Although only a few such creatures have found their way into our world, and each and every one is capable of causing unspeakable devastation, each does so in its own unique way. Like you and I, demons are just as much defined by what sets them apart from each other as what joins them. It is my belief that they are spawned in an alternate reality, the hallmarks of which are corruption and agony beyond measure.

However, some scholars claim that the origin of demons may be found here in our own lands. It is possible that they are right, and that my views are based on unjustified assumptions. After all, even the existence of these other planes is still a matter of strong debate in the arenas of higher learning.

There are realms incomprehensible to the puny mortals who dwell within this cage of a world. If only they knew that they were but prisoners, if only they could see the bars. But, only I have that power because only I have stepped wide-eyed into this pestilent corner of creation, granting the groveling morsel that was my original self the opportunity to travel to that beyond, even as my true mind took hold of this mortal shell.

—The Madrigorian
Book I, Chapter I

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The Origins of Demons

Over the course of centuries, numerous theories on the origins of demons have been espoused by individuals ranging from the great philosopher-warrior Astonby of the Oaks to crazed mystics jabbering their lives away in asylums. Each of the following theories assumes that there is only one level of reality and, ergo, demons must originate in our own land. Although I am now inclined to believe these theories too narrow in their visions of reality, the following hypotheses certainly show enough merit to warrant serious consideration.

Evolution and the Lich

The lich is one of the most dangerous, obscenely evil creatures found in our realms. However, the demilich is an even worse monstrosity whose great willpower, wizard skills, and undead powers form one of the most deviously intelligent and frightening beings in existence. [*The demilich and lich are described in Van Richten's Monster Hunter's Compendium, Volume Two.—LWF*]

I recently learned that my long-time friend Astonby of the Oaks and several noted scholars have long surmised that demons are the final evolutionary stage in the development of the lich. According to this theory, the demiliches who become demons have entered a new stage of existence—one in which they are neither living, dead, nor undead, but a being so hideous and powerful that we can no longer consider it in any way connected to the races of mortals.

If this theory is true, then it is all the more important that we track down the liches who make their homes among us. While I would not discourage such hunts, I must mention that this theory of evolution contradicts what I have learned of the demilich; it is my opinion that demiliches have no need for phylacteries and no desire to assume the physical forms in which we find demons. (However, this may be evidence for the accuracy of this theory; more on this later.)

Stepchild of World Evil

Another theory that is more widespread than the first, but slightly more complicated and philosophical in nature, is that of the "World Evil's Stepchild." This theory of demonic origins states that demons are somehow the product of gathering malignancies that form over the centuries in our homeland. How such "cradles of evil" arise is entirely theoretical. The most coherent hypothesis is that the evil performed by mortals permeates the psyche of the land, assuming that the land has some form of life or spirit. At some point, the malignancy reaches a critical level of evil energies and achieves a primitive degree of consciousness. It then searches out a vulnerable mortal and takes over his body, or responds to a strong summoning, or possibly forms directly out of the air. Once embodied, the evil becomes a creature we know as a demon.

If this theory is true, then we must all think soberly on what we have wrought. For, although the demon is still utterly alien and evil, it is the child of our own misdeeds. Our actions may have even greater consequences than we realize.

Extraplanar Origins

As stated earlier, it is my belief that only a realm of unyielding corruption and evil could spawn things as hideous as demons, and what does that speak of our homeland should they originate here? This is why we must turn to the as-yet-unproven "multiple reality paradigm" (extraplanar) theory.

Through my research, I have determined that there are at least two different ways in which demons may enter our realm of existence.

Transposition

It is a universal truth that in order to thrive, evil must first be granted the opportunity to insinuate itself into a community, or into the hearts of men.

The process I term *transposition* is no doubt the most intimate way to

invite a disaster into our land. Through this process, an individual can, with one deed, both destroy himself and provide a demon with an invitation to enter our world.

Many believe that the stories of good and evil that priests use to instruct their flocks are parables, mere reflections of philosophic truths but not based in fact. This is not so. Whenever an individual commits a vile or vicious act, he indeed eases the way for more such acts.

Evil seeks to seduce those who open their hearts and minds to its call. Demons, then, being creatures of absolute evil, seek out those souls that offer fertile ground for their perversions.

I believe that demons can establish a tentative psychic connection with humans tainted by evil. If the object of the demon's interest responds by continuing along his foul course, the connection between the two—mortal and demon—increases in strength and becomes a physical link.

As this connection is reinforced, the demon insinuates itself into the body and mind of its chosen victim. The culmination of the process appears to result in the transposition of the two beings: the demon enters our land, while the host takes its place, frail flesh and all, on the demon's home plane.

December 1st

Today has proved a most fascinating day. After a month of research on my own, and with Dr. Farringer (a most extraordinary woman!), Samuel and I set out to determine whether there were any living heirs to the Madrigore name and literary pursuit. Regardless of the current status of the Madrigore family, I am determined to discover any information I can on the family and whether or not my theory is correct—that a demon is behind the creation of the Madrigorian.

Imagine my surprise when we arrived in the small hamlet of Edrigan (the family's home), and found Dr. Farringer comfortably seated in the local inn, feet propped up before the raging fire and

nose firmly ensconced in one of Aimon's notebooks! Almost before I was across the threshold, Dr. Farringer informed me, in no uncertain terms, that she intended to be involved in every aspect of this investigation. Though she refused to tell me how she had learned of my plans, Samuel's scrutiny of his boots during our conversation was all the answer I needed.

Realizing the futility of arguing with such a formidable and resourceful personality, I agreed to our partnership in this matter. I must confess that I think working in the field with Dr. Farringer will prove a most interesting experience. It is rare for me to deal with my equals outside the academic settings. Plus, her sharp mind and pointed wit would be blessings on any endeavor.

It took us little effort this morning to discover that, although the eldest Madrigore, Athen, had recently died of consumption, his young daughter, Bethany, was already continuing in her family's bizarre footsteps.

—From the private journal of
Dr. Van Richten

I have thus far located at least two distinct sources documenting the process of transposition. The first of these comes from the second book of the *Madrigorian*, supposedly penned by the original Madrigore's daughter. However, for the sake of clarity, I will refer to the actual author, Drigor, the demon whom I have learned is responsible for the sixteen-volume opus. The various Madrigore "authors" are mere mouthpieces for the demon's discourses. (The ability of demons to control the minds of mortals will be addressed in a later chapter.)

During the course of a long treatise on the nature of reality and humanity's place in the universe, Drigor writes:

For it is the ultimate calling of we mortals to prepare our bodies and spirits through the most debased acts. Only by acting out the secret desires that lurk in the darkest corners of our minds can we

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rid ourselves of the evil festering within us. Otherwise, we will forever be unclean, full of impure thoughts and desires. But if we lance the festering boils our consciences create, we might be blessed with the attention of one of the wandering Great Ones. And if we are truly vigorous and do not shirk acting out our innermost evil, then might such a Great One deign to reward us by translating his body with our own. The pain of such a transportation will be glorious in its horror, but only through pain can we be cleansed. Then will we receive the highest of honors as the Great One will take our place on this tainted land so that we might enjoy our just rewards.

—The Madrigorian
Book III, Chapter VII

Here, Drigor describes an obviously warped and evil philosophy. It takes little philosophical training to realize that committing evil acts only increases the evil in one's heart. There is no finite amount of villainy to be disposed of like pus drained from a cyst! Yet, I fear there are those who use such justifications to commit evil, just as the demon desires.

Careful interpretation of this passage reveals that a demon may perform a physical transposition, rearranging of the flesh, blood, and other organs of the host's body until it re-forms itself into whatever foul substances compose the body of the demon.

The second source that provides information on the process of transposition is the diary of a young woman whose sister succumbed to the demon known as Elsepeth. This source is particularly illuminating, as it documents the mental and physical transposition of a young woman and a demon. From this account, we can clearly see that the transposition process takes place over a period of days, and it seems clearly to be spurred forward by acts of evil on the part of the demon's mortal victim.

September 8th

I do not know what has happened to my dear sister Ammie. She has always despaired of finding a husband, but this last month she has become even more dejected. No matter how much I tried to convince her of her inner beauty and kindness, she continued to insist that it was easy for me to say such things, as I was also beautiful on the outside!

Last night, she sneaked into our room well past midnight. I asked her where she had been at such an hour, and she refused to answer me. This morning I learned that last night a mysterious assailant attacked Deirdre, the pretty tailor's daughter who is to marry Johan Walrich, and scratched and beat her face until she was nearly unrecognizable. I nearly fainted at the news, but Ammie just smiled quietly. It was then that I noted the new luster in her eyes, the rosy glow to her skin.

—From the personal journal of
Tasha Weaveron

Tasha writes several more entries relating concerns about her sister and the sudden increase in violence in their small town. Several more of the town's women are viciously attacked and scarred by an unknown assailant. After each such attack Tasha notes that Ammie seems to grow lovelier, yet more alien in appearance and temperament. Further, she records the strange nightly fits her sister suffers closely after each attack.

September 15th

Ammie must be more affected by these horrid attacks than I at first thought. I was wrong to accuse her of reveling in others' pain. Yet she seems so happy, even radiant. I do not think I believe in magic elixirs that create beauty, but if there were such a potion then surely my sister is drinking it. This morning, across the breakfast table, I realized just how beautiful Ammie has become, seemingly overnight. How can this be possible? Especially when she

goes through such hideous dreams and nightly agonies?

Her sheets are always soaked with sweat in the mornings, and all too often this month I have awakened to find her huddled on the floor moaning in agony. Last night, as I held her in my arms, I begged her to have papa send for the physician, but she refused, mumbling that "the pain passes when Elsepeth brings me my beauty." Seeing her stare up at me with her light green eyes, the eyes that had once been brown, I swear I saw hatred there. Then her face softened into a smile and she told me not to worry. But I know something is horribly wrong with my dear sister. Should I tell Papa?

—From the personal journal of
Tasha Weaveron

In this entry, note the change in eye color and the comments on Ammie's newfound beauty. Although Tasha suggests that her sister might be taking some sort of beauty elixir, I believe she was witnessing Ammie's transposition with a demon of great physical beauty.

There is one more entry in the diary that bears presenting here. It is the last entry, and I believe it also marks the end of the unfortunate lives of both Tasha and her sister, Ammie.

September 20th

The worst has befallen us! I still cannot believe it, though I heard it from Ammie's own lips. It is Ammie who has maimed the young women in our village, her friends and relations! Tonight, she confessed to murdering Desiree Fontaine, the mayor's daughter! How could she?

And after telling me this horrible thing, she touched my hair and gave me the oddest smile. It set my teeth to chattering! But I have not yet confessed the worst. Within minutes after Ammie went to bed she began to writhe silently, her mouth gaping in agony! I was so horrified I could do nothing but press myself against the wall. I could

not even scream, my throat was so choked with fear! It was then that those awful brown wings burst from Ammie's back, spreading around her like some terrible cloak of evil! Ammie is still now, as I quickly record these words. I have resolved that I must get Papa. He will—

How silly my earlier ravings now seem! When I turned around, I had expected to see my sister revealed as a monster, but instead she looked just as she always had, brown eyes and all! And of course no wings or claws! When I confessed my strange delusions to my dear sister, she said I must have been dreaming. Of course she had not murdered or maimed anyone—how ridiculous! I can see now that she was right. I'll do as she suggests and go with her to pick flowers at the falls tomorrow. Things will be just like they used to be. I am sure we'll be happy, so happy, just as Ammie says.

—From the personal journal of
Tasha Weaveron

Rudolph, note how the handwriting changes in the final paragraph! Note particularly the grammar school precision of the loops of the letters o, j, and g. I have seen such sudden reversions to a more childish hand in subjects undergoing hypnosis or in individuals controlled by spells, such as suggestion or command. In my opinion, the Tasha Weaveron who wrote the final paragraph is not wholly in control of her mind at the time of this writing!

—From the clinical notes of
Dr. Ottelie Farringer

Unfortunately, I am certain this last entry is an eyewitness account of the final phase of transposition, when the demon Elsepeth utterly replaced Ammie. (Presumably, the unfortunate girl in turn took the demon's place in its home world. Her pitiable fate is perhaps better left unimagined.) The final paragraph confirms the completion of the transformation. Dr. Farringer's analysis of Tasha Weaveron's handwriting in the final entry in her

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diary confirms that Elsepeth used certain powers to convince the poor girl that all she had seen and heard was just a dream, as well as to hide her true appearance. These sorts of powers appear common to demons, and I will explore them in greater detail in the next chapter.

A final note on this sad episode before we move on to a discussion of the next way a demon may enter our land. This diary was dated only twelve years ago, so I journeyed to the small town just outside Stangengrad in Falkovnia to see if I could gather more information on Ammie and Tasha. The town's innkeeper told me the story of how both girls died in a terrible accident. The two sisters had climbed to the top of Grashen Falls to gather flowers and had apparently ventured too far onto the slippery boulders. Tasha's body was found on the jagged rocks below, and Ammie's body was never recovered from the churning waters. The Weaveron family was devastated by the double tragedy and soon left the area. The innkeeper had no idea where they now reside.

From the innkeeper's account, I believe it is safe to say that Elsepeth murdered the inconvenient witness to her arrival. After this, the demon proceeded to spread corruption and despair in the neighboring realm of Borca, tempting men into depraved acts with wiles not of this world. Dr. Farringer and I uncovered evidence of these activities while researching demons. More on this later.

Reversal of Transposition

Once a demon has transposed its body with that of its mortal dupe, it is most certainly impossible to reverse the process; the demon is within our realm, the horror upon us. However, as explained above, the process of transposition is not immediate.

Between the time when the mortal first draws the demon's attention and the time when the final convulsions have ceased and the demon is "reborn" among us, I believe it is possible to cut

off or reverse the transposition process. From my studies thus far, I have determined that there are at least two

Transposition

Certain of the more powerful beings of the Lower Planes often search for mortals to destroy, corrupt, or otherwise manipulate. Although none willingly enter the RAVENLOFT world (because they are aware that they will very likely become trapped in the campaign lands should they do so), a fiend is not always aware that a vulnerable mortal whose mind the fiend has contacted lives in a world governed by RAVENLOFT rules. Although this type of confusion on the part of a fiend is rare, it does occasionally occur. Thus, fiends fall prey to their own malevolence and greed, transposing themselves into the trap that is the RAVENLOFT campaign.

As explained in *Domains of Dread*, Chapter Seven, the Dungeon Master may simply decide if a nonplayer character's evil act attracts the attentions of great evil powers, such as the dark powers of the RAVENLOFT Demiplane of Dread campaign or evil gods of the current campaign world. Likewise, the Dungeon Master may decide that a fiend has sensed the character's potential for evil and established an initial connection to the person.

In the case of heroes committing acts of evil, the Dungeon Master should make the normal powers check (as per *Domains of Dread*, Chapter Seven), but decide whether it is a fiend who unknowingly formed an initial linkage with the character in lieu of evil powers.

The process of transposition is similar to the process by which a character proceeds through the Descent into Darkness (*Domains of Dread*, Chapter Seven). Three major differences between the two processes follow.

- It is the fiend, not evil godlike powers, that forms the unholy bond with the offending character.

- There are only five stages in the process, instead of thirteen.
- Once a fiend establishes contact and begins the process of transposition, any evil act causes the next stage in the transposition to proceed, because of the fiend's conscious and deliberate control of the transposition process.

If a character proceeds through all five stages of the transposition, the fiend will take the character's place and be loosed on the hapless denizens of the campaign world. (As happens with failed powers checks, heroes gradually slip from the players' control, eventually becoming nonplayer characters under the control of the *Dungeon Master*.)

Only the following fiends are known to enter the RAVENLOFT world through transposition:

Baatezu: erinyes, gelugon, pit fiend.
Gehreleth: farastu, kelubar, shator.
Tanar'ri: balor, nabassu, succubi/incubi.
Yugoloth: arcanaloth, nycaloth, yagnoloth.

Other fiends lack either the necessary motivation or intelligence to initiate the process of transposition.

Stages of Transposition

There are five stages of transposition during which a character gradually exchanges places with the fiend. If the process is completed, the fiend replaces the unfortunate person, while the victim is lost on the Lower Planes and faces a fate too horrible to contemplate at the talons of the fiendish denizens.

The *Dungeon Master* must first decide what type of fiend has focused its attention on the wayward character, for the physical and mental transformations occurring at each stage of the process are determined by the exact nature of the fiend in question. In general, a chaotic fiend (such as a *tanar'ri*) will be much more likely to notice a chaotic evil act, whereas a lawful fiend (such as a

baatezu) will be attracted to a more lawful evil act.

Similarly, individual fiends are more sensitive to acts of evil that they themselves find most pleasurable. For example, *Ammie's* initial jealous attack on a girl she believed to be prettier than herself attracted the attention of a succubus, a creature sensitive to passionate emotions, especially those involving desire, jealousy, and lust.

The following information describes the five stages of transposition. Afterward, a section describes the physical changes that occur during transposition for each type of fiend.

Stage One, the Connection: At this stage, the fiend reaches out across the planes and forms an initial psychic bond with the character. The character's body shows only minor alterations. The character feels only minor pain that does not affect his actions.

Stage Two, the Quickening: By now the bodies of the fiend and character are beginning to transpose. There is at least some obvious physical change in the character. The pain of the transposition increases, giving the character a -1 penalty to all physical actions.

Stage Three, the Malformation: At this level, the character's body is warped to the extent that the character is capable of using one of the fiend's powers. The minds of fiend and character are so closely connected that the fiend may place seemingly natural thoughts into the character's mind. The character's alignment begins to reflect that of the fiend. The level of physical pain caused by the vicious warping of the character's body now makes it difficult to concentrate at all, giving a +1 penalty to proficiency and ability checks.

Stage Four, the Sublimation: As the transposition nears completion, the character's body changes dramatically. Besides the physical

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changes, the character usually gains another fiendish ability and (if not so already) becomes completely evil. The fiend has at least as much control over the body as the character does, and the character must make a successful Wisdom check to complete any actions that the fiend disapproves. The pain of tremendous bodily changes gives the character a +2 penalty on all proficiency and ability checks (including Wisdom checks).

Stage Five, the Transposition: When the fiend completes transposition, the character (even a hero) meets a horrendous fate on the Outer Planes. The fiend now walks in the mortal's form.

Effects of Transposition

Baatezu

Erinyes

Stage 1: Skin becomes smooth and perfect; all scars, moles, and other disfiguring marks disappear (+1 Charisma).

Stage 2: Grows to 6 feet tall, while features become beautiful (+2 Charisma). Develops a craving to devour live animals (witnesses must make horror checks).

Stage 3: Subject can *cause fear* (as per the spell) in anyone who gazes on her. Back grows glossy feathers.

Stage 4: Subject grows the beginnings of wings. Subject is almost unrecognizably beautiful (+4 Charisma).

Gelugon

Stage 1: Eyes bulge prominently, and skin becomes scaly (-1 Charisma, base AC 7).

Stage 2: Teeth become sharp pincers (-2 Charisma, +1 point of damage in unarmed combat).

Stage 3: Eyes become multifaceted, can see in total darkness. Grows long claws (-3 Charisma, +2 points of damage in unarmed combat).

Stage 4: Grows antennae, body grows larger and insectoid in shape (-4 Charisma, +3 Strength).

Pit Fiend

Stage 1: Body develops patches of large, red scales (-2 Charisma, base AC is 6).

Stage 2: Grows large, green fangs (-3 Charisma, +1 point of damage in unarmed combat).

Stage 3: Fangs secrete venom, upper body grows grotesquely massive. (bite: 2d6 points of damage, saving throw vs. poison or die; +2 Strength).

Stage 4: Body completely covered in scales, features resemble gargoyle, grows batlike wings (-4 Charisma, base AC 2).

Gehreleth

Farastu

Stage 1: Hands and arms grow bizarrely large (-1 Charisma, +1 Strength).

Stage 2: Skin fades to a sickly gray in color, grows claws (-2 Charisma, +1 point of damage to unarmed attacks).

Stage 3: Can cause weakness (as per *ray of enfeeblement*) three times each day, body mass grows denser (base AC 8).

Stage 4: Body elongates and muscles become grotesquely pronounced (-4 Charisma, +2 Strength).

Kelubar

Stage 1: Body gives off offensive odors (-1 Charisma).

Stage 2: Nails and teeth grow long and are coated with a weak acidic slime (-2 Charisma, +4 points of damage in unarmed combat).

Stage 3: Body expands outward, becoming bulbous and ungainly, and it secretes an odoriferous slime so vile that anyone within 30 feet must make a saving throw vs. poison or become incapacitated for 1d10 rounds (-4 Charisma).

Stage 4: Body girth increases until subject weighs nearly 500 pounds; gains vestigial batlike wings (+3 Strength).

Shator

Stage 1: Earlobes drop off. Ear holes expand (-1 Charisma, +2 surprise bonus).

Stage 2: Skin begins to sag into folds of flesh, jaw expands and muscles become more pronounced (-2 Charisma, +2 Strength).

Stage 3: Touch acts as *ray of enfeeblement*.

Stage 4: Body expands to 560 pounds (-4 Charisma, +4 Strength).

Tanar'ri

Balor

Stage 1: Grow sharp talons (-1 Charisma, +2 points of damage to unarmed attacks).

Stage 2: Skin turns a deep, fiery red color and becomes warm to the touch (-2 Charisma, base AC 7).

Stage 3: Eyes turn solid red; all who see subject's eyes must make a fear check (-3 Charisma, automatically detects invisibility)

Stage 4: Grows vestigial wings, body starts to emit flames (-4 Charisma, 2d6 points of damage per round to anyone touching subject's body).

Nabassu

Stage 1: Eyes turn entirely steel gray in color (-1 Charisma).

Stage 2: Skin turns gray and leathery (-2 Charisma, base AC 8).

Stage 3: Must consume raw flesh to survive, can cause *darkness 15' radius* at will.

Stage 4: Grows to 7 feet high; body warps to resemble a gargoyle (-4 Charisma, +4 points of damage from increased Strength).

Succubus

Stage 1: Skin becomes smooth and creamy (+1 Charisma).

Stage 2: Physical senses heighten and eyes glow (+2 surprise bonus).

Stage 3: Voice becomes compelling (+2 Charisma, use *charm person* at will).

Stage 4: Develops vestigial bat wings even as beauty increases dramatically (+4 Charisma, but causes horror check in anyone who glimpses the wing buds).

Yugoloth

Arcanaloth

Stage 1: Ears become pointed and furry, but very keen (-1 Charisma, +4 or

+20% on Hear Noise rolls).

Stage 2: Body grows fur and face takes on jackal features (-2 Charisma).

Stage 3: Grows poisonous claws (1d4 points of damage each and a -1 penalty, cumulative per hit, on victim's attack rolls).

Stage 4: Head entirely transformed into that of a constantly snarling jackal (all who see subject must make fear check; can *warp wood* at will).

Nycaloth

Stage 1: Grows sharp, thick claws (-1 Charisma, +2 points of damage in unarmed combat).

Stage 2: Skin turns a sickly shade of green and becomes cracked and leathery (-2 Charisma, -1 Dexterity, base AC 7).

Stage 3: Claws grow larger (cause 1d8 points of damage and seeping wounds that bleed for 1d6 points of damage per round until magically healed).

Stage 4: Body grows huge and gargoylelike, must consume decaying flesh daily (witnesses make fear and horror checks, +4 points of damage to all attacks).

Yagnoloth

Stage 1: Ears grow large and winglike (-1 Charisma).

Stage 2: One arm grows to giant-sized (-2 Charisma, +2 Strength).

Stage 3: Skin becomes red and scaly (-3 Charisma), can use *shocking grasp* three times each day.

Stage 4: Facial features and body become grotesquely twisted and utterly disproportionate to one another and a normal body, breath turns acidic (can cause 2d6 points of damage to exposed skin three times per day).

discrete ways in which the transposition process might be reversed and the demon's contact with our homeland severed.

It is infinitely preferable to repel a demon before it can enter our land. I believe the chance of success in such an endeavor is much higher than that of attempting to expel a demon already present. Of course there is also the chance of redeeming the human host.

Repulsion

During the earlier stages of transposition, a powerful priest of good may be invaluable in forcing a demon to relinquish its hold on its mortal subject's body and, thus, its key to our land.

For this reason, it is essential to stay vigilant, watching for all reports of strange transformations of either personality or physical form. Such transformations will most likely be the

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Nabassu Tana'ri



Succubus Tana'ri



Aroaroloh



Pit Fiend Baalezu



Faratsu Gehroloth

result of some physical malady, an infirm mind, or based on some minor incident that has been blown out of proportion through its telling and retelling in drinking establishments. Even though there is only the smallest chance that the case identifies an individual who has begun the process of transposition, the gravity of such a possibility requires that this diagnosis be kept in mind until it can be refuted to one's complete satisfaction.

Should it appear that a transposition is occurring, the subject should be brought to a powerful priest for spiritual healing. Even if you are incorrect in your assessment, and the subject is suffering from some physical malady, the attentions of a priest can only help improve the unfortunate's condition. Keep in mind, though, that if the subject truly is undergoing transposition, he

may well be unwilling to allow anyone to examine him, let alone a priest.

But you must act quickly and decisively, for time is of the essence, as this account by Zimmian of Darkon illustrates.

Billus the tailor was brought to the temple yesterday evening, barely recognizable as human. His body had grown strangely insectlike—even the eyes glaring up at me were multifaceted! Stubby antennae grew from his balding pate, and reddish scales covered his body. Likewise, his teeth and fingernails had grown all out of proportion. I confess the sight filled me with revulsion and a near mindless desire to destroy the monstrosity into which poor Billus was transforming. It is a failing I regret, for I am uncertain

Repulsion

Once a fiend has turned its fell attentions on a character, it is very difficult to stop the transposition process from reaching its dread conclusion. However, it is possible to reverse the process and repulse the fiend from the character's body before the transposition is complete. This may be accomplished in one of two ways.

Holy Word: If a priest born in the RAVENLOFT campaign setting casts *holy word* on a fiend-ridden character at Stage Three or before, the spell forces the fiend back to its home plane. The victim must make a successful System Shock roll to survive this process. If successful, the victim survives, but all physical deformities caused by the partially completed transposition remain. If the roll fails, the victim dies.

A surviving victim is emotionally and psychically damaged by the experience, and remains at the stage of evil reached when the fiend's hold was severed. Thus, if the character was at Stage Three of transposition, he is now treated as if he had failed three regular powers checks. (See

Domains of Dread, Chapter Seven, for more information on the results of failed powers checks.)

If holy word is cast on a character at Stage Four in the transposition process, the spell randomly transports the character to some other area in the campaign world. At this point, the character is as much fiend as mortal, and reacts to the spell accordingly.

Note that priests who originally hailed from outside the current campaign cannot use this spell while they are in the campaign setting using the RAVENLOFT rules.

Banishment: Dr. Van Richten does not realize it, but this 7th-level wizard spell functions in much the same way as *holy word* does. The fiend must make a saving throw vs. spell with a +4 bonus, but *banishment* may be attempted by all wizards, even those not native to the campaign world.

At Stage Four, a successful *banishment* will merely transport the character/fiend to some other point in the campaign world.

Although Dr. Van Richten hints that other clerical spells (such as *heal*) might be helpful in stopping the transposition process, this is not so.

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whether it affected my attempt to stop the dread transformation.

Bilius was clearly not in his right mind, for he did not wish to be treated for his terrible condition. It was only luck that two young holy warriors (including Aphram Fendwell, who somehow recognized Bilius) heard his hissing screams coming from a shack in the wilderness. They sustained injuries, but managed to bring him here.

An hour ago I performed my most powerful spell on Bilius. However, instead of reversing the terrible transformation, my efforts caused him to writhe in greater agony. Our eyes locked, and a look of profoundly intelligent evil transformed Bilius's face more than the scales and fangs ever could. Just before he disappeared altogether, vanishing into thin air, the creature, which I believed to be Bilius smiled, even through his—its—dire agony.

I do not know whether Bilius and whatever evil presence was consuming him were destroyed in my attempt to cast it out, or whether I have merely shunted it into some other priest's domain. Such strong evil as I saw in Bilius's eyes is rarely destroyed so easily.

—From the church records of
Zimmian of Darkon

At some point, it may no longer be possible to reverse a transposition through clerical magic. Instead, the subject may either be consumed by the competing energies of good and evil, or transported to some other area on our world. I am unsure which of these scenarios is most likely. Unfortunately, powerful clerical spells that are healing in nature have been known to drive away creatures of evil, but seldom to destroy them. Therefore, I believe that once the transposition nears completion, the subject reacts to such spells as would a creature of evil (such as a vampire or lich), in which case it is more likely that Bilius was merely transported to somewhere else within the land to complete the transposition process.

Redemption

Although it may seem unlikely that an individual who has committed acts evil enough to draw the attention of a demon would be able—or even willing—to cast the demon out of himself, the possibility of such redemption is not as far-fetched as it might at first seem.

June 9th

I am certain I have just witnessed the repulsion of a demon attempting to trade bodies with a mortal! Christopher's ears had dropped off and his skin dripped in fold from his bones—even his muscles had begun to grow! It was just as described in Book IV, Chapter XII of the Madrigorian. Yet, when the priest cried out and thrust his holy symbol at Christopher's thickening form, he began to shrink, and the skin reattached itself to the bone. Even more, the humanity returned to his eyes.

—From the personal notes of
Aimon Davidovich

We are all capable of both good and evil. Even the most wicked blackguard can turn back to the path of light, as I myself have witnessed.

The path to redemption is a lonely one. It is also necessarily unique for each individual. No two persons could cast off the influence of a demon through the same exact actions; there is no magic formula to aid such unfortunates in their task. However, it is safe to say that, as with all acts of penitence and atonement, performing acts of good at least as great as the acts of evil that began the individual's degradation, would certainly be antithetical to a demon. Likewise, refusing to participate or initiate evil acts should also weaken the link between demon and mortal. Just as a bat or other creature of the darkness draws back when faced with the light, so, too, should a creature of absolute evil, such as a demon, shrink from good within its host. Logic dictates that a host

who works diligently and faithfully to be purged of evil is a poor host for transposition.

Unfortunately, it is not a simple matter to turn away from evil. If the transposition is advanced, the demon will undoubtedly attempt to foil efforts to reverse the process. Not only must the unfortunate host combat his own inclinations toward evil but those of the demon as well.

Although I have little to go on but philosophy and my own observations of those who have struggled with the evil in their natures, such a process undoubtedly has its own dangers when it involves a demonic presence. It is even conceivable that a single false step could lead to oblivion for the mortal and triumph for the demon.

Despite the potential hazard, the dangers inherent in not making such an attempt are obvious; it is a question of probable failure versus certain destruction. Those who witness such a struggle can perform no task more worthy than to encourage the penitent in this hour of need.

Summoning

Available evidence demonstrates that demons may be summoned to our world against their will by the working of powerful magic. Summoning is the second way that demons gain access to our lands and our lives.

The magic of the summoning process pulls the demon into our world, rather than the demon taking the time to leisurely select a target and move into the emptiness created by evil acts and the process of transposition. In both cases, the weaknesses in the hearts of men allow the demon access to our world, and in both cases, the demon exacts a terrible price from the mortal.

Those who wish to cleanse our lands of the blight of evil should find the treatment of magical summoning rituals in this section quite useful, but before we can move to the discussion of how demons are summoned, we need to briefly examine why demons are

summoned. The answer is not as obvious as it seems.

In a perfect world, those who wield power would always do so with wisdom. Leaders of our nations, leaders of our churches and universities, powerful mages, and mighty warriors would use their power for the common good. Yet, harsh experience has proven time and again that no special wisdom comes with the mantle of leadership or circumstance that gives a man power over his fellows.

Those who walk at the forefront of our society display the same qualities, from wisdom to folly, kindness to cruelty, and humility to deadly pride, which are found among the mass of the common man. With their prominence, however, their personal distinctions and failings often have far-reaching consequences, particularly when they allow self-pride to affect their judgment and overwhelm their common sense.

I know the temptation to allow pride in one's work, to allow one to hold oneself up as superior to the common man. I have spent half my life traveling the realms, cataloging and hunting

Redemption

Redemption of a character is theoretically possible at any point until Stage Five, when the transposition is complete. To repel the fiend from his body, the victim must commit acts of good comparable to the acts of evil that first attracted the fiend to him. These acts weaken the fiend's hold on the character, and it will do all it can to foil its victim's efforts.

This process follows the guidelines given under "Redemption" in Chapter Seven of *Domains of Dread*. However, should the character fail even one redemption check, the physical and psychic strain on both fiend and character requires a System Shock roll to survive. Should the character survive, the transposition process is immediately completed and the fiend replaces its host. If the check is failed, the character dies, but achieves a manner of victory, denying the fiend its prize.

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creatures of darkness. I have seen many horrible things and suffered much, and on occasion, when weary of the battle or frustrated by a clever foe, I take the attitude that this entitles me to special treatment by my fellows for whom I "have sacrificed so much." Then a biting quip from one of my outspoken and strong-willed companions reminds me that I merely do what I do to contribute, to the best of my abilities, to the betterment of the lot of my fellow man. In this sense I am no different than, and no doubt in some cases inferior to, those tradesmen who toil at their crafts to produce valued goods for their fellows. My intellect and learning is to me as a hammer and cutting tool is to a cobbler.

Sadly, many of my peers fail to recognize the value of humility and do not heed, or cannot hear, those voices that would remind them of their place among humanity. Some turn their minds to glory, to the thought that they will make some momentous discovery that will leave their names splashed boldly on the pages of history, a shining vision for those who follow them on the path to knowledge. Others, in their pride, believe they have the capacity to control any happenstance, and that they may reach beyond the borders of the unknown and pluck the deepest mysteries at no cost.

In some instances, these colleagues succeed where it would have been better if they had not. Those who struggle with concepts or powers beyond their understanding often act most unwisely, allowing their foolish desires and the weaknesses of their all too human hearts to govern their actions. Such men and women are not necessarily evil, even if they have allowed their intellectual pursuits to be misdirected by the baser side of their nature.

A mage or priest is particularly vulnerable to the temptation to explore blindly, and thus to leave himself open to the power of the demon. Whether due to overweening pride, lust for power, or an unshakable certainty that they can control any situation, even these learned individuals make the

foolish and generally fatal mistake of commencing the study of summoning magical creatures with a mind to harnessing their extraordinary power.

Of course, the summoner may as well seek to stem the tide with a soup spoon as to channel or control the power of a demon. Yet, as a fool will often persist in his folly until utter ruination ensues, so too will a mage or priest caught up in the thrill of their studies. When these misguided fools, whose intellects have outstripped their judgment, actually summon a demon, they will know their error too late.

I would have once said that absolute evil was as impossible as absolute good. I no longer believe in such convenient words as "impossible." For this night I have looked into the eyes of the Demon, and nothing can ever be the same.

The seething, twitching monstrosity, with its pale eyes and toothsome mouth, is gone for now. I have driven it off with the last of my strength. I have no more.

My spells were enough to give me life this night, but the Demon has looked into me and I can still hear its scraping voice, peeling away my brain.

"I am in you and you are in me. How can you hide from yourself?"

I cannot. Gods help me, I cannot.

—From an anonymous letter
left on a church pew

The Mechanics of Summoning

Those who would dabble in such matters will do so without my encouragement. Still, for my peace of mind I need to make clear that my words and collected information are not intended to be used to launch an attempt to summon a demon to our lands.

I have not provided the following to aid the foolish in their quest to summon magical creatures, but so that the wise can recognize such activity and act appropriately before it is too late. For,

unlike most deeds of darkness, the act of summoning a creature from beyond our world is unmistakable in its prelude.

The physical process of attempting to summon a demon requires great erudition, considerable resources, and powerful magic. The process of preparing the site for the ritual involves weeks of painstaking work and involves the expenditure of great sums of money. It is my understanding that most of this expense goes to defray the tremendous costs of the magical inks or powders used to inscribe the appropriate runes on the floor of the area which is to contain the creature. Indeed, this process has two distinct parts, the effort to summon the creature to this realm, and the effort to control the creature once it has arrived. Both of these stages are crucial and require very advanced magical ability.

The spell required to control the summoned creature is known to mages as the spell of *binding*. My advisers on subjects magical inform me that this spell, when cast, is directed against one particular creature. The purpose of this enchantment is to restrain the actions of this creature, and to protect the caster and his surroundings. Without this spell, any summoned creature would immediately be free to wreak whatever havoc it desires.

Binding is a spell that can only be wielded by powerful mages with access to the eighth level of spells. The physical process of mixing the inks or powders, crafting the scrolls, and manufacturing the other components required takes weeks of intense and painstaking effort. These components are used to craft a circular diagram on the floor of the area in question, using mystic symbols, chants, and gestures known only to the initiate.

The actual process of summoning the creature is not nearly as time-consuming, although it is just as tense as the weeks of preparation work that have gone before. The summoning ritual, or spell, is a closely guarded secret known only to certain mages with access to spells of the ninth level,

so my advisers were understandably reluctant to impart any information. However, as I understand it, the magic creates an opening between our world and mystical realms beyond.

This magical *gate* allows, or rather, according to one of my advisers, forces the demon to step into our realm—presumably into the middle of the circle inscribed during the binding ritual.

Summoned Demons

While various mages and other obsessed fools undoubtedly will try and fail for much of their lives to summon and trap a demon, documentary evidence does establish conclusively that there is at least one demon on our world today who was originally summoned here by a tragically misguided man. A priest known as Micah of the Order of Tramalaine apparently successfully brought the demon to our world, but failed utterly to control it. I recount this tale because it, and its consequences, serves as an object lesson as to why we must be ever alert and act to prevent summoning attempts while they are in preparation.

I write these lines to record the strange passing of Brother Micah, a good and holy man. Micah ever strove to expand the frontiers of knowledge, but it may be that he reached too far into the depths of the unknown and encountered that which man was not meant to know.

It was past the second bell last night, approaching the hour of the sunrise service, but lights still burned in the tower. This was not unusual, for Micah would often burn the lamps late into the night. With hindsight, we should have seen that Micah had become even more distant and elusive than his norm. He missed many meals and barely exchanged words of greeting in the halls. But all seemed normal, until the quiet of the night was shattered by an explosion from Micah's laboratory.

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The compound shook with explosions, broken glass, rending stone, terrible roars, and the sound of a man screaming in horror. The noise suddenly stopped, and we gathered at the foot of the stairs and proceeded with haste up into the tower, led by the abbot and the most Reverend Jacoby. The scene was one of complete destruction.

The tables, bookcases, books, and equipment were scattered and burned. The walls themselves were charred, as if they had been exposed to a great flame; much of the glassware had fused together. Pieces of stone had been torn from the walls and floor, and deep furrows in the stone ran six abreast throughout. The room was empty. Only the remnants of assorted sigils scribed onto the floor and walls, and the charred remains of Micah's notes, showed what had occurred before the end.

I can determine no more than that Micah was engaged in some sort of summoning of a power that we have never seen. I will record Micah's symbols and notes below, that perhaps someday a learned reader may understand. Micah is gone, and we fear that he will never return.

—Monsignor Arbatus of Termaia
Order of Tramalaine

My examination of the transcribed portions of these notes and symbols leads me to believe that this unfortunate monk attempted to summon and control a demon. He obviously failed in the latter aim.

Evidence suggests that demons have an amazing fortitude in the face of magic's effects, something discussed at length in the next chapter. It is likely, and my advisers in things magical agree, that the spell of *binding* is an unreliable defense against a demon.

Cross-referencing the date of the incident involving Micah with other accounts leads me to conclude that the creature he summoned is the demon later known as the Beast of Ehrendton, a monster made moderately famous by a book of the same name.

Alternative Theories of Origin

While the preceding sections discuss the means by which misguided and foolish individuals attempt to summon demons into their presence and control them, it does not address a key issue regarding demons: From where do demons originate?

If one accepts the theory that there are other "planes of existence," other worlds alongside and apart from our own, then there is barely a need to ask that question. However, I have no doubt that some readers find themselves reluctant to subscribe to such fanciful ideas. While skepticism in the face of unsubstantiated claims is to be encouraged, in this case skepticism may lead to disregard of a potential threat to us all.

Believing that our reality is the only plane of existence can easily lead one to disregard the would-be summoner as a fool caught up in a harmless fantasy. After all, a being that is summoned must certainly arrive from elsewhere, and if there is no "elsewhere," then the being cannot be summoned. However, what if the magic during the summoning ritual, actually brings the demon into existence?

Demilich Evolution and Summoning

I have seen clerics, both holy and foul, raise the spirits of the dead, then dismiss them back to the shadowy realms of the afterlife. The spirits of the dead rarely seem pleased to be summoned back into the realms of the living. It is possible that the free-roaming spirit of the demilich, neither alive nor dead, is captured and forced back into a physical form by the powerful magic of the summoner.

As I ponder this possibility, it seems to fit well with the chronicled activities of some demons. Drigor, for example, has devoted much effort to escape from our reality, because it chafes on him like a tight collar. It seems likely that after experiencing the total freedom of existing only as a spirit, the demilich wants desperately to return to that state. The fact that Drigor and other

demons appear to be seeking ways to escape our existence might further support this theory. However, what this theory does not account for is transposition. If demons are indeed an evolution of the demilich, why do they take steps to assume a physical form that will, without doubt, limit them, no matter how powerful it may be?

The Stepchild and Summoning

Natural observers have identified any number of creatures that lie dormant, either as pupae or some other protective state, until a specific natural event occurs. Oft I have found that physical phenomena have a parallel in the realm of magic—that hazy sphere of forces and energies from which wizards and magical creatures draw their power.

It seems possible, then, that under rare circumstances, the powerful magical forces unleashed during a *summoning attempt* interacts with the negative psychic energies generated by all the evil in our land. This gives the evil form and brings to conclusion the gestation of the living nightmares that are demons, causing them to spring into physical being.



Accepting this theory, however, might lead to the false conclusion that any race capable of generating enough evil to spawn a demon is receiving the punishment they deserve. This could not be further from the truth! Demons do not punish evil, they encourage it, and try their utmost to snuff out all that is good in our tortured land. It is the innocent and those who try to resist the demon who suffer the brunt of their evil. There is no justice or moral imperative served by the existence of demons.

Summoning

Powerful magic can indeed summon a fiend to the campaign world. This foolhardy endeavor will almost invariably spell disaster for any foolish enough to attempt it, and it is an act of such evil that it would cause multiple powers checks for any character involved in such an effort.

While there may be other methods to summon a fiend to the realms, Dr. Van Richten describes the method most likely to meet with success. The great intellect of most fiends renders the use of the *ensnarement* spell a laughable effort, which fiends normally answer only if they desire to step through and punish the fool who dares disturb them. When fiends do respond to this spell voluntarily,

they are still trapped on our world.

The preferred method combines the *gate* spell and the effects of *binding* (giving it the appropriate chance to remain unaffected). In addition, a fiend that is aware it is being drawn to the campaign world, and is aware of the peculiar nature of the realm, receives an additional bonus of +10% if it desires to resist the summons. Enlightened fiends will fight with every ounce of their being to avoid being trapped in a world governed by RAVENLOFT rules.

Even if a mortal is successful in controlling the fiend, this relationship with such a creature makes riding a tiger appear tame! The fiend will always work to the best of its ability to undermine the caster, and if it fails, it will claim revenge one day.

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... (C)hey the day before, in broad noon, on such a summer sea, had heard a noise like the flapping of wings outstretched from one edge of the sky to another, and in a moment the calm sea was lifted up and fell again ... And there was a tumult about them of thunder and raging waters and black night and wildfire. ...

—E. R. Eddison
The Worm Ouroboros

CHAPTER TWO: OBSERVED POWERS



It is essential to make every effort to understand an adversary, particularly one as powerful and dangerous as a demon, before venturing forth to do battle. Every hunter knows that to be successful, he must know the ways of his prey; its nature, habits and abilities. This takes on even greater weight when faced with prey that is more powerful and intelligent than its predators!

We turn now to the question that must leap to the minds of all those who would battle demons. Namely, what are their powers and abilities, and how may they be countered? Although the information gathered by my sources and myself is sparse when compared with the voluminous materials a dedicated researcher can amass on vampires or werebeasts, what there is of it quite reasonably addresses demonic powers.

Nonetheless, the uncertainty over the extent of the abilities of these monstrosities cannot be overstressed. Much of the information in this work is only educated speculation, or extrapolation from what is known, for a number of difficulties have hindered the effort to produce a definitive study of the demon.

First, opportunities to study the nature of demons have been few. Blessedly, demons are rare in our land.

Another obstacle to definitive pronouncements is that our available information suggests that each demon is a unique creature. Each demon differs greatly from the next, not only in form, but in powers, attitudes, and purpose. Therefore, this catalogued information,

obtained by brave folk at a great price, may not apply to a particular demonic adversary. Indeed, the single greatest point to remember when facing any demon is that it undoubtedly will do the unexpected. It is wise to endeavor to prepare for almost any eventuality.

I find that it is very rare for a mortal to comprehend the powers of the Great Ones. It may well be that most of us are simply incapable of doing so. The magic of wizards and the arrows of warriors are as nothing to them. They brush them aside and laugh heartily at our mortal impudence and foolishness. It is truly futile to oppose them, for they can shape the very land where they walk. Those who understand these facts will serve them. Those who do not will be crushed in their path. To each, his just reward.

—The Madrigorian
Book II, Chapter III

While Dr. Van Richten is correct that there are many different types of fiends and each has a unique combination of powers, still there are common powers that may be defined. For instance, most fiends are immune or at least resistant to several forms of attack. Only enchanted weapons and magic harm most fiends. Nearly every fiend possesses magic resistance, making magic an uncertain weapon against them. Many are able to conceal their form in some manner, and over half possess heightened senses or mental powers that allow them to spy on their victims from afar. This section examines these commonalities.

Common Powers

I have reiterated the individuality of demons so frequently in this text that the sober-minded reader may begin to suspect that the demon has no genus at all, but is merely an arbitrary grouping of creatures by a poor researcher. However, it is possible to make certain generalities about the demons thus far encountered. This is true much in the same way that careful study of the human race has led to general conclusions which hold true for all men, despite the differences found from individual to individual.

All demons share certain types of powers. For the purposes of this work, common abilities have been grouped into five broad categories: *visual acuity*, *elemental immunities*, *weapon immunities*, *resistance to magic*, and *spell-like abilities*.

Visual Acuity

There is little that escapes the notice of a demon. Not only is it exceptionally intelligent and perceptive, but it seems possessed of senses that far exceed those of humans. According to those who study medicine and anatomy, these abilities often exceed those of demihumans as well.

A survey of all available texts describing encounters with demons also confirms that demons have exceptional vision. The scope of their vision seems to perceive both heat and, perhaps, cold. In addition, demons seem able to see far greater distances than humans.

Of course, the demon's ability to perceive its adversaries in darkness may be no more than the power which many demihuman races have to perceive heat patterns that living flesh emits. There is no direct evidence to confirm or deny the ability of the demon to see normally in cold, pitch darkness as does the lich, but it is wise to assume that the cover of darkness does not provide safety from these malevolent creatures, as this excerpt shows.

I heard it come through the darkness, heard the scrape of its claws on the stone floor and its breath rasping far down the hall. It was not even trying to be silent, for it knew that it had naught to fear from the likes of us! The blood of our four valiant comrades was spread over the creature's body and the floor of the keep in silent testimony to its power.

Jess and I crouched behind the barrels of moldy grain in the darkest corner of the storage room and even tried to think quietly! I heard its wings scrape along the wall and its whip hiss against the stone as it came; its bulk nearly filled the corridor. It laughed and taunted us as cowards! Mayhap that is true, but we were not fools, and we stayed still.

Suddenly, the noise stopped, and though I knew it was close, it was a long time before a shift of shadow told me that the thing was in this very room.

"I see you there, you pathetic fools! You cower in vain!" Its voice echoed inside my skull. I could feel it staring holes through me, scouring my soul while time stood still. Then it turned, chuckling, and walked away. "Tell them about me! Tell them all about me! Let them know that it is futile to oppose me!"

—Sir Armand Ironhand
The Beast of Ehrendton

Elemental Immunities

Given the extraordinary abilities of the demon and its unknown origins, it is not surprising that their physiology is very different from those of the natural

Every fiend has infravision that extends to a range of at least 120 feet. In addition, the natural vision of a fiend is enhanced so that it can see in complete darkness as if in full daylight. The connection between the campaign land and the fiend serves to sharpen the fiend's already keen vision.

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inhabitants of our world. The demon seems naturally hardy and less vulnerable to extremes of temperature. Whether this is due to the will of a summoner, a link to the land itself, or to the beast's tempering to a harsh native environment, is unknown. However, this amazing constitution is readily observable by anyone unfortunate enough to encounter a demon.

This resistance to the elements goes far beyond a resistance to extremes of temperature. The available evidence suggests that demons are in fact often immune to the effects of heat and cold, including those attacks that rely on these elements. The following brief discussions provide examples of such immunities.

Fire

Both research and my personal experience suggest that demons are immune to the effects of natural fire. Whether this resistance is a magical ability or results from an unnatural toughness of hide, its effect is clear. The account below provides a representative tale.

We saw the smoke from the fields; and Samael, Clem and me run in as quick as we could. It looked like a big 'un, and as we got close we could see that like unto half of Creeana was on fire. As we rounded onto the main street, we seen the body of Thom the Smith. He was stretched out in the road with his hammer in his hand and his insides become his outsides. Through the smoke we saw a few other bodies, and the only live folks we saw was runnin' for the woods a good ways away.

We didn't know about no war, and we might have run too, if we hadn't of heard the screams of 'Becca and the babies from Samael's house. So down the street we ran, screamin' like we was back at Dargal Pass and swallowin' real hard to keep our breath coming. As we got near the house, the screams stopped, and we saw a man coming out the door of the burning house. He was

holding a bloody pike and whistlin' a pretty tune.

He stopped when he saw us and smiled real strange. Clem froze, but me and Samael charged the bugger. That's when he changed. All of a sudden he was big, bigger than any man, and he didn't look like a man no more. His skin was all red and tough like horsehide, stretched tight over his body like it could barely cover his bones without cracking. His teeth were real big, and he had a horn growin' out of the back of his head. He still had the pike, in bony hands with huge red claws, and his skin had this red kinda slimy stuff all over it. He was still whistlin'.

Samael got to him first, and his heart was running the show, not his head. Instead of teaming up, he charged into it, and knocked them both back into his burning home. The monster just stood in the fire, flames licking up all around it, but it didn't pay no mind. It smiled as it spiked Samael to the ground and clawed him apart, whistling while the roof fell in around his head.

—Recorded by Ashlan of Il Aluk
as told by Jared Tinkerson

My personal observations confirm this immunity to fiery attack, here against a being usually called the "Whistling Fiend." In our final battle against Drigor, I had thought to use a special concoction that I had secured from an alchemist of my acquaintance. This potion consisted of a sticky, saplike substance that ignites when exposed to the air, and burns for a period of time before consuming itself. The adhesive qualities of the ointment cause it to adhere to whatever surface the glass vials containing it broke upon.

The ointment worked as advertised, but to my horror, it had no perceptible effect on the demon! Three of our vials burst against its form at the start of the fray, but it continued to fight while they burned, suffering no apparent ill effect. In fact, Drigor even laughed when, at first, I merely stood and gaped at this phenomenon. It scooped

up some of the substance with its fingers, and licked its hand clean, as if to prove its complete contempt for my feeble attack!

While I was aware of the reports regarding normal flame, I had hypothesized that this more potent form might do a demon harm. Let this tale be a warning to all those who battle the forces of darkness that they must be prepared to accept any eventuality with equanimity, having multiple plans of attack in readiness when attempting to best a demon. My shock at the failure of the oil was so great that Drigor could easily have taken my head off whilst I stood gaping like a child at a circus. I survived only because he chose to mock me instead. I swear that the demon shall one day have cause to regret that bit of pomposity.

Most fiends are immune to normal fire, except the farastu, which suffer half damage from fire.

Cold

Given the resistance of the demon to heat and fire, it is to be expected that it would be more vulnerable to cold. At least, creatures in nature who have adapted to one extreme based on their environment often have no tolerance for the opposite extreme. Yet it appears many demons are also immune to the lower temperature extremes.

During another encounter with the so-called Whistling Fiend, recorded once again by Ashlan of Il Aluk as he followed the creature's swath of destruction through Darkon, we find a dramatic example of this immunity.

When my master ordered the man from his courtyard, he stopped whistling for the first time and instead started laughing. The master did not like laughter, especially not when he thought it directed at him, so he decided to teach the cad a lesson. I heard him mutter the incantation for ice

storm and I ducked down behind a barrel. "Laugh at this!" the master shouted as he unleashed the spell.

Then the whistling started again. When I looked, the stranger was walking through the raging storm of hail and ice as if it was nothing! He was twirling his pike above his head and whistling. He suddenly caught the pike and lunged forward; the master did not even have a chance to scream before he was run through and pinned to the wall.

The stranger went into the school, and the screams of the other apprentices soon drowned out that horrid whistling.

—Recorded by Ashlan of Il Aluk,
as told by Penda Kunster

Once, when battling a lich, I was unfortunate enough to be targeted by an *ice storm* spell, and I almost did not survive the experience. Any creature that can whistle merrily in the face of an ice storm must plainly be unaffected by it. It should be noted that attacks that concentrate cold in sufficient strength to be damaging are all magical. Thus, the apparent resistance of the demon to cold may be related to its resistance to magic, discussed below. This resistance is not complete, so do not abandon an attack which is based on cold. It may prove successful.

Fiends in general are partially resistant to the effects of cold. Most baatezu, tanar'ri, and gehreleths suffer only half damage from cold-based attacks. Yugoloths, however, who normally suffer double damage from cold-based attacks, take only normal damage while under the influence of a RAVENLOFT world.

Poison

As far as we can determine, the demon has a completely different physiology than a mortal. Therefore, it is very uncertain that any substance which we know to be poisonous would in fact have any adverse effects on a demon.

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Recorded battles with demons seem to support this hypothesis.

For example, Hataras the Quiet, a veteran hunter and warrior, who often stood beside me in my battles against evil, once related a tale to me of a creature he came upon in his wanderings. From his description of the monstrosity, I believe Hataras encountered the Whistling Fiend.

While Hataras is a good soul, his pragmatism, regrettably, often defeats his principles when fighting evil. He informed me that he had coated his blades with an exotic and deadly poison derived from mushrooms and toads found in the deepest swamps of Lamordia. However, it did not appear that his opponent suffered any ill effects from this deadly poison, and Hataras barely escaped with his life from that encounter. The creature appeared none the worse for wear, continuing its whistling despite several deep slashes with the poisoned blade.

All fiends are immune to all known poisons and toxins.

Weapon Immunities

Many evil creatures are immune to the effects of normal weapons that would harm or kill a normal man. This immunity is also common to many undead beings, as well as to magical creatures such as the created, those monstrous constructs of once-dead flesh that are shaped by obsessed and evil souls. If one wishes to attack a demon in close quarters, one must secure an enchanted weapon.

My colleagues and I took this as a given, and we never attempted to attack a demon with a mundane blade. There are also written accounts, such as the following, which confirm this theory.

Jared thinks I froze, but I never did. I just got sense enough not to go charging into a fire after a monster that's a whole lot bigger and meaner than me! Anyway, I heard Samael dying, then I saw the

thing come out after Jared. I hung back and stuck to cover, trying to get behind it. Maybe it didn't see me, or else I didn't worry it none.

Jared got the jump on it and hit it twice with his sickle, two good cuts, but the blade just bounced off of it like it had hit a rock! Sparks flew, and some of the red gook on the thing got onto the sickle and started to bubble. The monster moved right quick, and cut Jared with the pike. Then it reversed the butt and cracked him good, sent him flying into a tree. It walked toward him, whistling all the way.

Then I took my chance! I cut him twice from behind with old Quickclaw, a gift from me grandpa, and still a fine old blade. The first one was deep. The monster screamed, and looked at me with its glowin' eyes. I thought sure I was dead, then it vanished in a blink. I got Jared up, and we beat feet. Creana was destroyed.

Never seen anything like it before, and hope I never see it again! Funny though, sometimes when I'm just sitting quiet I hear that whistling crawling along in the back of my head. [Investigator's note: Testing of this man's sword reveals that it is enchanted.]

—Recorded by Ashlan of Il Aluk,
as told by Clem Nimbletoe

This entry confirms that while normal weapons have no effect on demons, magical weapons may indeed harm them. However, not all magical weapons are the same! Magical weapons differ in quality and the power of enchantment, and as with certain undead or other magical creatures, some demons may be vulnerable only to blades of particularly strong enchantment. It is likely that different demons vary in this regard.

Yet, there is another material more readily available for weapons which will harm, at least, some demons. That substance is iron—cold, wrought iron.

The passage below was penned by a warrior unfortunate enough to encounter the Whistling Fiend. It

illustrates the effect of iron on this beast, which shrugs off fine steel.

As the horned creature leapt toward me, I raised my sword in feeble defense. The weight of the beast slammed me into the ground, but I realized that I was alive and the creature not moving! Struggling out from under the body of the beast, I saw that it had miscalculated its jump. It had landed on the iron fence, crushing a section and impaling itself on six of the posts!

I sought to examine the strange beast, but as I moved closer, it began to stir, struggling to free itself from the spikes. My sword had bounced off its hide too many times already, so I fled.

—From the private journal of
Mithran Gray

Apparently, the cold iron of the fence pierced the demon as it would any mortal creature. The demon shares this vulnerability to iron with certain other supernatural creatures. Its susceptibility to iron also raises the possibility that certain demons may be vulnerable to weapons of silver as well. There is no record of a demon's encounter with this precious metal, but many magical creatures vulnerable to cold iron are also harmed by silver.

Gehreleths are immune to any nonmagical weapons. Yugoloths and baatezu are immune to normal weapons and iron, but are vulnerable to silver. Most tanar'ri suffer full damage from both iron and silver weapons.

Resistance to Magic

Many magical or undead creatures are resistant to at least certain types of magic. Some even have a resistance so powerful that it works to partially protect them from all magic. Demons have a similar resistance.

Demons shrug aside many spells as

easily as they might arrows or daggers. Yet, this resistance is not complete, nor is it based on the might of the magic being cast against the demon. Many accounts of demons describe their resistance to a variety of spells. My experience confirms it.

The two spellcasters in our party in the battle against Drigor used myriad spells, as well as powers from various magical devices. Many had no apparent effect, while others (particularly a spray of colored energy) injured it. Relatively minor magic affected Drigor, while more powerful attacks did not. The obvious lesson is that magic is an unreliable ally in a battle against a demon.

Nonetheless, magical items and spells are still powerful tools which should be employed against a demon when at all possible. It is logical to assume that with demons, as with certain undead creatures, their resistance will vary. It is certainly best to use magical attacks, since they may damage the foe while keeping the wielder out of reach.

Fiends have magic resistance to varying degrees. This magic resistance functions normally in a RAVENLOFT setting, protecting the fiend against magical attacks but not from magical weapons. Magic resistance does not in any way assist the fiend against the dark powers of the Demiplane of Dread campaign.

Spell-like Abilities

While the powers listed above are formidable enough to give pause to even the stoutest of heart, they are not even the most powerful weapons at the demon's disposal. In addition to these abilities and immunities, demons all possess special powers casting spells or at least emulating magical effects. Exactly where these abilities spring from is unclear.

Dr. Farringer argued that demons are true mages, either by nature or inclination. The following excerpt from her journals explains her position.

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While there is room for dispute on this matter, I believe that the demons we have studied are mages, wielding powers which they have selected and learned according to their natural inclination and anticipated needs.

The vast intellect of the demon supports this theory. It is clearly within their intellectual capability to become mages of the highest order. Further, while many undead or supernatural creatures can replicate certain spells at will, the evidence does not suggest that demons fall into this category.

The vast number and diversity of the spells cast by demons demonstrate that they must be chosen and studied to be cast when needed, as are the spells of any mortal mage. Note that of the other supernatural creatures, only the lich and demilich can match or exceed the demon in magic ability, and they are trained spellcasters. Further, there are documented cases of a demon reading spells from a scroll or making use of magical devices. These behaviors mirror those of the mage.

While the natural abilities of demons are of legendary proportions, it simply boggles the imagination to suggest that demons possess by their nature the diverse array of offensive, defensive, and protective magical effects.

—From the clinic notes of
Dr. Ottelie Farringer

With all due respect to my distinguished colleague and beloved friend, I disagree with her position. In my opinion, the available evidence strongly suggests that demons wield powerful magic from their own natural abilities rather than through a rigorous course of study.

This is not to say that most demons are incapable of becoming mages. Demons are highly intelligent, and they live for spans far exceeding the human life cycle, if they are mortal at all. Therefore, a demon could, in all likelihood, study the magical arts and further develop its talents. However, the

documents available to us lead me to believe that demons, in general, emulate spell-like effects with natural abilities.

First, the use of scrolls and magical devices in no way confirms that the user is trained as a mage. Many magical devices can be used by those who are not trained in the arts—and some cannot be used by those who are so trained. Certain spells, particularly the protective magic to which Dr. Farringer made reference above, may also be read from scrolls by those who are not mages. While the behaviors Dr. Farringer noted are consistent with the behaviors of mages, they are consistent with other sorts of people as well.

Further, there is no evidence that demons use, possess, or create spellbooks that are the greatest treasure of the mage. No demonic spellbook or fragment has ever been recovered for study, and we have never found a written account drafted by a demon that refers to spellbooks or to scribing spells.

Demons are able to manifest spell-like effects immediately (as we saw in the account of the unfortunate Miss Weaveron) upon their arrival, and somehow renew those abilities, despite the lack of both the raw materials needed to trigger the magical effects and spellbooks from which to relearn spells. These abilities must, therefore, be natural spell-like abilities.

Because of the extraordinary variety among demons, it is very difficult to catalogue these abilities. Dr. Farringer was certainly correct that a demon's powers are plentiful, diverse, and perhaps exceeded only by those of the lich and the demilich. Further, these demonic abilities are idiosyncratic and cut across the specialties observed among mortal mages.

Therefore, the champions of good must expect a demon to have extensive magical powers at its disposal. It is most important to study your foe. Learn everything that you can concerning its powers and behavior, and carefully identify the magic the demon has used. This is the only way to determine the

unique magical powers of a demon and to prepare to counter them.

General Magical Powers

There are certain broad categories of magical abilities that all demons possess to some degree. All demons possess magical powers of some variety or other. Categories of powers are discussed in some detail following.

Charm: First, it has been noted that most, if not all, demons have certain *charm*-like abilities that affect the minds and perceptions of its victims. One recent example is the demon Elsepeth, who obviously used some power similar to the mage's *charm person* spell to calm the fears of Tasha Weaveron, and to preserve the secret of her arrival in Falkovnia.

Demons have other abilities that affect the minds of their victims and are even more powerful and dangerous than any standard *charm* spell. The *Madrigorian* offers an example.

Though we foolish mortals may oppose the will of the Great Ones, and harden our hearts to them, their mighty power and the light of their presence will bring us back to the fold. With a wave of the hand, a smile, and a few words of wisdom and grace, the Great Ones can smooth the furrowed brow, soothe the angry heart and dispel our confusion. No one may remain disturbed while in the presence of the Great Ones. Their wisdom enlightens the mind and soothes the heart. The mob becomes an assembly. We find true grace in the light of their presence, and receive wise counsel at the feet of the Masters.

—The *Madrigorian*
Book VIII, Chapter XX

Drigor describes more here than just powerful charisma. The power described is akin to *mass charm*, designed to capture many minds at once. Certain powerful spells and magical items can create or duplicate

this effect, in which the wielder fosters good will among those around him. The text seems designed to prepare the readers to be willing targets, but I can personally attest to the fact that even the most unwilling targets are not immune to Drigor's mind-controlling, mood-altering powers.

During my disastrous confrontation with Drigor, the demon somehow put my companions and I magically off guard. I shall never forgive myself for not being strong enough to resist its foul charms, but I found myself convinced that Drigor was no more harmful than a wandering minstrel. So help me, I even felt remorseful over having sought the creature out with violence in mind.

This power, and mind-affecting magic in general, are particularly suited for the cunning nature of the demon. Subtle charms are dangerous even to a determined foe, for they may divide the loyalties of those who oppose the demon. It is wise to avoid contact with a demon until the very moment of confrontation.

December 10th

*Dr. Farringer and I continue to concentrate our research efforts in the hamlet of Edrigan itself. Despite the reluctance among the folk to confide in us, the pretense that we are gathering research for a work of regional history continues to provide confirmation of certain of the events reported in the *Madrigorian*.*

*We also continue to uncover details about the *Madrigore* "authors." It is clear that for as long as the *Madrigores* have been the lords of Edrigan, there has always been one "author," one member who did little but feverishly script crazed ramblings.*

*This morning, Dr. Farringer spoke with the young man who was to marry Bethany *Madrigore*. Her father died a week or so before they were to wed, and that very night, the young lady called the wedding off. When he went to dissuade her, he found her at the desk*

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where her father had been feverishly writing ever since both he and his beloved had been children. Now, it was Bethany who was sitting there, a wild stare in her eye and ink stains on her hands. She was almost unrecognizable, he said, and she seemed to barely be aware of who he was.

Much to our surprise and cautious delight, near midday, a message arrived for us at the inn. The message proved to be a note from the Mistress of Edrigan, Bethany Madrigore. The lady invited Dr. Farringer and myself, by name, to dinner at the Madrigore estate on the following evening. Dr. Farringer's examination of the note confirmed that it was written in a hand which matched that of the author of the Madrigorian!

—From the private journal of
Dr. Van Richten

Almost all fiends have charm-related abilities. All baatezu and yugoloths have the ability to cast *charm person*, while shator gehreleths (such as Drigor) have the ability to *beguile* (as a rod of *beguiling*, once per day). Many tanar'ri and other fiends have the *charm* ability, as well as spell-like abilities related to illusion.

Illusions

The demon has other magical resources at its disposal to manipulate the hearts and minds of the mortals around them. Demons all appear to be masters of various types of illusions. They use these powers to hide their true nature and forms from mortal eyes, and to manipulate the perceptions of their human pawns to further their dark goals.

For example, Clem and Jared, the militiamen who encountered the Whistling Fiend, described the demon changing from a normal man to a huge, horned, skeletal figure before entering battle. There is also much evidence that the demon who transposed itself with Ammie Weaveron often cloaks itself in illusory guises.

The Beast of Ehrendton, a tragic saga believed by many to be fiction, provides yet another account of a demon who reveals its powers of illusion. The author's grandson, the current Lord Ironhand, states that his grandfather always swore that the story was true. In this account, written years after the fact, we see how the demon lived among mortals in an illusory guise.

This dark figure resided in a fortress deep in the southern mountains, in a region known as Ehrendton. This location was remote, and often outside the reach of civil authority. Rumors reached us that this warrior, a powerful man who was the size of a bear, whose hair and beard were wild as a briar patch and who wore only dark livery, had assembled a band of followers without land or honor who terrorized the surrounding countryside. They preyed on travelers and kept the local peasants in a state of slavery.

We vowed that we would ride to Ehrendton, find this Black Duke and end his reign of terror. After all, no mere bandit could stand against the combined swords of six noble warriors, wielded in the cause of justice! And so we rode forth from Castle Drakkir that sunny day, thinking we were bound for glory.

By the gods, we were young! Who could have known what waited to prey on us in Ehrendton?

—Sir Armand Ironhand
The Beast of Ehrendton

Later sections describe the transformation of this "Black Duke" into a huge winged creature possessing magical powers, tremendous strength, and skill with weapons. The creature described in this work could only be a demon, who decided to seize power in a remote region of Nova Vaasa while using its powers of illusion or alteration to hide its true nature from the populace.

Many fiends possess Illusion or Alteration magic that they use to conceal their true nature.

All baatezu possess the power *advanced illusion*, while yugoloths use their *alter self* ability.

Most tanar'ri also possess some sort of spell-like power which enables them to make changes to their appearance or shape. A fiend may utilize its illusions in whatever form advances the drama and plot. (Creativity is encouraged when devising strategies and powers for fiends.)

Defensive Magic

The magic powers of demons are not wholly focused on the minds of its adversaries. It has among its resources a variety of powers intended to protect it from harm. These seem to vary from creature to creature, yet the most potent defense seems available to all.

Demons all possess the ability to *teleport*, traveling great distances in the blink of an eye. This ability enables the creatures to strike with impunity and to escape when wounded or threatened. For example, the Whistling Fiend that disappeared after being stabbed twice by Clem Nimbletoe almost certainly *teleported* to safety when surprised by an adversary who could do it harm.

It is necessary to neutralize this *teleport* ability to force a final confrontation. Possible methods to temporarily curtail this ability, including one used with great effect against Drigor, are discussed in a later section of this work.

Offensive Magic

The magical arsenal of the demon also includes powerful offensive magic. Given the variety of these powers, it is difficult to group them into particular categories. It is possible, however, to draw certain general conclusions which may prove instructive.

A survey of the written accounts of battles with demons reveal a great variety of offensive magic. An illuminating excerpt follows.

The Black Duke met us alone in his Great Hall. At first, we thought that he did so to avoid witnesses to his humiliation, or that his lackeys were setting up some clever ambush outside. We were foolish to be concerned with that rabble. They were the least of our worries!

I strode forth boldly and denounced him as an evil man, a blackguard, a coward, and a fool. I called him forward to meet me in single combat, to answer with his life for the crimes he had perpetrated on the people of Nova Vaasa. He stopped me with a wash of fire that erupted from his hand. The flames fanned out around me, burning my clothing, hands, and face.

My companions spread out slowly as I retreated in shock. We had not known that this man was a mage! How could he be? He wore armor and swords, and obviously led others into battle. It was then, as we struggled to adapt to this new information, that the creature struck.

Everything seemed to happen at once. Suddenly, the Black Duke grew to an enormous size, splitting the armor he wore and seeming to fill the room. Huge wings and a long tail sprouted from his

All baatezu, tanar'ri, and yugoloths possess the ability to *teleport* without error. Fiends cannot *teleport* out of a RAVENLOFT setting. However, a fiend in the Demiplane of Dread campaign may use this ability to cross into or out of the territory of a domain lord, even if the domain lord has closed the domain's borders.

Ironically, the gehreleths, including Dr. Van Richten's shator nemesis Drigor, are the only fiends that do not have the ability to *teleport*. When battling that fiend, Dr. Van Richten assumed that it was able to use this avenue of escape. However, within a RAVENLOFT campaign, gehreleths can use their *gate* ability to transport themselves to somewhere else in the world once per day.

Altered Powers

Fiends have a great variety of spell-like abilities. While for the most part they replicate wizard spells, some are duplicates of priest spells as well. As the spells they resemble, fiendish powers may be altered by the effects of the RAVENLOFT rules.

This section lists fiendish powers that work differently in a RAVENLOFT world than they do in normal settings. Note that though some of the magic would normally call for a powers check, a fiend need not make these checks, for the fiend is already evil beyond the capacity of any evil godlike powers to transform.

Animate dead: A fiend can animate and control twice the usual number of corpses in a RAVENLOFT setting.

Clairaudience: The sensor for this power in a RAVENLOFT setting is a visible ghostly ear. The spell is limited in effect to one domain or region.

Conjure elemental: Fiends with this ability may summon only corrupted "Ravenloft elementals," described in the first RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix (TSR #2122). These elemental monsters are always free-willed, so fiends use this power only if severely pressed.

Curse: This spell-like power works as described in Chapter Twelve in *Domains of Dread*.

Detect good: The peculiar nature of a RAVENLOFT campaign masks readings of good and evil and confuses this power so it effectively does not work.

ESP: This power functions normally. However, this effect also senses projected thoughts designed to mask their true nature. Fiends have the ability to understand the thoughts of undead, and often "listen in" on nearby undead for

amusement, enjoying the irony of the false thoughts as well as the hideous evil of their true natures.

Gate: This ability does not function normally for any fiend in a RAVENLOFT campaign, whose nature does not allow any fiend to depart the world by this method and limits attempts to *gate* to once a day. Greater fiends have a 10% chance to succeed in an attempt to *gate* in an ally. Lesser fiends have a 5% chance to succeed. Those wretched creatures known as least fiends have no chance to overcome the campaign world. Gehreleths may use this power to attempt to flee elsewhere in the world.

Know alignment: The RAVENLOFT campaign insulates evil from discovery. The target of this ability must make a saving throw. Even if it fails to save, a fiend can only detect the lawful, neutral, or chaotic component of alignment.

Plane shift: This power merely transports a fiend to a different domain within the campaign world. It cannot help a fiend depart from the world itself.

Raise dead: This ability functions normally, except that if a fiend's target fails its Resurrection Survival roll, he becomes an undead creature of a type equal in Hit Dice to its former level.

Teleport without error: This spell cannot transport a fiend beyond a RAVENLOFT world.

Vampiric touch: The effects of this ability are enhanced in a RAVENLOFT setting, with the victim losing one permanent hit point per die of damage inflicted.

Word of recall: This power works normally except that it cannot transport a fiend between planes.

body, which was covered in dull red scales. The body of the beast was spiked with barbs that matched the barbs on the huge whip it now wielded. As it moved toward me, I shrank back in fear.

I am as ashamed now as I was then by this reaction, but I know that I could no more have kept myself from running than I could have stopped breathing. I fled toward a side corridor, with Jess d'Lurien beside me. At a harsh word from the beast, a wall of flame sprang up which shrouded the hall and blocked the corridor. We both ran through it, our desperate need to run stronger than our pain. As we fled down the hallway, we heard the deafening sound of thunder from the Great Hall, and the laughter of the beast within!

—Sir Armand Ironhand
The Beast of Ehrendton

This passage describes several offensive magic abilities available to the demon. Although the Beast of Ehrendton seems to have a preference for fire-based spells, this is not so with all demons. Once again, each of these creatures is a unique individual; each and every one has a preferred method of fighting. The physical power of a demon is often matched by its magical abilities, and these powers are used with stunning speed and deadly effect. Any given demon likely possesses a number of offensive spell-like powers.

Ethos-based Powers

While all demons are utterly evil, and engage in reprehensible acts designed only to enhance their own schemes, some behave very differently from others. There is some evidence to suggest that their behavior and powers may be connected in some way. Demons that share an ethos also seem to share certain abilities.

Careful review of the written records of demons with a focus on their attitudes and behavior seems to show that there are two broad groups into which we can divide these unique

creatures. These groups are mostly artificial, and are used not to limit the demon, but strictly for the purpose of simplifying our discussion.

One group of demons appears to behave with a certain regard for principles such as order, discipline and logic. These tend to adhere rigidly to the twisted philosophical frameworks in which they operate; they are well-organized and methodical in pursuit of both their immediate and their long-term goals.

Any term developed to discuss human nature is undoubtedly inadequate when dealing with the complex, alien psyche of the demon. Indeed, our language and understanding may be wholly inadequate to truly grasp the demonic nature. Like any researcher and writer, I am bound by the limits of my language and frame of reference. Therefore, I will refer to these demons as "lawful."

The other group of demons approaches matters differently. First, they are by all appearances utterly devoid of concern for, or dedication to, any cause or being other than themselves. Secondly, while they are extremely intelligent and dangerous adversaries, they tend to behave in a less organized and logical fashion than their lawful counterparts.

This seeming limitation may in fact be a disadvantage for those who battle these demons, because it makes their actions even less predictable than the norm. Yet this lack of organization also sometimes limits the ability and willingness of these demons to plan far in advance or to prepare for every eventuality. In addition, their lack of personal loyalty breeds nothing but distrust and betrayal around them. This atmosphere of intrigue and danger may make them more vulnerable to betrayal by their servitors, for leaders who feel no trust or loyalty inspire none in those who serve them. Keeping in mind the caution we must use when discussing the demonic mentality, these demons may be described as "chaotic."

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The Source of the Power

Now that our categories are defined, we can consider the question of whether it is the power that brings the behavior or the behavior that brings the power?

The raising of this issue may seem pointless to some readers—after all, demons have the power and that is all we really need to know—but the possible implications of this answer are rather important.

One possibility is that the answer is the same for demons as it is for mortals. That is, differences in temperaments and abilities are shaped by a creature's environment as well as its innate nature.

These differences may suggest that not only do demons develop or mature in differing environments (or on differing worlds), but that there may be different tribes or factions of demons. The possible existence of factionalism among demons should come as no surprise, for they are powerful and intelligent beings with sharp differences in personality and outlook. They may have internal divisions every bit as great as those in human society.

The idea of a social structure among demons leads to the second possible source of a demon's ethos-based power, and this thought chills my very soul.

Most readers have probably encountered priests in the service of differing gods, each of whom adheres to his or her deity's preferred ethos. While there is a similarity in powers of healing and warding of evil, each deity also grants unique abilities to servants.

It is a terrifying concept, but perhaps demons are like priests. Perhaps they draw on the might of some gods in the reality that they call home. This theory horrifies me, because if the demons are being granted powers akin to mortal priests by other-dimensional obscenities, then what goals of their masters are they serving in our reality?

Powers of Lawful Demons

The following powers and tendencies have been particularly noted among those demons that we tentatively classify as lawful. These abilities tend to

Dr. Van Richten is correct in believing that there are alignment differences among fiends. However, his categorizations are rudimentary. For example, while yugoloths are neutral evil, Dr. Van Richten has evidence of their total disregard for loyalty of any sort, and assumes they are chaotic. The alignments given for fiends remain in effect. He is correct in assuming that fiends of all sorts exist within the frameworks of rigid hierarchies, at least on their home planes. Suffice it to say that if a tanar'ri and a baatezu were to encounter one another, a battle that would devastate vast areas would ensue; chaotic and lawful fiends have been battling each other since the beginning of time.

be oriented toward improving the defensive and manipulative powers of the creature, rather than its combat abilities. While lawful fiends are less powerful in combat than chaotic fiends, they rely on their other strengths to preserve them.

Regeneration: This fearsome ability adds to the power and resilience of some demons. It has been observed that certain demons have the capacity to heal at an extremely rapid rate. Their tissue knits and repairs the effects of wounds before the very eyes of their foes. Some lawful demons may heal in minutes from a wound that would impair a mortal for days.

Not all lawful fiends *regenerate* damage. Of the baatezu most commonly found in a RAVENLOFT setting, only gelugons and pit fiends *regenerate* rapidly.

Telepathy: This fearsome power allows the demon to communicate with any human by insinuating itself into the mortal mind, and perhaps even the mortal soul. The horror of this power must be obvious to any who contemplate the touch of that alien, evil mind upon their own.

Certain written accounts provide examples of this power. Consider the account of Sir Ironhand, in which the demon whom he and his comrades battled in Ehrendton spoke directly to his mind. In addition, there are passages in Ashlan of Il Aluk's reports regarding the Whistling Fiend which bear study. Recall that Clem Nimbletoe mentioned he often thought he heard the habitual whistling of the demon.

It is possible that he was merely expressing his mind's attempt to remain whole in the wake of his gruesome encounter. However, it is likely that the demon remained in the area for a time. Given the nature of the Whistling Fiend, it probably lurked patiently, seeking a chance to revenge itself by quietly destroying the mortal whom had driven it away. In the meantime, the demon sent its thoughts to monitor the man. Its signature whistling served as a constant reminder to keep its prey on edge and awaiting disaster. This theory cannot be confirmed, since no records of the death of this Clem Nimbletoe can be found. However, it is also certain that the Whistling Fiend lives on, for it is seen again over a century later on the other side of Darkon.

It has been my experience that chaotic demons either do not have this power or choose not to use it. They communicate verbally, often speaking in the language of those to whom they address. In all of our research, our "expert" study, and tracking, and our confrontation with Drigor (a blackhearted, vicious creature if ever there was one), not once did we discover any record or encounter in which the demon spoke telepathically.

Dr. Van Richten has correctly identified telepathic communication as a power of the fiend, but is mistaken in saying that it is a power of only lawful fiends. All baatezu, tanar'ri, and yugoloths have the power of *telepathy*. Dr. Van Richten was misled by the fact that Drigor, his model for all chaotic fiends, is a shator. The gehreleth are, in fact, the only fiends who do not have *telepathy*.

Guile and Manipulation: Recorded encounters and information show that lawful demons exhibit more tendencies toward manipulation and guile, whereas their chaotic counterparts tend toward more direct methods. To a certain extent, *this is no doubt caused by the different ethos orientations of the demons.* The tendencies of the lawful demon to plan, organize, and create complex schemes and support structures allow for more long-term planning and for delicate manipulation behind the scenes. To a certain extent, this orientation is simply a matter of predilection and discipline.

Powers of Chaotic Demons

There are also certain powers seemingly peculiar to chaotic demons. Their situation is in many ways a mirror image of that of their lawful brethren.

Dr. Van Richten is correct that the natural, spell-like abilities of lawful fiends focus more on *charm* and manipulation than those of their chaotic brethren. All baatezu have among their base powers *advanced illusion, charm person, know alignment, and suggestion.* Certain lawful fiends supplement these with their own additional abilities; for example, the erinyes, gelugons, and pit fiends can *polymorph self.* Further, lawful fiends gain the power to cast four levels of 1st- and 2nd- level spells from the Enchantment/Charm or Illusion/Phantasm schools per day in addition to their normal spell-like abilities. This is a gift from evil deities or other wicked powers, to encourage the fiends' natural inclination toward evil.

The neutral yugoloths have *alter self, charm person, and improved phantasmal force* as part of their basic set of abilities. However, most of the chaotic tanar'ri and their brethren, the gehreleth, have no powers of illusion or *charm.* Only powerful tanar'ri possess powers of illusion, with the succubus being foremost among these. Shator gehreleths do have the ability to *beguile* their opponents.

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The powers associated with chaotic demons are primarily physical in nature. These special abilities are more suited for direct combat than for subtle manipulation.

Physical Immunities: It seems that these chaotic demons, more inclined to engage in combat pell-mell, are slightly better adapted for that task by nature than their more lawful brethren. One trait that is more developed in chaotic demons is immunity to various forms of natural and magical attacks.

While we have discussed the resistance of all demons to fire and cold, it seems chaotic demons are also immune to electricity and acid.

In addition to having surveyed several written accounts, I have personally witnessed the invulnerability of the chaotic demon to attacks of acid and electricity. Beakers of acid and bolts of lightning washed over Drigor with as little effect as the fire potion I mentioned in an earlier passage. My frustration and horror only grew as the battle continued and, tragically, so little that we did seemed to affect our foe. Drigor never had any reason to fear us.

However, one of the most chaotic demons that walks our land, the creature known as the Whistling Fiend, is not immune to acid. During a violent foray into Falkovnia's Lekar, the Whistling Fiend was severely injured when it accidentally splashed acid on itself. This serves to further underscore the variety in demons.

The chaotic tanar'ri are immune to the effects of electrical attacks, while other fiends are not. Drigor's magic resistance preserved him from the lightning bolt. Gehreleths and yugoloths are immune to acid, while tanar'ri and baatezu suffer full damage. Further, certain powerful fiends have additional resistances. The shator, for example, is immune to all nonmagical attack forms.

The *MONSTROUS MANUAL* contains an extensive treatment of the powers of fiends under the baatezu and tanar'ri entries. A full listing of the spell-like abilities of all fiends can be found in the *PLANESCAPE MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix*. Generally the chaotic fiends have a far broader and more diverse selection of these powers to choose from. While some baatezu are very powerful, tanar'ri and yugoloths on the whole, are magically far stronger. Gehreleths, by comparison, have relatively few spell-like abilities to choose from.

All chaotic fiends in a RAVENLOFT setting may cast four levels of 1st and 2nd level Invocation/Evocation spells per day, in addition to their normal spell-like abilities. (This can be four 1st-level spells, two 2nd-level, or one 2nd- and two 1st-level.) The unique nature of the campaign boosts their power in the same manner that it aids lawful fiends.

Enhanced Magical Powers: As indicated in the general section on spell-like powers, above, the magical powers of the demon are dazzling in their diversity. However, accounts indicate that the chaotic demon enjoys an advantage in magical power similar to that which they hold in physical immunities. While the varied nature of these powers, and the difficulties in identifying them precludes precision, the chaotic demons clearly have greater magical powers at their disposal.

The available evidence suggests that they have a far wider variety of offensive and defensive spell-like abilities to choose from. Spells of mass destruction, such as lightning bolt and fireball, are particularly lethal when the demon starts his attack with some mood-altering power that puts his foes off guard. Although "less organized" than the lawful demon, the chaotic demon is still a cunning and deadly adversary.

"I have ... the blurred impression of a huge, whitish, hairless and semi-quadruped body, of canine teeth in a half-human face, and long hyena nails at the end of forelimbs that were both arms and legs. A charnel stench preceded the apparition, like a breath from the den of some carrion-eating animal; and then, with a single nightmare leap, the thing was upon us."

—Clark Ashton Smith
"The Nameless Offspring"

CHAPTER THREE: DEMONS AND OUR WORLD



any theories of the origin of demons postulate a magic or psychic connection between our world and the demons. Such a link is certainly plausible given the tremendous power of demons, and the manner in which beings of great power or evil seem to flourish in the shadow of our world's evil. Evidence shows that demons, under certain circumstances, may draw power from the magical properties of the land itself. In this chapter, we examine the effects demons have on the physical reality of our world, and what effects the physical reality has on the demons.

The Great Ones have power over the land as well. The rocks and earth move in response to their will. The trees and grass see their needs and seek to please them. When a Great One deigns to visit this land, he makes it his own. He may pass through the lands at will, none may stop him, and none may stand against him in its confines. The Great Ones force their will on the land, and it serves them.

—The *Madrigorian*
Book IV, Chapter II

Reality Wrinkles

Demons warp the very environs that surround them from the moment they arrive in our realms. This may well be

the demons' most horrible and awesome power. With evil power and force of will, the demon dominates the region around it in what I term a *reality wrinkle*.

The reality wrinkle centers on the demon, as nature's whirlwinds ever center on pockets of deadly calm. They travel with the demon, and seem to set it apart from our world, as if the monstrosity holds to its alien nature even while it walks our land. The demon's reality wrinkle separates it from our world and gives it special powers and freedoms.

Several sources confirm the existence of these "wrinkles." First, Dr. Farringer and I directly observed one when we first approached Drigor. Written accounts also record their existence, including the overblown excerpt from the *Madrigorian* cited earlier.

Causes of Reality Wrinkles

Despite the best efforts of myself and other scholars, the cause of reality wrinkles remains shrouded in uncertainty. These areas certainly may result from the reaction between the alien presence of the demon and our land. Yet it is equally possible that the demon itself creates a pocket domain by some direct act of will. The following three theories are the most widely accepted hypotheses concerning the cause of these bizarre twists in the very fabric of our reality.

The Power of Evil

Perhaps the most widely held theory concerning reality wrinkles is that they are formed when the demon first enters our lands. According to this theory, the magical and psychic energies of the demon are so powerful that they ever

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strive to impose themselves on the mystic and psychic template of our land or the power of the evil gods. In the same way that the force of one powerful magnet might repel another, the intensely evil presence of the demon reacts against the land. Although every creature, from the smallest babe to the most powerful wizard, seeks to impose its will on reality, few succeed. However, the demon is so powerful that it does succeed in its quest, twisting and shifting the land around it. This is not to say that this "quest" is necessarily any more conscious than our bodies' "quest" to displace water when we dive into a pool. The demon's psychic presence may merely be so powerful that it displaces our world's psyche as easily as our bodies displace bathwater.

This theory seems equally valid whether the demon arrives in our realms from some unknown place, or simply springs into existence.

Residual Energies

Another theory holds that reality wrinkles result from the magical energies of the demon, not its evil nature. According to this theory, demons arrive in our realms from some other world, a magical realm, and their innate magical nature shapes the land around them to provide the demon with a livable environment.

The residual energies from the demon's passage to our world create an aura or field around the creature in the same manner as a strong electrical current can create a field of electricity. The energy field clinging to the demon then reacts to the energies of our land, causing perceptible "wrinkles" in our reality.

Magical Abilities

The final theory I shall address postulates that demons consciously create reality wrinkles by employing some magical spell or power. The demon's powerful magic, no matter what its origin, allows the demon to impose its will on the land around it. No spells or magical powers currently known could explain this ability. Yet the

The first theory set forth above is correct. Within the Demiplane of Dread campaign, the fiend's evil nature reacts with the Mists and creates what is essentially a mobile pocket domain in which the fiend is the local domain lord, able to cross into any other domain lord's domain. In other AD&D worlds, the fiend's control of reality subverts the local magical control of native beings as powerful as demigods (such as the demigod-emperor Iuz in the GREYHAWK campaign, or the mighty *awnsheghli* lords of the BIRTHRIGHT campaign).

power of the demon is great, and it would be foolhardy to entirely ignore this possibility.

December 11th

This evening was the most disturbing, yet most revealing. Approaching the grounds of the Madrigore estate, I began to feel a "wrongness" about my surroundings. I almost dismissed this as the imaginings of an old man, yet Dr. Farringer made a comment indicating she was similarly affected. What we felt is difficult to put into words. We perceived the world around us through a slight haze or shimmer, as if we were in the midst of a desert heat wave. Further, distances seemed slightly distorted and as though they changed from moment to moment. This effect was so faint it may have been psychic or psychological rather than physical, but it was very real.

The dinner itself was quite proper. Our young hostess questioned us in great detail concerning our forthcoming "history" and our reasons for selecting Edrigan. Surprisingly, she made comments indicating that she was familiar with my body of work and my career. Indeed, she discoursed comfortably on creatures such as vampires and werewolves.

Despite the sumptuous food and the pleasant conversation, my sense of unease grew throughout the evening. Careful observation of Bethany Madrigore

revealed signs that she may not have been in control of her faculties. She touched not a drop of her wine, yet she had slightly flushed cheeks, and her eyes were a bit unfocused. She would stare out into the room, at no one, even while carrying on an animated conversation. Her speech and movements were hesitant, as if her mind and body were not completely at one.

—From the private journal of
Dr. Van Richten

Size of Reality Wrinkles

As each demon is unique, so too is its reality wrinkle. Reality wrinkles vary greatly in their dimensions from demon to demon. The size of the wrinkles apparently ranges from the few yards around the Whistling Fiend to the roughly 3 square miles of Drigor's reality wrinkle.

Although reality wrinkles are normally a constant presence around the demon and stable in their size, a demon's reality wrinkle can sometimes change. While this might indicate that the distortions are indeed generated by residual energies that diminish as time progresses, the little evidence we have access to indicates that a change in the

The power of a fiend determines the size of its reality wrinkle. The range of each major fiend's domain varies from 1 mile (for lesser fiends) to approximately 4 miles (for true fiends of great power). This effect has no impact on a character's combat ability, but the distortion effect is unsettling, and the larger areas cause a -2 penalty to any morale checks.

The Dungeon Master should set an appropriate range for the reality wrinkle of any fiend in his campaign within these limits. In general, powerful fiends, such as pit fiends, create large reality wrinkles, while lesser fiends produce much smaller distortions. An imp or quasit might have a reality wrinkle of only a few tens of feet.

wrinkle is tied to changes in the demon's powers or relationship with the land. Such changes seem to occur only when a demon actively seeks to anchor itself more firmly in our reality through magical rituals discussed below.

Control of Reality Wrinkles

Both my own experiences and the written account set forth below, indicate that demons have some control over their reality wrinkle, they and are able to mold and shape the very land and buildings around them in whatever fashion they desire. If this power is real, it is possessed by no other inhabitant of our world that I know of. The following passage from *The Beast of Ehrendton* illustrates this ability. This section of the story occurs just before the climactic battle that reveals the identity of the demon.

I spoke then, declaiming his foul misdeeds, the way he and his lackeys brutalized the populace, robbed traveling merchants, destroyed the surrounding towns and farms, and left the people destitute and begging by the roadsides.

When I finished, the Black Duke demanded to know who I was to speak to him thus, and if I planned to act on my bold words. I proudly announced my family name, and told him that my comrades and I were here to challenge him in the name of justice. He smiled sardonically, and beckoned us forward as he leaned back in his huge chair.

As I walked across the length of the grand hall, I noted something very strange. It seemed as if my perceptions were faulty, or fading in and out with wine, though I had not consumed a drop of alcohol. As I walked toward him, the Black Duke got farther away. He actually dwindled in the distance, and I stopped, confused. Suddenly, the Black Duke shot closer, returning to his original position in the hall! I looked to my comrades, and saw from the confusion on their faces that they too had seen this incredible event. Then our

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host laughed again, and suddenly seemed to shoot forward until he was within ten feet of us. He faded back and forth for quite some time, apparently enjoying toying with us. When he finally ceased his movement, the Black Duke stood again where we first encountered him.

"Come," he said. "I tire of your presence here. Issue your challenge, so that I may be rid of it—and of you!"

—Sir Armand Ironhand
The Beast of Ehrendton

This account is the only record of a demon manipulating the size, shape and distances of the land under the feet of its foes. Some combination of powerful magical abilities may well account for the effect described. Yet, given the extraordinary powers of all demons, it would be a serious error to assume anything less than the worst. When you confront a demon, reality itself may work against you!

The land inside a fiend's reality wrinkle does not change with the fiend's arrival. In the Demiplane of Dread campaign, magical control over it merely passes from the domain lord to the fiend. This immediately alerts the domain lord to the presence of a powerful force in the local realm. A fiend cannot seal the borders of its own pocket domain. Anyone who wishes to enter a reality wrinkle and approach the fiend is free to do so.

Freedom of Movement

Demons travel freely throughout our world. While this ability is not surprising, given the tremendous power of the demon, it almost assuredly stems directly from the reality wrinkle. The energy of the reality wrinkle insulates the demon, protecting it from all strange magical conditions that occasionally are observed on our world.

An example of such freedom of movement is found in the *Madrigorian*.

A fiend is able to pass freely through magical borders and barriers in a RAVENLOFT setting, even those maintained by powerful magical beings. The borders of the fiend's pocket domain are continually open. When the open border of such a pocket domain meets the closed border of one of the normal domains, the power of the pocket domain supersedes the more diffuse power of this realm. Thus, no higher being can bar a fiend's passage through a "closed" domain.

In an autobiographical passage, the demon Drigor describes its efforts to research and construct a strange device, a ship which was in part mechanical and in part magical. This device would allow him to pierce the barrier around some place called the Astral Plane, thereby escaping from our world.

This project involves an astounding effort of mundane and magical design, engineering and construction. Never have I heard of any effort remotely like this one. This odd project stands as a testament to the scope of Drigor's imagination and creativity, but its continued presence is testimony to the unfortunate failure of its efforts. How much grief would have been spared our world if only it had succeeded?

This magical device is important to this tome only because Drigor records its efforts in great detail, and thus records his ability to travel throughout the world, even to areas surrounded totally by supernatural barriers. Yet, it makes only passing reference to the Vistani. They did not guide Drigor's party on his expedition using their special powers of travel, which I shall detail at a later time.

The demon tells this story very simply, with no apparent effort to dissemble. Drigor did not appear to realize that this type of travel is in any way out of the ordinary.

Another valuable source for information on the ease with which demons travel in our land is a chronicle

sent to me by an adventuring mage named Zartin the Red. The text sheds light on many demonic topics while telling the tale of an intrigue between Count Strahd von Zarovich, the ruler of Barovia, and a demon with the head of a jackal.

Opacity of Reality Wrinkles

Reality wrinkles also seem to protect the demon from prying eyes, rendering the creature and the area within its pocket domain immune to scrying or other magical observation.

The following account of the jackal-headed demon known as Inajira comes from Zartin the Red, a powerful mage from my homeland, who is a veteran warrior against evil in all its guises. His latest adventure involved a remarkable series of encounters with the vampire Strahd and a demon known as Inajira (who apparently has an enmity with Strahd that began some time ago). From Zartin's account, it is clear that the reality wrinkle creates an area that is secured against magical observation.

The creature laughed a high, barking laugh, his muzzle upturned in a sneer, as he vanished.

"My lord," I murmured nervously, "the creature must be watched. He cannot be trusted to remain apart from us in this quest." My companions muttered agreement. While we were no friends of Strahd, none of us trusted this creature.

Strahd whirled toward me, restraining himself with an obvious effort of will, and snapped, "We cannot! You should know that as well as I! We cannot see his kind magically, and with his ability to teleport, he could be anywhere."

—Zartin the Red

Autobiography of a Wandering Mage

Personal experience confirms this abbreviated statement by Strahd. While my companions searched for

Drigor in preparation for the coming battle, our mage, Annelyn, made repeated efforts to locate the demon by magical means, to spy on its habits and environs. Yet each effort to make magical contact with the demon proved unsuccessful. This inability adds to the evidence that demons are undetectable by magical means.

Dr. Van Richten is partially correct in his observations. The reality wrinkle of the fiend does create an area that is impenetrable to the scrutiny of a domain lord. The evil of the fiend disrupts the connection between the domain lord and the domain, and it is this connection that grants the domain lord the ability to magically survey the domain.

Dr. Van Richten is incorrect, however, in surmising that fiends are immune to all scrying. Drigor is immune to scrying because he possesses an amulet of proof against detection and location.

Unwilling Entrapment

Demons on our world are frustrated and furious creatures. Despite their horrible powers and control over the land, the arrogant creatures find themselves forever pursuing an apparently unattainable goal: escape. Many accounts show that although most demons desperately desire to return whence they came, they apparently cannot do so.

The arrogant demon struggles to impose its will in this matter as in all else, and its failure infuriates the monstrosity, filling it with agonies of need. Reality wrinkles demonstrate the demon's power over the land.

Yet, every gift carries a price. Demons are trapped on our world. It is possible that the evil which flourishes in the shadows and crevices of our realm is attracted to the demon, as like attracts like so often in nature. This compelling evil may hold the demon here in the land just as strongly as other

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aspects of the land reject the demon's presence. Thus, although the demon always exists on a level somewhat divorced from mundane reality, so too is it unable to move away from our land. The demon is trapped, suspended between two poles of existence—unable to fully assimilate, yet also unable to escape.

If this theory is correct, it is the height of irony that those demons that so often tempt and trap mere mortals are themselves trapped in return! The frustration, rage, and horror of demons resonate in the words of the demon Inajira, as recorded by Zartin the Red.

Our cause appeared truly desperate as we sought to flee. The vampire lord fell on my comrades, thanking us for providing him with such capable assistance in retrieving the arcane artifact.

"I like you, Zartin," he said, swiftly slashing the life from Larkin the Strong. "Perhaps I will let you stand by my side through the ages. You can have either death or eternal life as my trusted servant, but you will not leave this ruin with the knowledge you gained unless you are a changed man."

All appeared lost until, suddenly, the jackal-headed creature appeared in the air between us. "I hope I am not interrupting anything," it said, unleashing a bolt of magical energy. The seething ray struck the vampire squarely on the chest, sending him reeling backward. The artifact was wrenched from his grasp and darted to the creature's outstretched, clawed hand. He looked at it quizzically, as he unleashed another blast of magical energy at the vampire with an almost casual gesture. "So, this was to be your escape, eh? I think not."

The creature muttered a quick incantation, and the artifact that we had quested so long and hard for turned to dust before my eyes. Strahd howled in fury. The creature bellowed back: "You know the price, vampire! For as long as I am trapped in this odious

shadow-world, you'll be denied happiness and release! We shall suffer together!"

With that, the creature and Strahd lunged at each other. The resulting din and clash of magic sounded as if a thousand battles in a thousand desperate wars raged all around us at once. Over it all, I heard the creature's harsh voice, "Flee, mortal fool, or join your companions in death!"

—Zartin the Red
Autobiography of a Wandering Mage

This passage indicates that the demon Inajira is a bitter exile in our land, desperate to return home. A careful reading of the *Madrigorian* leads to the same conclusion regarding Drigor. The seemingly mad researches Drigor has sponsored over the course of its time in our world reveal the truth. From its scheme to build a magical vessel to a number of other magical research efforts over the years, the primary goal of Drigor has been, and still is, to escape our world. This impotence is perhaps the only thing that strikes horror in the cold hearts of demons.

The Gaining of Power

Horrifying as the prospect may be, demons are able to gain new powers from the land to supplement their already considerable abilities. It seems that at specific times and places, when magical forces are aligned properly, demons may draw on the power inherent in the land to enhance their own abilities and obtain new and terrible powers.

While, as a man I am dismayed at this possibility, as a scholar of the supernatural I welcome it. This final ability of the demon knits together a comprehensive theory of how demons exist and function in our land.

Demons are apparently able to tap into the magic in our land and draw on its power, yet by so doing they pay a terrible price. When they draw power

from one of our world's domains, they tie themselves ever more closely to our world, gradually smoothing the reality wrinkle that occurs around them, causing it to "shrink." Eventually, each demon becomes as much a part of our world as you or I, through a process to which I have eyewitness testimony from an unexpected, though unimpeachable, source.

In the midst of my initial investigations of demons, I received a package. Both the source of the package and its arrival at all surprised me greatly, for I had made every effort to keep my researches completely secret. Nonetheless, an ally presented himself from most unusual quarters.

In the afternoon of a very dreary day, a messenger arrived at my home in a well-appointed coach-and-four. That individual courteously delivered a slender package and departed, leaving me to blanch in wonder, and no small amount of fear, at the seal on the envelope. The contents of the package were covered by a letter from Lord Azalin of Darkon!

*To Our Most Learned, Loyal Subject,
Dr. Rudolph Van Richten:*

Greetings! We write to you today on a matter of mutual interest concerning the safety and preservation of the good people of Darkon, and those throughout our world. Your valiant efforts to study and battle the forces of Darkness in our realm have not gone unnoticed. Indeed, we share a professional interest with you in the supernatural, and certain of your prior works have been most entertaining and informative.

It has come to our attention that you are currently engaged in researching the existence and nature of creatures which you term "demons." The enclosed excerpts from the work of a distinguished scholar and expert on all matters supernatural have recently come into our possession, and it is our fervent hope that the information contained herein will prove helpful to you.

We anxiously await the results of your research.

*Yours in Service to Darkon,
Azalin Rex*

I was shocked and amazed at this letter, for I have no relations with the wizard-king who rules my homeland (a wizard that I fear is an undead being, as I note in an earlier work, the *Guide to the Lich*, and whom I thought bore me no good will for my earlier works). Yet it is not surprising that any ruler would wish to contribute to an effort to rid the land of demons, particularly Lord Azalin, who must be concerned over the possibility of the Whistling Fiend resuming its havoc in Darkon. On further examining the packet I was again shocked, this time by the contents and author of the work. The package which Lord Azalin had delivered contained original journal entries recording personal observations of a demonic ritual. This ritual drew power to the demon directly from the land. The entries were penned by none other than Count Strahd von Zarovich!

It is clear from Strahd's journal that the creature he encountered was none other than the Whistling Fiend. Though an unwilling witness to the creature enacting a dark ritual, Strahd made very perceptive and informative observations on the process and its results. This account seems to illustrate the means by which demons draw energy and powers from the land itself. The text also sheds light on how one demon uses such stolen energy to further enhance its own, already extraordinary, powers.

January 16th

Yesterday, shortly after sunset, I felt a small area of blackness enter my awareness. Never in all my years of watching over the people of Barovia had I felt such a sensation. Therefore, while I moved to investigate, I did so with caution.

I arrived near the area, on the slope of a craggy peak high in the Balinok

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range. Proceeding with absolute silence, I heard what appeared to be a soft whistling. When I drew nearer, I saw a peculiar, skeletal creature of some seven feet in height, with dark, leathery skin, long claws, and a large horn protruding from the rear of its skull. The creature was engaged in some bizarre ritual, one which even I had never before seen. I moved silently closer to observe the arcane rite, as well as to await the best moment to attack.

I sensed the beast was nearing the end of the ritual, which involved a hideous concoction of loathsome substances placed inside a magic circle, so I decided to attack. However, I was suddenly paralyzed both physically and mentally, as if held by a giant hand. Magical energies began to crackle in the night, flowing from the ground and the circle into the beast. As it arched its back and screamed in triumph, I felt a sharp pain, and a terrible weakness—a sense of great loss as my power and connection to the Land dimmed perceptibly. I have not felt spiritual torment of such magnitude since I lost my beloved Tatyana all those many years ago.

A billowing fog erupted around the creature then, thick and swirling. Only a few yards in diameter, and moving with the beast, this fog was no natural event! Sweeping one arm through the tendrils of swirling mist, the creature smiled with apparent satisfaction. Whistling once again, it turned on one heel and headed off, the fog trailing after it like some bizarre cape.

The paralysis eventually passed, but I am left with a nagging sense of lethargy. This has not kept me from noting other changes in the creature, things not present when first I laid eyes on it. First, of course, the creature seemed to have gained in power. The aura of magic around the beast was noticeably stronger than before it completed its rite. Despite this manifest increase in its power, I could feel that the area of my realm usurped by the beast had shrunken noticeably, perhaps by as much as half its original size. The

area was now no larger than two or three arm spans across. I know not the meaning of these changes, but now that I know of this creature's existence, I shall soon learn its secrets. This beast may not find our next encounter quite so satisfying.

—From the private journal of
Strahd von Zarovich

Strahd's encounter with the Whistling Fiend illustrates a number of important points. From this account it seems clear that the Whistling Fiend drew power directly from the land of Barovia itself, and in doing so somehow diminished Lord Strahd's "connection" to his domain.

What this "connection" that Strahd mentions might be, I can only guess. While it is a completely separate issue from the demons, it bears further examination. Perhaps there is some power of the elder vampires that I have yet to discover. Or, and this is the more unpleasant of the possibilities, but most likely to be the true one, as further details of the Whistling Fiend's wanderings hint at, perhaps Strahd himself has been draining life and power from the land he rules through fell magic. And Strahd may not be the only one engaging in such activities. Through my review of the information on demons, I have uncovered some rather unpleasant similarities between some of the most renowned sorcerers in the realms of the land. More on this later.

It also seems apparent that the demon accomplished this task through the use of foul ritual magic. Strahd is a wizard of great power, with an unnaturally long life span, yet he had never seen or heard of this ritual. It is, therefore, most likely that this rite is not a standard one, but either one natural to all demons or a rite this demon created from whole cloth (if so, it indicates immense wizard skills).

Finally, the unnatural fog which erupted around the creature certainly appears an effect of the ritual, if not its entire purpose. The demon's expression of satisfaction certainly indicates that the fog was no mere side effect of its rite.

Land-based Powers

Strahd's observations seem to make it clear that demons can draw new powers from the natural magic in the land or from supernatural energy sources connected to our world. The true effects of the ritual and the precise nature of these powers remain less clear.

In the passage from Strahd's journal, we see that after the conclusion of the ritual a most peculiar fog leapt up around the demon. This fog moved with the demon, swirling within its reach while the demon gazed on with pleasure. In its movements, the fog centered on the demon just as its reality wrinkle does.

Further, there is evidence to suggest that the Whistling Fiend may have gained other powers by drawing on the energies of other realms. A letter from the collection of the Aspasian family, an aristocratic line centered near Il Aluk, describes this power—a hideous ability which allows the demon to slay plant life merely by passing by it. (It should be noted that we have no evidence that the demon possessed such a power when it was sighted in Creena decades earlier.) The good monk Hubert of Atalan first noticed this missive while cataloguing the family archives and, as he is aware of my interest in all manner of supernatural creatures, alerted me to its contents.

The letter was written centuries past by one Alyn Dragant, a young cousin of the Baron Aspasian. In the letter, the young man describes encountering a beast in the deep forest. From his physical description of the demon and remarks he makes on its uncanny whistling, it seems fair to assume that the creature in question is, indeed, the Whistling Fiend. As his party watched from a distance, they noted the demon's remarkable and horrifying effect on the land around it.

The creature left a trail of devastation behind it as it passed, leaves curling and dying, grass smoking under its feet. All plant life left in its wake seemed suddenly to sicken and die, and all that



it touched was left a smoldering ruin. And so we let the thing pass, daring not to disturb its awful tread. Yet I resolved that we would at least learn the origin of this creature, that we might come to understand what we had seen. With that, we determined to follow the creature's path backward to learn whence it came.

From the private letters of
Alyn Dragant

Young Dragant and his men found the swath of destruction an easy trail to follow, tracking the demon's path through several lands to the borders of Invidia. From there they could go no further, although Dragant's letter offers no explanation as to why.

Intriguing though it is, this account alone tells but little, providing no proof of the origin of this previously unobserved power. Yet, another letter found in the collection of papers Aimon Davidovich left me may hold the key to the mystery.

The contents of this account at first appear unconnected to the events in young Dragant's letter. The missive below recounts a gala affair in the realm of Invidia, hosted by the outcast Vistani sorceress Gabrielle Aderre. The letter was penned only a few days before Dragant's encounter with the Whistling Fiend. In light of the information from Strahd's journal, it tells a most disturbing tale.

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The food was wonderful and the dancing divine, but her ladyship seemed to take no pleasure that night. The storm raged outside as if it sought to batter the castle to its foundations.

The Lady Gabrielle seemed pensive most of the evening, oft lingering near the windows or balcony, looking out into the stormy night with furrowed brow. I wondered somewhat at this, but knowing Gabrielle you should not be surprised that I dared not question her. As the storm reached its height, dear sister, so did the evening's excitement!

Of a sudden, the Lady gave a cry and collapsed to the floor. Though she had given no prior sign of illness, she was shaking and still, unable to move for long minutes. As her minions attended her pallor faded but little, and even with their help she was slow to rise from the cold flagstones. Although she insisted that she was well, she soon retired for the evening.

The shellfish that evening were blamed for her collapse, and the cook executed. Still, no others suffered ill effects, and I doubt that the food caused the malady. It will no doubt be the talk of the salons for weeks, my dear. Perhaps our good Lady has taken Lord Darrian closer into her "confidences" than any of us has guessed!

—From the letters of
Lady Kristia Llewyllen

The described symptoms of the Madame Gabrielle that evening match perfectly Strahd's account of the effects of the Whistling Fiend's power ritual. When we examine Madame Gabrielle's symptoms, and her distraction that night, in light of Strahd's experiences and the proximity of the Whistling Fiend, it seems possible that the creature conducted another such rite in Invidia. This conclusion seems sound, given Dragant's account of the demon's effusive use of a heretofore unnoted power mere days later.

It is most disturbing for me to consider this matter while I still struggle to comprehend the nature of demons, but I think I may be on the verge of unlocking the secret of the many mystical and bizarre phenomena that seem to occur along political borders in our world. While rumors abound that Madame Gabrielle is certainly unnaturally powerful so that even the land itself bends to her wishes, there never seemed to be any supernatural reason for this, other than the magic available to any powerful mage. Now, however, I fear that her power might arise from some far more exotic magic, perhaps the same magic that gave Strahd his "connection" with Barovia. Perhaps, just as the Whistling Fiend seems to have gained in strength by draining power from the land, certain mages native to our world have been performing power rituals of their own. Perhaps these rituals are what account for the strange behaviors along arbitrary, man-made boundaries?

It is impossible, of course, to draw a firm conclusion from such a small body of evidence, but I have resolved to someday turn an eye toward the rulers and powerful beings of our world. It seems likely that the particular psychic energies of each realm allow the demon access to differing powers, and perhaps even lend power to mortals as well. If this is true, it seems not unlikely that power-hungry demons might make a practice of conducting their foul rites in multiple realms, always searching out new and greater powers.

The Price of Power

If my theory of power rituals is accurate, then it is probably perfectly clear to all readers why a mortal should wish to siphon power from the land. However, demons are already powerful beyond imagining; why should they want more?

As mentioned, demons, regardless whatever else they may be, are on

quests to escape our land. For all his might and bravado, even Drigor is trapped in our world, forever longing to return to whatever foul realm birthed him. I have already discussed the reality wrinkles that surround the demons, and how, by reading Strahd's diary, these wrinkles become smaller with the performance of power rituals. It is as though the demon is becoming more closely tied to our world.

This, of course, paints a strange picture of the demon. Although constantly trying to escape, it nonetheless seems to be tying itself closer to its perceived prison.

My first thoughts on this leaned in the direction that becoming firmly entrenched in our reality was actually an avenue to the demon's escape: one must first be standing firmly on the top rung of a ladder before one can safely climb down. However, on rereading the *Madrigorian* in preparation for this volume and in an attempt to find additional weaknesses to exploit against Drigor, I found what I believe is the correct answer.

Though it seems difficult to believe, even the Great Ones face temptation. They too know the sweet lure of power—tantalizingly close, like ripe fruit there for the picking. Reveling in the fullness of their power, the Great Ones must beware of powers that even they do not understand. Oh, the delicious irony and great tragedy! Even they may act as do the mortal sheep, and so fall into a honey-coated trap that they themselves construct.

Whispers of powers unimagined, promises of glory and freedom, worm their way into the spirit and wear on even the stoutest resolve. Give in to the temptation, though, and you may lose your heart's desire! This land is sweet and seductive—here nothing is as it seems.

—The *Madrigorian*
Book IX, Chapter IV

This passage made me realize that just as I thought drawing power from the land might help a demon escape, so does the unwary demon.

The changes in the Whistling Fiend and Drigor's talk of a "trap" suggest the true price that demons pay for power drawn from the land. This information also provides a satisfactory explanation for the variation in size of the reality wrinkles surrounding demons.

As the demon draws power from our world, and takes that energy into itself, its energies are, as I surmised, less alien and less apart. But, as the energies of the demon move in harmony with the energies of our world, the demon becomes tied to the land and is unable to leave it. Rather than being the top rung of a ladder, then, our world becomes more akin to quicksand: all around the demon are diamonds of legendary size, but they are scattered upon a bottomless pit of mud.

This is the "honey-coated trap" of which Drigor speaks. Those demons that resist the lure of the power ritual create larger reality wrinkles and may still one day return whence they came. Demons that are tied to the land may lose their "heart's desire," their ability to return home.

The final irony is that demons are vulnerable to the same temptations that they offer to mortals. In this way, at least, they are not so different from humans. The difference is only in the scale of the power involved.

It is impossible to pity a demon, and the irony in their situation is, as even Drigor admits, sweet. Yet, one must avoid the temptation to celebrate the spiritual pain of the demon. Exultation at another's suffering is an unworthy emotion, motivated by the baser part of our human nature. We must ever avoid the temptation to nourish our dark side, no matter how tempting.

SECTION, THE FIRST:

The Power Ritual and Corruption

The ritual described here is what a fiend uses to draw new powers from the land. Each power ritual is unique, different from any other, and different for each fiend as well. The only consistent factor is the horrible evil of the rite. Any character observing such a ritual must make both fear and horror checks in the face of such open, malignant evil.

Should the Dungeon Master wish, he may design a suitably evocative power ritual for any fiend in his campaign. The only necessary limitations on the ritual are that it must occur in natural surroundings where the fiend is in direct contact with the land, and that it requires at least 6 full turns to perform. *The ritual must also be uninterrupted.* Any event during the ritual that breaks the fiend's concentration results in the ritual's failure.

Even a Demiplane of Dread domain lord cannot resist the fiend's power drain, except by actively disrupting the ritual. A successfully completed power

ritual draws energy from the domain where it is performed. This draining of energy is painful and temporarily disorienting to the local domain lord, causing incapacitation for 1d4+1 rounds. However, even minor domain lords are powerful enough that the draining effect of the power ritual has no further measurable effect.

It should be noted that Dr. Van Richten has misunderstood the source of Strahd and Madame Gabrielle's connection with the land, and he does not realize their full status as domain lords in the Demiplane of Dread campaign. They need not perform power rituals, as theirs is a permanent connection.

Each time a fiend successfully completes a power ritual and receives a land-based power, it becomes more connected to the RAVENLOFT world. The fiend succumbs to temptation by seizing power from the land. This is the corruption of a fiend, and it is measured as follows.

Fiend Corruption Index Table

Corruption Points	Chance of Failure*	Reality Wrinkle radius (ft.)**		
0	—%	21,120	10,560	5,280
1-2	10%	10,560	5,280	2,640
3-4	20%	5,280	2,640	1,320
5-6	30%	2,640	1,320	660
7-8	40%	1,320	660	330
9-10	50%	660	330	65
11-12	60%	330	165	80
13-14	70%	165	80	40
15-17	80%	80	40	20
18-21	90%	40	20	10
22+	100%	20	10	5

* Failure of the power ritual.

** Figures are for true, greater, and lesser fiends (left to right); 5,280 feet = 1 mile.

The corruption index measures a fiend's connection to the RAVENLOFT world. This is a new statistic for fiends in the campaign. A fiend's corruption index begins at zero when a fiend arrives in the land. Each time a fiend successfully performs a power ritual and gains a land-based

power, its corruption index rises by 1d4 points. The Dungeon Master may determine this score randomly, or can assign a number. There is no upper limit to a fiend's corruption score. The effects of the rising corruption index on the fiend are set forth below.

Shrinking reality wrinkles: As the fiend's corruption grows, its reality wrinkle (or pocket domain) shrinks. Each time the fiend successfully completes a power ritual, the diameter of the circular realm dominated by the fiend shrinks by half, as per the table.

Bound to the land: The second effect of the corruption is that the fiend may not be able to leave the campaign world even if it finds and activates a portal or magical item that would allow any other character to exit the region. The land-based powers of the fiend may bind it to the realms. The corruption of the fiend creates a chance that even a perfectly functioning portal or magical item will fail. In that event, the fiend is transported to the precise spot where it first entered the campaign setting. The Dungeon Master may determine the success or failure of a fiend's escape attempt according to the Fiend Corruption Index Table, or may simply decide if a fiend succeeds.

At the successful completion of the power ritual, the fiend receives a new power from the land (here called a *land-based power*). This type of power gained depends entirely on the sort of domain in which the ritual is performed, but all should add to the fear and horror that the heroes feel when facing a powerful creature with unknown abilities. The Dungeon Master should feel free to create unique land-based powers to fit the nature of the campaign. Examples of land-based powers could include the ability to generate certain spell or psionic effects, a poisonous touch, insanity, raging thirst, or disease.

A power ritual will fail should the fiend's concentration be broken, even for a moment, in the completion of the ritual. However, there is always a 10% chance that the fiend will make an error in this exacting ritual even when not interrupted.

If the power ritual fails, a dramatic backlash of magical energy engulfs the fiend. This backlash stuns the fiend for one round, causing it terrible pain, as well as more permanent injury. Every time a fiend fails to complete a power ritual, the Dungeon Master should select one of the following effects or roll 1d6 to determine the outcome.

1. The fiend suffers 6d10 points of damage and is terribly scarred by the magical energy. This damage may not be magically healed. However, 75% of the damage will heal with the passage of time. The final 25% of damage will never heal. For example, a fiend that suffers 40 points of damage from this backlash will eventually recover 30 hit points (75% of the damage). However, the remaining 10 points (25% of the damage) are gone forever.
2. The backlash cripples the magical powers of the fiend. The fiend permanently loses one spell-like ability (Dungeon Master's choice).
3. The backlash permanently impairs the fiend's ability to conceal its appearance. One of its limbs may no longer be *polymorphed* or concealed by *alter self* or *change self* spells.
4. The failure leaves residual energies in the body of the fiend, increasing its corruption index by two points.
5. The fiend is physically expelled from the domain where it was, forever barred from that specific area by the magic in the land or other forces. The fiend still remains in the RAVENLOFT world.
6. The fiend receives the effects of a failed madness check and a mental disorder from the madness table (Table 9) in Chapter Six of *Domains of Dread*.

SECTION, THE FIRST:

*And be these juggling fiends no more believ'd,
That palter with us in a double sense;
That keep the world of promise to our ear,
And break it to our hope.*

—William Shakespeare
Macbeth

CHAPTER FOUR: DEMONS AND THE PEOPLE



In this chapter we examine how demons interact with the inhabitants of our world. Demons are cunning and terrible foes, their goals often hidden within the murky, swirling depths of their schemes by varied measures of careful manipulation and brute force.

Demons delight in corrupting or terrifying mortals. They often conceal their true nature, using their powers of *charm* and illusion to move among the people in mortal guise. Exploiting the weakness in the human spirit, these demons combine deceit, guile, and compulsion to catch foolish mortals in traps of their own making.

A demon may corrupt mortals through pseudomystic cults, arcane bargains, and the usurpation of a human's body in a way more horrible than transfiguration.

Rivals for Power

The powerful and influential rulers of our domains regard demons as hated enemies. Flowing from their positions at society's forefront and the demons' drive for more power, this enmity is a direct consequence of the inevitable clash of their interests. Indeed, how could their relationship be otherwise?

The demon Drigor mentions the enmity between demons and the leaders of mortals in the *Madrigorian*. The passage below describes this rivalry, and hints at its causes.

It is ironic that those of power in our land, purporting to lead the people, often are the ones who most fervently resist the wisdom of the Great Ones. This shows that power and wisdom do not go hand in hand! These fools are so blinded by ambition that they cannot see the truth. They clutch anxiously to their power and prerogatives like children grasping their bed sheets to guard against the bogeyman!

Our so-called leaders lack true vision, shaking with impotent rage at the coming of the new order. Yet their shreds of power will not protect them! If they do not follow the will of the Great Ones, they will be crushed and fall by the wayside!

—The *Madrigorian*
Book V, Chapter XI

This passage obviously presents a self-serving picture of the relationship between lords and demons. Framing the conflict in terms of power, however, the demon represents the crux of the enmity between the two parties. Demons challenge the control of the lords over their lands, servants, and subjects, scorning the rulers' authority and power while pursuing their own ends. It is little wonder, then, that demons incite rage and hatred in the lords of the realms! Also, persons like Strahd and Madame Gabrielle Aderre of Invidia, who have somehow tied themselves to the land, must hate demons passionately.

Prey to Power

Demons seem to see the people of our realms as fodder for their own desires. The monstrosities apparently think of us as no more threatening than dogs or cattle, and important only for amusement or serving the demons' needs. Toying with mortals as cats toy with a mouse, demons play many different games with their mortal prey. These games appear sparked by one of two motivations: the desire to terrify, or the desire to corrupt.

The Desire to Terrify

Certain demons clearly desire to terrify, or terrorize, mortals. Deriving pleasure from their victims' fears, they perhaps even satisfy some inner need by their tactics of terror. While many demons cruelly enjoy the terror their horrible power inspires, demons whose primary desire it is to terrorize mortals differ greatly from the others.

Both Drigor and the Beast of Ehrennton use terror as a tactic in battle and cruelly enjoy its effect. However, they normally work subtly, lurking behind some front, as seen by Drigor's manipulation of the Madrigore family, and the Black Duke's bandit guise in Ehrennton.

The manifest powers of the Whistling Fiend, on the other hand, are vastly different. In contrast to its demonic brethren, this horrid creature seems primarily motivated to terrorize the people and destroy the land. Destroying the village of Creana and slaughtering its people, as recounted by Ashlan of Il Aluk, seems an act of random, malicious evil. The same is true in the report penned by Alyn Dragant, where the demon was boldly using its power to openly scar the land with no care for secrecy, subtlety, or guile. The Whistling Fiend behaves as if it enjoys attention, desiring only to terrify and destroy.

The Desire to Corrupt

The vast majority of demonic behavior, however, shows these creatures' love for

All fiends delight in cruelty and the suffering of their victims, but the tanar'ri provide special examples of these traits. The tanar'ri feed not only on the flesh of other beings, but on their life force as well. They apparently derive more nutrition from a victim if they terrify him before the kill. Therefore, they particularly desire to terrify their prey.

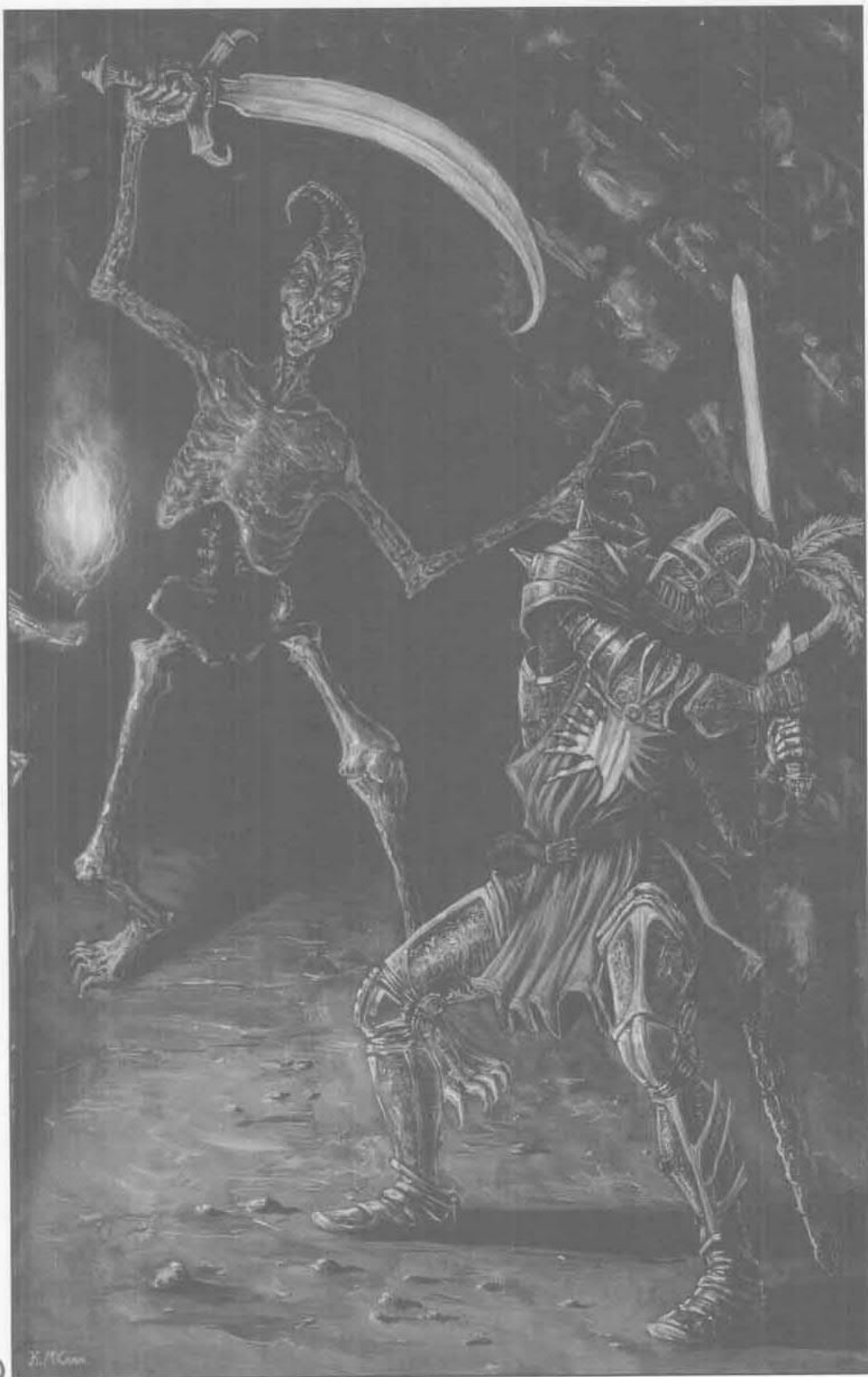
guile and deceit. Carefully manipulating mortals, tricking and trapping them with their powerful intellects and great charisma, these demons play a far more subtle game than the Whistling Fiend. Ever seeking to promote evil, they insinuate wickedness into the hearts and minds of the people, and nurture its growth. Corrupting the people of the realms, they slowly corrupt the entire society, and thus seek to lead mankind to its doom. The information below shows these monstrosities' foul desires, and discusses the major methods they use to trick and trap foolish mortals.

December 11th

After dinner, we took advantage of our host's hospitality to arrange a tour of the grounds. While this was largely uneventful, the library, in particular, proved to be most interesting. It was packed with books, far more than one finds in most country estates. A large writing desk was overflowing with manuscript pages. Our hostess laughed when asked about her writing projects, dismissing them as nothing more than poetry and flights of fancy—indulgences of a young girl. Yet she seemed ill at ease. She would not discuss the work of her ancestors, other than to say that the Madrigores were a "literary family." Dr. Farringer and I both noted an inhumanly large chair in one corner, half covered with an old quilt.

At the end of the evening, Dr. Farringer and I discussed the night's events. We concluded that the dinner invitation had clearly been given to investigate our presence and determine our motives.

SECTION, THE FIRST:



December 16th

Try as I may, I can find no other explanation. The thought of these foul creatures has tormented my every moment since our return from Edrigan. The sense of a malevolent presence—a brooding, ominous power lurking just outside the corner of my eye—has never left me since the visit to the Madrigore estate. Although my heart and soul rebel against my conclusions, the evidence is too strong. Dr. Farringer and I agree—demons exist, and one resides in Edrigan!

Now we must endeavor to learn all we can about the most horrible evil our land knows, so that we may root it out.

—From the private journal of
Dr. Van Richten

Cults

Although delighting in the individual “cat and mouse” game with each victim, demons also sometimes attempt to manipulate and corrupt large groups of mortals. One common technique of mass manipulation demons use is to organize and develop cults of mortal followers.

Consisting of misguided or evil individuals, these cults seem to slavishly follow the demon’s commands and turn on those who will not join their cause. The demon builds its own power base through these deluded fools, who have fallen prey to the lure of a promise of glory, riches, or power in the coming order. Taking advantage of the greed and evil in the human heart, the demon further corrupts its followers, who go on to spread its corruption like a plague. The rosy visions of great rewards never materialize for the cultists; those who follow a demon seem doomed to lose everything for a leader who cares nothing for them.

Developing and directing a cult requires considerable organization, discipline, and effort on the part of the demon. Therefore, it seems likely that only lawful demons will organize and command such groups. Nonetheless,

I see no reason why a chaotic demon might not fuel a cult as well.

Much of our information concerning demonic cults comes from the captured journal of a cult member who followed the Black Duke. In *The Beast of Ehrendton*, Sir Ironhand mentioned a band of disreputable bandits who served that demon. This rogue who wrote the journal, Lertan Scarhand, served as one of the creature’s lieutenants among the so-called “Brothers of the Whip.” Apparently named for the whip which the demon carries both in human form and its natural shape, the cult loyally served the demon by spreading suffering and evil through many regions of Nova Vaasa until its suppression. Captured with Scarhand after a failed raid on the community of Drataan, his journal details his history in the cult. Analyzing the contents shows three distinct stages in the recruitment of each cult member: the *lure*, the *oath*, and the *trap*.

Careful consideration of the pattern laid forth by Scarhand might help demon hunters in recognizing fiendish machinations.

The Lure

The first stage of the recruitment of a cult member is the lure—the tempting of a mortal into the demon’s service. Note that the demon keeps its true nature secret (at least at this stage) even from its prospective followers. Whether foolish or evil, or both, these mortals join the cult based on promises of great rewards (and perhaps some psychological need to belong to an “elite” group). The cunning demon no doubt tailors its recruiting message to fit the weaknesses of its audience. The following journal entry describes Scarhand’s decision to join the cult.

They call him the Black Duke, and he looks the part—a tower of a man decked out in black plate and chain. The Black Duke said he’s heard of me, and that one like me could go far once

SECTION, THE FIRST:

we take and hold what's rightfully ours!

I don't know about all this ruling Nova Vaasa stuff, but the Black Duke's a leader! When he talks about what'll be, a man gets a lump in his throat, a tear in his eye, and a fire in his belly. I'd follow him anywhere. Pays good too. We're joining his band. I hear there's a ceremony planned next week to "initiate" us!

—From the private journal of
Lertan Scarhand

This passage shows the demon tempting its mortal targets, using its charisma (and perhaps magical means) to paint a picture of a glorious future for those in its service. As shown below, however, life does not stay rosy for those who serve a demon. Scarhand realized this, even before he died under the headsman's axe.

The Oath

The second stage of a cultist's recruitment is the oath—the initiation ceremony at which the mortal swears his loyalty to the demon and the cult. Binding the mortal to the demon's service, this oath undoubtedly takes many forms, and the demon crafts it in part to impress the cultist and to cement his psychological commitment to serving the demon. Yet the oath Scarhand recounts in the passage below appears to involve a dark ritual of blood magic that magically binds the mortal to the demon.

Never have I seen anything like last night! It still has my brain buzzing, but I'll try to write it now before I forget. The initiation ceremony was held up at the Black Duke's castle in the mountains. I figured it would be some mumbled words and a quick handshake before the party started, but it went nothing like that at all.

First, the thing started in the dead of night, and the Great Hall had been

closed up all day. When they gave the signal to start, we found the Hall lit by what must have been a thousand candles. The shadows still pressed in close all around. Then I saw the writing—symbols and pictures covered the walls and the floor. I'd never seen the like except once on a scroll.

Standing in the center of it all, with a fire smoking in a pot in front of him, the Black Duke never said a word. He raised his arms, drawing us up in a circle. Once the doors were closed the smoke got thick, and the Black Duke commenced to sing in the strangest tongue I ever did hear. The whole thing had me spooked! I decided to make a break for the door, but couldn't get my legs to move.

The Black Duke called me out first, and took a knife out of the pot. He slashed his palm, then slashed mine, taking my hand in both of his as he brought me to my knees. Gods, his blood burned! It felt like his blood ate through my hand. The pain passed, and I stepped back into the ranks.

My whole body started to tingle, still does a little bit. I felt different when it was done, and I know I'm different now. With his power, nobody can stand before us! I picked a winner this time!

—From the private journal of
Lertan Scarhand

Clearly this passage depicts ritual magic, a foul blood ritual used to initiate the Brothers of the Whip. This ritual appears to have no known parallels, and likely is crafted by the demon itself. Based on the information below, it seems likely that the ritual magic of the oath creates a bond between the demon and its mortal pawns far beyond that of mere loyalty. The completion of the oath springs the trap shut on the unwary victims.

The Trap

Demons inevitably ensnare those foolish mortals who swear to serve them. After the oath, they draw the cultists further

under their evil influence, trapping them in a web of deceit and corruption. These cultists meet their doom used, trapped, and corrupted by the demon.

All the available evidence suggests that the demon despises and exploits its followers as it does any other mortal in the realms. Desiring to corrupt and destroy all mortals, the demon seems to delight in their protracted suffering. Therefore, the demon rewards them only enough to keep them loyal. In the end, no one profits from service to a demon.

The following excerpt from Scarhand's journal, written shortly before his capture and execution at Drataan, shows his dawning awareness

of the trap. It may also shed light on the means the demon uses to control its followers.

It's been a while since my last entry. We've been campaigning hard, and since the troubles began I haven't wanted anyone to know that I'm writing. The easy targets dried up a long time ago, and pickings are slim. I'll never complain, though—I saw what happened to Jess!

Three days ago, the Black Duke was mad at Jess, captain of the Second Company, about a failed raid on Drataan. He wanted to know what had gone wrong and who was to blame.

The Blood-oath Ritual

The blood-oath ritual is evil magic created by the fiend. This ritual is not a standard spell, but a ceremony taught on the home plane of the fiend. Creating a magical, mental link between the fiend and its mortal victim, the oath varies for each creature. Due to the evil and alien nature of the ritual, outsiders witnessing it must make a horror check.

The oath ceremony requires 24 hours to prepare, while the fiend meditates and readies the ceremony chamber. The ritual may be held at any location, so long as it is uninterrupted. Any interruption ruins the ceremony, and requires the fiend to begin preparations anew. The ritual lasts for 2 hours, plus an additional 10 minutes for each participant.

Resisting the oath: The magic of the ceremony transfixes its mortal participants. Anyone desiring to leave the ceremony once it has begun must make a saving throw vs. paralyzation at a -2 penalty. Such a departure interrupts the ceremony, with the effects discussed above.

A mortal who wishes to resist the bond with the fiend may attempt to do so when their blood mingles, with a saving throw vs. spell at a -4 penalty. Willing victims receive no saving throw.

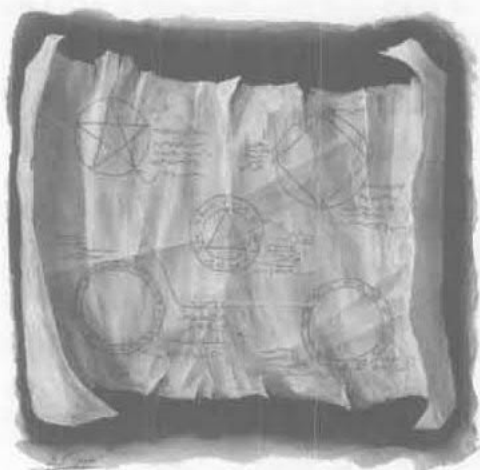
If the victim successfully resists the bond, the fiend will know that it did not form the link. This resistance, however, need not interrupt the ritual. Knowing this, fiends often allow the mortal to believe that they have escaped detection until after the ritual is completed.

Powers of the blood oath: The blood oath grants the fiend the ability to sense the location of any of its sworn servants anywhere within the RAVENLOFT world. The fiend receives no details concerning the location, but can track the follower unerringly.

The second power granted fiends is the ability to hurt or even kill mortals through this mental link. The fiend merely concentrates its tremendous will and evil power along the link. The fiend may use this power whenever it can see the target and is within 200 yards of its prey. When within range, the fiend may use this attack form at will.

If the fiend desires to merely hurt its victim, the mortal must roll a saving throw vs. paralyzation with a -4 to avoid the attack. If the saving throw fails, the victim suffers excruciating, debilitating pain for 10 rounds. If the fiend desires to kill its servant, the mortal must roll a saving throw vs. death magic at a -4 penalty. Success negates the attack; failure means a painful death.

SECTION, THE FIRST:



Jess got hot, and told him that he drove the men too hard, and that the raid was poorly planned. He was right, but none of us made a sound.

The Black Duke got real quiet, and stared at him like a snake watches a mouse. Then he sort of bobbed his head at Jess, who jumped like a scared rabbit. Jess started screaming, grabbing his head and rolling around on the floor. We just watched. Then he flopped stone dead, blood pouring from his ears, nose, and mouth. His body laid there for hours. Jess was a good mate of mine, and the Black Duke watched me close after that, but I kept a straight face.

I'll say this, no one deserts from this unit! A few have run, but the Black Duke personally leads the searches, and always finds them. It's amazing, the way he just looks into the sky and seems to know where to go. Baren had made it near fifty leagues, too, but that didn't matter. No one knows what he does with them. The Black Duke just says they'll be punished for breaking the oath. Sometimes we hear them scream for a while. No one complains, though I just learned that I'm leading the next raid on Drataan.

—From the private journal of
Lertan Scarhand

In this entry, Scarhand clearly sees that he is trapped in the service of the Black Duke and is apparently resigned

to his fate. His other observations of his master, suggesting certain powers of the demon, also merit close attention.

First, the demon is apparently able to track his fleeing cultists over long distances with no more than a thought, and seems likewise able to kill with the same amount of effort. While it is dangerous to speculate based on one case, since neither ability has been attributed to demons elsewhere, my theory is that these abilities come from a mental link between demon and cultists, established by the blood oath.

Possession

Many demons choose to manipulate mortals and tempt them toward evil not in large groups, but individually. Savoring the intimacy of the encounter, the joy of the seduction, these demons promote evil and corrupt society one victim at a time. Perhaps the most chilling results of a foolish mortal's dealings with demons are the cases where they steal the very bodies of their mortal prey.

A tragic letter came to my attention which seems to describe an example of a demon seizing, then discarding the bodies of mortals.

Good Taliesian,

I write seeking your aid because I have nowhere else to turn. I believe that I have found the cause of the strange disappearances which have plagued our city, yet I know not what to do!

My name is Levis Andreyev. I am a craftsman of porcelain dolls. For several years now, the beautiful Madame Elsa has come to me with orders for dolls to add to her wonderful collection. She keeps them displayed in the front hall of her home, surrounding a beautiful cut crystal stone. In addition to the outfits that I have crafted for them, each of the dolls wears a delicate dab of scarf, or some other bit of clothing.

I have never wondered at her demands, always producing the dolls to her exacting specifications of size and appearance. Yet, good sir, I have noted that the most recent doll I crafted for her, strongly resembled Madame Ivanov, who disappeared some two months after I created the doll!

You may say that this is nothing sir, mere coincidence, but the evidence grows. Last month she brought that very doll into my shop for repairs to its outfit, and she referred to the doll as "Irina"—the name of the vanished Madame Ivanov! Moreover, that doll, sir, appeared to me to have changed since I made it. Every craftsman knows his work, sir, and that doll seemed positively flushed and rosy, far more lifelike than I had rendered it. And the eyes—the eyes appeared to move and glisten with tears! I have invented pretexts to come to her home since then sir, consumed with fear by this matter. All of the dolls are flushed, sir, and all of them seem to glow from within!

I might still doubt, sir, save that I have received another doll order. The description of this doll, sir, the features and face, resembles none other than my daughter Liza, married last fall to the guardsman! The resemblance is complete in every detail. When ordering the doll, sir, I noted that she twined and untwined a small scarf in her right hand. This scarf appears to be one I purchased for Liza last holiday! This cannot be a coincidence, sir, and I will never finish this doll, but I need to know what to do! This woman is evil! We must rid our town of her!

Sincerely, Levis Andreyev

—From the City Archives of Levkarest

Both Dr. Farringer and I were greatly disturbed by this letter, and resolved to investigate. In particular, elements of the tale placed us in mind of the *magic jar* spell, used by powerful and evil mages to seize the bodies of unwary victims. Since we had received word from Darkon of more recent and possibly related events, and our presence there

was more pressing, an adventurer of our acquaintance, Astonby of the Oaks, agreed to investigate the matter for us while he was in Borca. His report has done nothing to calm our fears.

Astonby reports that he interviewed the Most Reverend Taliesian, now retired and in poor health. The venerable man remembers the letter, but swears that the dollmaker was deluded.

That letter seemed wild to me, but I determined to look into it. I went calling on the lady myself. My, but she did have a doll collection! No crime in that, though, and I found no evidence of any other crime.

Indeed, though I was prepared to be suspicious, Madame Elsa—I can still picture her beautiful face—put me quickly at ease. After I had determined that she could be trusted, I repeated to her at length the allegations of poor, sick Andreyev. I had feared that she would be upset, yet she merely laughed, and expressed concern for the poor man's health and mental state.

No, Andreyev was crazy as a loon!
—Most Reverend Taliesian of Levkarest
as recorded by Astonby of the Oaks

Astonby further reported that his inquiries revealed that Andreyev had vanished from his home nearly nine years ago. I fear that he did not live long after his suspicions became known! His daughter still remains in the city, but Madame Elsa had left for parts unknown.

There had indeed been a string of disappearances in that city, two or three women per year for several years. Although all of these cases remain unsolved, the guard suspected the husbands, who in each case disappeared within weeks of the loss of his wife. The guards were particularly intrigued by the fact that each of these men was seen with a beautiful young woman (of varying description) shortly after his wife disappeared.

Fiendish Possession

Fiends in the RAVENLOFT setting may possess the bodies of mortal victims, using an ability similar to the *magic jar* spell described in the *Player's Handbook*. The precise form of this spell-like power will vary a bit for each fiend. For example, while Elsepeth uses *porcelain dolls* as the receptacle for her victim's life force, other fiends would choose receptacles more suited to their natures.

The focus for the possession spell varies and may be a large gem, crystal, doll, carving, piece of jewelry, or other lasting item that the fiend must have specially crafted for this purpose. To form the proper link prospective victims, the fiend must trick them into providing some personal item for use during the spell.

After preparing the spell, the fiend shifts its spirit from its body into the focus, and awaits the arrival of the intended victim. A possession attempt may be made if a victim moves within range of the receptacle (10 feet per Hit Die of the fiend). The fiend may return its spirit to its body at any time, but this ends the spell. The possession attempt takes one round to complete. The victim must make a saving throw vs. spell with a -2 penalty.

Once the fiend has control of the target's body, it may use that body or dispose of it and reenter its own. While in the host body, it has full access to all of its spells and mental powers.

The life force of a victim of fiendish possession whose body dies is not automatically slain. Rather, its spirit is shifted into the awaiting fetish prepared specifically for the victim by the fiend.

Only a *wish* or *limited wish* spell will free the spirit of a victim from its special receptacle without the consent of the fiend. The fiend may reverse the process at any time.

Note that if the victim's body is dead, a *raise dead* or *resurrection* spell must be cast simultaneously, or the victim's life force will perish.

I feel these facts strongly suggest that this woman was a demon. Based on the name, description, and inquiries into a more recent, related case, there can be little doubt that "Elsa" was the Elsepeth who entered our world through Ammie Weaveron 12 years ago.

The circumstances of the dolls and the disappearances, combined with the details of the scarves and the crystal, lead to the conclusion that the foul creature was using an ability or spell to possess the bodies of her victims.

To the best of my understanding, during the casting of the *magic jar* spell a mage uses a large crystal or gem as the focus for a spell of possession. The caster shifts his spirit and mind into the crystal, then mentally attacks the victim as soon as he enters the range of the spell. At that point, the victim is trapped in the gem while the caster controls the victim's body.

I theorize that something similar has happened in this case. The scarves mentioned are most likely talismans taken from their owners to use to link the women to the demon and aid the possession attempt. The large crystal in Madame Elsa's living room would serve as an admirable focus for the spell, while the dolls could be special receptacles to store the life forces of their victims!

The pattern of these disappearances make it likely that the demon was the same "beautiful young woman" seen consorting with the husbands shortly after their wives' disappearances. Perverting and warping the human desires for love, affection, and friendship, Elsepeth exploits the need for intimacy to corrupt these men.

Bargains

Bargaining with mortals is another common technique demons use to lure them into evil. Demons manipulate mortals by appealing to the greed and weakness in every human heart. They offer us our hearts' desire, demanding in exchange seemingly minor services or innocuous concessions. Ensnared by

a honeyed web of deceit, the demon's victims find their glittering rewards turning to ashes at their feet. Ultimately, they lose their freedom, often their lives, and perhaps their spirits as well.

The Spirit and the Letter

Every agreement contains at least two key elements: the strict letter of the terms, and the spirit of the bargain. The magical energy ensuring compliance with the demonic bargains applies equally to both parties. This symmetry is apparently required to maintain the balance of the magical forces involved. As seen below, demons are thus strictly bound by the terms of their agreements—the letter of the law.

As the following excerpt reveals, demons profit from bargains, and tempt mortals into corruption in a very different manner.

Inajira bristled at the very suggestion that he could not be trusted. "I am an honorable, honest businessman. My business is magic, contracts, and power! I strictly honor my agreements and act as any merchant would. The profit margin in any transaction lies around its edges, and I work the edges in my bargains.

"I lay out my terms very clearly and explicitly, hiding nothing from each customer. If they lack the capacity to understand the contract, they should refrain from doing business with me."

—Zartin the Red

Autobiography of a Wandering Mage

This self-serving portrayal of the demon does establish a critical point—that demons trap mortals in these bargains by brilliantly warping the spirit of their contracts.

A concrete example of the complexity and detail of a demonic contract was unearthed by Dr. Farringer, in perhaps the most precious document that either of us has ever uncovered. During our

investigations, we recovered and salvaged portions of the original contract between the demon Elsepeth and one of her victims! The story of this discovery, and the text of the letter, shed light on the nature of demons and their bargains.

The Temptress

While compiling our notes for this volume, Dr. Farringer and I received news of bizarre occurrences in Nartok, in the kingdom of Darkon. Several young couples had disappeared over the last two years. In each case, when their bodies were discovered, the woman lay dead without a mark on her, while the man's corpse was a withered husk with burnt out eyes. This pattern seemed similar to the earlier events in Levkarest, raising the possibility that the demon Elsepeth had surfaced once more. We hurried to Nartok to investigate.

Happily for our work, though not for the unfortunates involved, we arrived in the city just as the authorities discovered the sixth dead couple. The City Council agreed to permit us to investigate.

The couple was Tomas and Helga Tennemen, a clerk and his wife. In this case, the body of the wife lay on a slab in the basement, while the husband was sprawled on the living room floor. Although signs of decay were present, the bodies were in the same condition as the previous couples.

The neighbors had discovered the bodies after seeing no sign of the pair for several days. Careful interviews revealed that no one had actually seen Helga for almost three weeks, though some neighbors recalled hearing a woman's voice from within the home. Cronies at a local tavern revealed that Tomas had been seen with a lovely woman, not his wife, the week before. All of these signs suggested the work of Elsepeth, but on a final sweep of the living room Dr. Farringer noticed the vital clue that I had missed.

In the fireplace lay a partially destroyed sheaf of papers. All of them

SECTION, THE FIRST:

had burned to the point where the remnants were little more than ash. Excitedly calling for her equipment, Dr. Farringer cordoned off the room and went to work. She first stabilized the remaining paper with a mixture of chemicals and clear resins. Then she used additional applications of chemical concoctions to bring out the ink so that one could again read part of the document. After several days of work, Dr. Farringer then began to analyze, copy and translate the document.

She noted that the script was in a rounded, feminine hand, the work of a well-educated individual. Our excitement grew as it became clear that we had actually retrieved a contract, which seemed to involve Elsepeth and Tomas Tennemen!

The recovered fragments speak volumes of the complexity and detail of a demonic contract. Selected excerpts from that text are enclosed here separately. Let them stand as a fitting tribute to the scholarship, brilliance, and energy of Dr. Ottelie Farringer.

The restoration of the fragments remains, sadly, incomplete, but it is clear that the clerk entered into a contract for the services of the demon in the very house he shared with his wife. He may even have forfeited his wife's life in the bargain!

Tomas Tennemen paid the price for his misdeeds and serves as an object

lesson of the perils of bargaining with a demon. Remember, demons desire to corrupt and destroy mankind. Therefore, if the demon does offer anything of true value, the cost will certainly be high.

... This contract, entered into . . . between the lady Elsepeth, hereinafter referred to as the grantor, or the party of the first part, and Tom . . . hereinafter referred to as the grantee, or the party of the second part, or the grantor . . .

... The terms of this agreement . . . governed by the laws of the territory of Rokushima, as they were in effect on the seventh day . . . month of the . . .

... the party of the first p . . . promises to supply erot . . . the grantee, the party of the second part . . . on the satisfaction of certain specific and contingent requests by the party of the first part . . .

The party of the second part agrees that all obstacles to the successf . . . of the contract may be eliminated by the party of the . . . to include disposal of organic organisms native to the environment in question. [Rudolph, note this phrase! I believe this is where Helga was lost!—Dr. Ottelie Farringer]

... upon nonfulfillment of any term of this contract by the party of the second part . . . forfeit security deposited with the party of th . . . par . . .

... agree that if the provisions of said contract are found to be unenforce . . . according to the limits of the laws of the . . . in question, they shall remain in force in any event to the extent that they conflict with the interest of the party of the second p . . . vis-à-vis the grantor of the favors referred to in Part Three of this . . . supra.

... enforceable into perpet . . . with the understanding that all costs associated with collection of suc . . . borne by the grantee in the event of breach or unexpected contingencies . . .



*Like one that on a lonesome road
Doth walk in fear and dread,
And having once turned round walks on,
And turns no more his head;
Because he knows a frightful fiend
Doth close behind him tread.*

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge
“Rime of the Ancient Mariner”

CHAPTER FIVE: DEMONS AMONG US



This chapter presents brief descriptions of the demons that have made their presence known in our lands. I have attempted to summarize their powers and mentalities so that the reader might get a sense of the diversity of these monstrosities.

Do not undertake the pursuit of one of these creatures lightly. With them, nothing is as you might expect, and even your most dedicated research might result in a false conclusion.

The Black Duke

The demon known as the Black Duke is described by Sir Ironhand in *The Beast of Ehrendton* as a monstrously muscled, scaled beast with wings and a long, prehensile tail. Armed with a barbed whip, large claws and teeth, and a panoply of magical abilities, the Black Duke is a formidable foe indeed.

Although the Black Duke has not been heard from since the defeat of the Brothers of the Whip, he was active east of the Dnar River in Nova Vaasa.

The Black Duke is highly militaristic. Disguising himself as a powerful human warrior (still armed with a long whip), he organized and led a powerful army of cultists on a campaign of destruction and terror. This behavior strongly suggests that the Black Duke has a fundamentally lawful, if evil, nature.

This demon is noted for a preference toward fire- and lightning-based attacks, an aura of fear, and a mental attack that might affect only those bound to the demon through magic.

The Black Duke's activities suggest that he is equally driven by the desire to corrupt and the desire to terrify. He is likely operating a violent cult somewhere in the world.

Drigor

This terrible demon is a tall yet muscular monstrosity, with a huge head and mouth, relatively small wings, and clawed, three-fingered hands. Drigor may lack the ability to disguise its appearance.

The Black Duke

Cornugon (greater baatezu)
Reality Wrinkle: 2,640-foot radius
Land-based Powers: *Forget*
Corruption Index: 3
AC -2; MV 9, fly 18 (C); HD 10; hp 77;
THAC0 11; #AT 4 or 1+weapon; Dmg
1d4/1d4/1d4+1/1d3 or 1d3 + weapon
+6; SD *regenerate* 2 hp/round; MR 50%;
SZ L (9' tall); ML elite (14); Int
exceptional (16); AL LE; XP 10,000.

Special Abilities: +2 or better
weapon to harm; immune to magical
fire and poison; half damage from
cold and gas; may *gate* abishai,
barbazu, or cornugon once per day;
spell-like powers (10th level):
advanced illusion, animate dead,
charm person, infravision, know
alignment, suggestion, teleport
without error.

SECTION, THE FIRST:

Drigor most likely appeared in our world long ago during the era in which the first volume of the *Madrigorian* was published. Drigor made its home in Edrigan, a small village in Dementlieu, but has moved on since our fatal encounter.

Drigor prefers to manipulate humanity through mortal pawns while keeping its presence and very existence a secret. For generations it succeeded in this goal, controlling the Madrigore family and using it as a front for its writings: the *Madrigorian*, a huge work of philosophy, poetry, and other musings concerning demons and their relationship to our world.

Writing is Drigor's favorite activity, and its preferred method of spreading its corrupt philosophy. This sustained, subtle behavior, proceeding according to a carefully crafted scheme, convinced me that Drigor was lawful. I should have listened to Dr. Farringer's analysis of the disjointed, careless structure of the *Madrigorian* itself. Drigor is in fact chaotic.

Drigor's confirmed powers include the ability to control the minds and emotions of mortals, tremendous strength, and the ability to create a *ray of enfeeblement*. Drigor appears immune to all nonmagical attacks and has a powerful resistance to magic as well. Only exceptionally powerful magical weapons could injure this creature. However, the demon's true



Drigor

Shator (most powerful gehreleth)
Reality Wrinkle: 5,280-foot radius
Land-based Powers: None
Corruption Index: 0
AC -3; MV 9, fly 18 (C); HD 15; hp 105; THAC0 5; #AT 3; Dmg 1d8+11/1d8+11/5d4; MR 50%; SZ M (6' tall); ML fanatic (17); Int genius (17); AL CE; XP 22,000.

Special Abilities: +3 or better weapon to harm; edged weapons -1 to hit and damage; immune to acid, fear, illusions, nonmagical damage, and poison; immune to scrying because he possesses an *amulet of proof against detection and location*; infravision 120 feet; *group memory*; *gate* other gehreleths once per day; spell-like powers (15th level): *beguile*, *cloudkill*, *detect good*, *detect invisibility*, *detect magic*, *dispel magic* (2/day), *ESP*, *fear*, *fog cloud* (3/day), *invisibility*, *ray of enfeeblement* (3/day), *stinking cloud* (3/day), *tongues*, *weakness* (3/day).

name is known, leaving it vulnerable to summoning magic.

Elsepeth

This demon first appeared in Falkovnia decades ago, transposing her form with that of Ammie Weaveron. According to Tasha Weaveron's diary, Elsepeth's true form is that of a beautiful young woman with large dark wings and glowing eyes. The demon masks these unnatural features with some type of *charm* or *shapechange* ability, and she has used it in a number of guises (always beautiful females). Elsepeth first appeared in a small town near Stangengrad in Falkovnia, and she has since been active in Borca, Falkovnia, and Darkon.

Elsepeth works subtly to corrupt and manipulate mortals. She particularly focuses on males, with the apparent goals first to tempt the men into infidelity and then to steal the spirits of their wives. Elsepeth has apparently never created an organization to

support her activities. Her increasingly bold and erratic behavior suggests that Elsepeth is chaotic.

There is no record of Elsepeth engaging in combat, so her particular powers and vulnerabilities are mostly unknown. Elsepeth does possess a particularly potent *charm*, as well as the ability to drain the spirit from her victims. The appearance of the name Elsepeth on the contract with Tomas Tennemen indicates that this is her true name.

Elsepeth seems driven by the desire to corrupt. In Nartok and Levkarest she preyed on men, destroying their love and tempting them into betrayal.

Inajira

Except for recent encounters with Zartin the Red and his companions, Inajira has hidden his presence from mortal notice, despite a long-standing feud with Count Strahd von Zarovich. Inajira appears as a human male with the head of a jackal.

Dr. Farringer noted an interesting coincidence concerning Inajira. The reverse of Inajira's true name is Arijani,

Elsepeth

Succubus (lesser tanar'ri)
 Reality Wrinkle: 330-foot radius
 Land-based Powers: *Forget, mass charm, power word kill*
 Corruption Index: 8
 AC 0; MV 12, fly 18 (C); HD 6; hp 48; THAC0 15; #AT 2; Dmg 1d3/1d3; SA drain one level (Wis -4 to notice); MR 30%; SZ M (6' tall); ML elite (13); Int exceptional (16); AL CE; XP 11,000.

Special Abilities: +2 or better weapon to harm; immune to electricity, fire, and poison; half damage from cold and gas; never surprised; may *gate* a balor once per day; spell-like powers (6th level): *become ethereal, charm person, clairaudience, darkness 15[fm] radius, ESP, infravision, plane shift, shapechange* (any humanoid form), *suggestion, telepathy, teleport without error.*

Inajira

Arcanaloth (greater yugoloth)
 Reality Wrinkle: 10,560-foot radius
 Land-based Powers: None
 Corruption Index: 0
 AC -8; MV 12, fly 18 (B); HD 12+24; hp 108; THAC0 9; #AT 3; Dmg 1d4/1d4/2d6; SA poisonous claws (causes a -1 penalty per hit); MR 60%; SZ M (6' tall); ML champion (15); Int supra-genius (20); AL NE; XP 20,000.

Special Abilities: +3 or better weapon to harm; immune to acid, fire, mental attacks, and poison; half damage from gas; *regenerate* if killed; never surprised; suffers double damage from cold; may *gate* mezzoloth, dergholoth, or arcanaloth once per day; spell-like powers (12th level): *advanced illusion* (1/day), *alter self, animate dead, cause disease, charm person, continual darkness, control temperature 10[fm] radius, fear* (1/day), *fly, heat metal, improved phantasmal force, invisibility, magic missile, produce flame, shapechange* (any humanoid form), *telekinesis, teleport without error, warp wood.*

the name of the High Priest who rules Sri Raji, a land reportedly beyond the Sea of Sorrows. This possible connection certainly bears investigating. Could the demon have established his own kingdom?

Inajira attempts to strike bargains with all manner of creatures, human and supernatural alike. The demon devises contracts of such intricacy that (he hopes) no mortal may discern the true meaning of the clauses and terms therein. Clearly driven by the desire to corrupt, Inajira uses these contracts to tempt mortals with largely illusory rewards, exploiting their greed and tricking them into signing away far more than they had intended. This behavior does not suffice to identify the demon's alignment.

Inajira is a very powerful spellcaster with a high resistance to magic.

SECTION, THE FIRST:

The Whistling Fiend

The Whistling Fiend looks like a large, skeletal, sexless humanoid covered with leathery hide and red jelly. A horn protrudes from the rear of its skull. It whistles cheerfully while committing acts of senseless brutality. The demon can disguise its appearance, but rarely does.

The Whistling Fiend roams randomly, causing havoc wherever it goes. Driven by the desire to terrify mortals, the Whistling Fiend has been sighted in many domains, including Darkon, Barovia, Falkovnia, and Invidia. It acts almost as if it is drawn to human habitation, requiring the people's terror for its satisfaction. Its behavior is clearly chaotic.

The Whistling Fiend

Babau (greater tanar'ri)

Reality Wrinkle: 80-foot radius

Land-based Powers: *Confusion, cause disease, cause insanity* (touch, effects as *symbol of insanity*), *poison* (touch), *slay plant life* (60-foot radius, no save)

Corruption Index: 14

AC -3; MV 15; HD 8+14; hp 70; THACO 10; #AT 1 or 3; Dmg 1d10+7 weapon or 1d4+1/1d4+1/2d4; SA gaze (as *ray of enfeeblement*); MR 50%; SZ M (7' tall); ML champion (15); Int genius (17); AL CE; XP 17,000.

Special Abilities: +1 or better weapon to harm; immune to electricity, nonmagical fire, and poison; half damage from cold, gas, magical fire, piercing, silver, and slashing weapons; gaze (20-foot range, saving throw vs. spell, or *ray of enfeeblement*); corrosive slime (20% chance to corrode metal, saving throw vs. acid); backstab (x4); *gate* a cambion or babau once per day; spell-like powers (8th level): *darkness 15[fm] radius, dispel magic, fear, fly, heat metal, infra-vision, levitate, polymorph self, teleport without error.*

Thief Abilities: PP 30%; OL 30%; F/RT 25%; MS 95%; HS 80%; DN 35%; CW 35%; RL 30.

The Whistling Fiend has the power to destroy plant life around it, and the ability to generate and control a cloud of fog. In addition, the slippery jelly on the creature's hide is acidic. The demon is apparently vulnerable to cold iron and acid-based attacks.

Demons of Chateaufaux

A less known infestation of demons occurred in the town of Chateaufaux in Dementlieu, when not one, but two foul demons attempted to corrupt the village. Trapped in our world, these two conspired to reshape Chateaufaux into a new home. They slew the mayor, Henri Melano, and Dominic Tisiphanes, captain of the militia, then used magic to take on their likenesses. Under their guise, the Black Watch, a band of brutal thugs, was formed to enforce cruel laws. Though the townsfolk seem cheerful and obedient to strangers, this is but a facade concealing their mistrust and fear. Neighbor now betrays neighbor to gain generous rewards.

I encountered these demons during a visit to the town at the invitation of Dominic d'Honaire to attend a symposium on *mesmerism*. Though I had learned much regarding the nature of demons, I was taken unaware when the effects of the demons' reality wrinkle did not seem to manifest in the town. I now suspect that the demons managed to hide their nature through the use of *magic* or perhaps a drug imbibed by the townsfolk. Captured by the demons, I survived only because my friends felt my long absence strange and came to investigate.

In the battle that followed, the true form of each creature was revealed. Mayor Melano is dwarfish with a bulbous head, stubby arms and legs, fang-filled mouth, and leathery wings. This demon appears to command illusions and has some command of mental control of others. It proved very resistant to magic. Captain Tisiphanes is a goblin of a man with scaly skin, pointy ears, a long tail, clawed hands and feet, and a wiry

beard. Wounds from his wiry beard became infected, and several of the guardsmen died from a rotting

disease. The captain has a berserker rage that made him difficult to face in combat. Due to the nature of their plot, I surmise that they are lawful in nature. Sadly for our realms, when it looked like they faced their bane, they fled and remain at large.

Melano

Amnizu (greater baatezu)
 Reality Wrinkle: 1,320-foot radius
 Land-based Powers: *Forget*,
hypnotism
 Corruption Index: 6
 AC -1; MV 6, fly 15 (C); HD 9; hp 48;
 THACO 11; #AT 1; Dmg 2d4; SA
 attack ignores foe's AC (saving throw
 vs. spell, or *forget*); MR 50%; SZ M (4'
 tall); ML elite (14); Int exceptional
 (16); AL LE; XP 11,000.

Special Abilities: +2 or better
 weapon to harm; immune to acid,
 fire, and poison; half damage from
 cold and gas; *gate* abishai or erinyes
 once per day; spell-like powers (9th
 level): *advanced illusion*, *animate
 dead*, *charm person*, *fireball* (3/day),
forget, *imprisonment* (1/day),
infravision (120 feet), *know
 alignment*, *suggestion*, *telepathy*,
teleport without error.

Tisiphanes

Barbazu (lesser baatezu)
 Reality Wrinkle: 5,280-foot radius
 Land-based Powers: None
 Corruption Index: 0
 AC 3; MV 15; HD 6+6; hp 34; THACO
 13; #AT 3 or 1; Dmg 1d2/1d2/1d8
 +disease (25%) or *whip of
 entanglement*; SA battle frenzy; MR
 30%; SZ M (6' tall); ML steady (12);
 Int low (6); AL LE; XP 6,000.

Special Abilities: +1 or better
 weapon to harm; immune to fire and
 poison; half damage from cold and
 gas; if both claws hit, beard hits;
 battle frenzy (cumulative 10%/round:
 attack at twice normal rate, +2 to
 attack and damage dice, -3 to AC);
gate abishai or barbazu once per day;
 spell-like powers (6th level):
advanced illusion, *affect normal fires*,
animate dead, *charm person*,
command, *fear* (touch), *infravision*
 (120 feet), *know alignment*, *produce
 flame*, *suggestion*, *telepathy*, *teleport
 without error*.

Malocchio

The *Dukkar* is a unique and unnatural creature, the only known spawn of a human and a demon, for his mother was Gabrielle Aderre and his father was a stranger, referred to as the Gentleman Caller. History reports that this dark stranger had the voice of a lover, the wings of a bat, and the cruel eyes of Hell. Is it any wonder that their offspring, Malocchio Aderre, is a cruel and sadistic monster? He constantly tests the depths of his powers, regardless of the pain, suffering, and death this brings. To him, living beings are no more than toys to manipulate and destroy at his leisure.

Malocchio's monstrous nature is exposed by a sixth, clawlike "witch finger" beside the pinky of each hand. His power to transcend magical boundaries and other demons' reality wrinkles makes him the most dangerous creature in the realms. Now he competes for rulership of the domain of Invidia with Gabrielle Aderre and tries to destroy all Vistani he finds.



SECTION, THE FIRST:

Malocchio

Cambion born of a Vistana and the Gentleman Caller, an incubus (lesser tanar'ri).

Reality Wrinkle: 165 feet diameter

Land-based Powers: *Confusion, forget, poison* (touch), *slay plant life* (60-foot radius, no save)

Corruption Index: 13

AC 3; MV 12; HD 5; hp 33; THAC0 15; #AT 2; Dmg 1d3/1d3; SA drain one level (Wis -4 to notice), never surprised; MR 20%; SZ M (6' tall); ML elite (13); Str 14, Dex 16, Con 10, Int 16, Wis 11, Chr 17; AL CE; XP 5,000.

Special Abilities: +1 or better weapon to harm; resistant to electricity, fire, and poison (save at +4 for one-quarter damage); keen senses; may summon wild beasts (ravens, snakes, or wolves) once per day; spell-like powers (5th level): *animal summoning, darkness 15[fm] radius, evil eye (charm monster, charm person, ESP, fear, hypnotism, suggestion), infravision (120 feet), plane shift (creates fog/mist, user cannot leave RAVENLOFT world), teleport without error.* For details, see *Domains of Dread*, Chapter Two, and *The Evil Eye* (TSR #9497); also see the following section, "Vistani," Chapter Five.

Thief Abilities: MS 80%; HS 80%; CW 95%.

The Gentleman Caller

Little is known of the creature named the Gentleman Caller, but he appears often in tales around our world. He is a seducer of women, a schemer, and a tempter of the corrupt. His motives remain a mystery, but in his wanderings he aids the wicked and creates new monsters of darkness.

Malistroi

The creature called Malistroi is one of most powerful demons in our realms. An odd chimera, this creature has the form of a giant ape, and the tusks,

snout, ears, legs, fat, and stench of a giant boar, with a pair of small condor wings. Its glowing red eyes pierce the mind and drain energy with a glance.

The tale of this demon comes from the starving land of G'Henna, home to the mad priest, Yagno Petrovna. Petrovna, lord of that dark land, is a man of weak faith whom some say believes in nothing and so made his own god, Zhakata the Devourer. Seeking to commune with the god he had invented, this wretched man used a mage to open the gates to the outer realms to summon his god. But, a being of great evil and despair answered instead and taunted Petrovna, telling him that his faith was false, his god a sham. The priest filled with rage, slew the wizard who conjured the creature, and left the beast bound in a magical circle lost in the wastes. From there this demon has tried to wrest control of G'Henna from Yagno Petrovna.

Malistroi is able to animate dead and reshape the flesh and minds of those natives of G'Henna's outlands

The Gentleman Caller

Incubus (lesser tanar'ri)

Reality Wrinkle: 1,320-foot radius

Land-based Powers: *Suggestion*

Corruption Index: 3

AC 0; MV 12, fly 18 (C); HD 6; hp 48; THAC0 15; #AT 2; Dmg 1d3/1d3; SA kiss drains one level (Wis check at -4 to notice); MR 30%; SZ M (6' tall); ML elite (13); Int exceptional (16); AL CE; XP 11,000. For details, see *The Evil Eye* (TSR #9497) and *Servants of Darkness* (TSR #9541).

Special Abilities: +2 or better weapon to harm; immune to electricity, fire, and poison; half damage from cold and gas; never surprised; speaks language of victim; may *gate* a balor once per day; spell-like powers (6th level): *become ethereal, charm person, clairaudience, darkness 15[fm] radius, ESP, infravision (120 feet), plane shift, shapechange (any humanoid form), suggestion, telepathy, teleport without error.*

Malistroi

Nalfeshnee (true tanar'ri)
 Reality Wrinkle: 80-foot radius
 Land-based Powers: *Cause disease, detect magic, fear aura* (line of sight, saving throw vs. paralyzation, or paralyzed 2d6 turns), *polymorph others*
 Corruption Index: 15
 AC -8; MV 12, fly 18 (D); HD 9; hp 63; THAC0 7; #AT 3; Dmg 1d4/1d4/2d4; SA never surprised; MR 70%; SZ H (20' tall); ML fanatic (17); Int godlike (21); AL CE; XP 17,000.
 For details, see *Circle of Darkness* (TSR #9493).

Special Abilities: +2 or better weapon to harm; immune to electricity, nonmagical fire, 1st-3rd level illusions, and poison; half damage from cold, gas, magical fire, piercing and slashing weapons; full damage from cold iron; *nightmare spray* (3/day); concentrates one round, then all within 60 feet suffer 15 points of damage (saving throw vs. spell for 7 points of damage, then save at -2 or wander in a trance and experience a vision of fear for 1d10 rounds; *gate* a babau or vroock once per day; spell-like powers (12th level): (always active) *detect invisibility, ESP, know alignment, protection from good*; (at will) *alter self, bind, call lightning, chill touch, darkness 15[fm] radius, distance distortion, feeblemind, forget, giant insect, infravision* (120 feet), *invisibility, mirror image, raise dead, slow, telepathy, teleport without error, web*.

who have stumbled into his lair. These agents have made repeated attempts to assassinate the high priest and his clergy, apparently looking for the key to release the demon from his cage. It is suspected that through years of imprisonment the demon has become wasted, denied food and other energies necessary to maintain life and vigor. Woe betide heroes who stumble on this ravenous beast unaware.

Baltoi

Lost beneath the Sleeping Beast mountain range of Lamordia lies a legendary creature called "Baltoi, the Sleeping Beast." Those who have fled her deadly coils report a beast that is both hideous and beautiful to behold. A monstrous 20 feet in length, this wicked beauty is said to have the body of a serpent and the many-armed torso of a maiden. Folktales relate the story of how Eserine the sorceress bound this demon deep beneath the earth in an enchanted sleep. But all magic wanes with the passage of time, and this demon is bound to awaken at some future time. Only her immense size will keep her imprisoned in her earthy tomb.

The Sleeping Beast

Marilith (greater tanar'ri)
 Reality Wrinkle: 40-foot radius
 Land-based Powers: *Cause insanity* (touch, effects as *symbol of insanity*), *confusion, corrupt life* (acidic touch, 2d4 points of damage), *hyper-regeneration* (if hit points fall below zero, *regenerate* 10 hp/round until healed), *mass charm*
 Corruption Index: 20
 AC -9; MV 15, burrow 3; HD 24; hp 144; THAC0 6; #AT 7; Dmg 1d8+8 (x6)/4d6; SA constriction (Con check or knocked out), never surprised; MR 70%; SZ H (20' long); ML fanatic (18); Int genius (18); AL CE; XP 45,000. For details, see *Adam's Wrath* (TSR #9439).

Special Abilities: +2 or better weapon to harm; immune to electricity, illusions, mind-affecting spells, nonmagical fire, and poison; half damage from cold, gas, magical fire; *gate* any tanar'ri once per day; spell-like powers (12th level): *animate dead, cause serious wounds, cloudkill, comprehend languages, curse, darkness 15[fm] radius, detect evil, detect invisibility, detect magic, infravision* (120 feet), *polymorph self* (7/day), *project image, pyrotechnics, telekinesis, telepathy, teleport without error*.

SECTION, THE FIRST:

*He had heard the midnight bells
jangling: if you permit
this evil, what is the good
of the good of your life?*

—Stanley Kunitz

Around Pastor Bonhoeffer

CHAPTER SIX: BATTLING DEMONS



Fiends are perhaps the deadliest foes any mortal could ever face, yet they have weaknesses. Proper tactics, preparation, and planning may yet win the day for those hunters who are powerful, smart, prepared, and lucky. Those who would hunt the demon would do well to follow the suggestions in this chapter if they hope to defeat the creature while they and those they care for still live.

Detecting the Demon

The first step in destroying a demon is learning of its existence. This task is rarely simple, for the demon uses its masterful powers of manipulation, illusion, and guile to hide its presence. A direct sighting of a demon is of course a sure sign, but such events are extremely rare. Careful, informed observation can detect the more subtle signs of a demon's existence.

The wrinkle effect: An aware observer can detect the presence of a nearby demon by noting the effects of its reality wrinkle. The outward effect of

The noticeable effects of a reality wrinkle are subtle. A hero must make an Intelligence check with a -4 penalty to notice the effect, and a Wisdom check at -4 to understand what they perceive. These modifiers are reduced to -2 if the character is aware of the existence of fiends. There are no negative modifiers if the hero actively seeks the wrinkle effect.

a reality wrinkle is a shimmer in the air and a very slight shift in the relationship between objects. Dr. Farringer and I both detected this effect, and I recognize it as the unmistakable sign of Drigor's presence. This barely perceptible shift seems to be the most common effect of reality wrinkles.

Unexplained murders: Reports of a pattern of unexplained murders or disappearances in a particular region may point to the presence of a demon. This is particularly likely if the murders or disappearances occurred over an extended period of time.

The key to this analysis, separating demons from the more common murderous monstrosities, is the pattern—the signature, if you will, of the crimes. The demon's "signature" will link these crimes to each other, though they be separated by many years or many miles.

Cult activity: Evidence of organized campaigns of destruction, banditry, or ritualistic activity may be a sign of the activities of a cult—the followers of a demon. While any group may be no more than bandits, or a more benign secret society, each report bears scrutiny.

Transformation: If you should hear a report that a person's physical form is changing, investigate immediately. While they may have been transformed in some other manner, these people may also be caught in the midst of transposition. Attempt to halt or reverse the process, if at all possible.

Paladins: These warriors have a place of honor in the battle against demons. Paladins are particularly well suited to battle these creatures, and greatly assist in detecting them as well.

A paladin's holy aura, comforting to his allies and hated by his foes, also affects the demon. The foul beasts are loath to approach a paladin, and seem to move and fight less effectively when they do. The passage below demonstrates the special antipathy between the demon Inajira and Mrytok Greybeard, a veteran paladin.

Mrytok stiffened, instantly drawing his sword. "Gods! Men, look alive!" he shouted. "We are in mortal danger!"

Moments after he uttered those words, the creature appeared in the now-familiar burst of smoke. With fangs frothing, Inajira cried, "Away with you, old man! You and your kind are blots on this miserable land. I cannot stomach you. Begone, lest I slay you now!"

Mrytok moved only to raise his grand sword in formal salute: "Foul beast, you set my eyes on fire, for I know now that I have seen all the evil that lives in this world wrapped in your corrupt visage. Join me in the dance, then! If I need to die, I would count it an honor to perish while cutting apart the likes of you!"

—Zartin the Red

Autobiography of a Wandering Mage

This passage and others in the book show the natural enmity between paladins and demons, and that paladins can sense a demon's presence as well.

Even though a paladin's ability to detect evil does not normally function on our world, paladins may detect fiends. Fiends are so evil that their aura cuts through all the interference to reach the senses of a paladin. A paladin can sense the presence of a fiend's reality wrinkle when he is within 60 feet of its outermost edges. This is whether he concentrates or not. The paladin may not know precisely what he senses, however, especially if he has never encountered a fiend. The fiend, however, can also sense the paladin, knowing his exact location.



This ability, otherwise unknown in our realms, may result from the strong tension between the positive energies of the paladin and the dark aura of the demon. They apparently may thus sense the presence of a demon, an invaluable aid to a group seeking such a creature!

Gathering Information

Any warrior will confirm that one of the keys to victory is information on the nature and strength of the enemy. Such knowledge is particularly vital when facing a demon. A single miscalculation can lead to tragedy and disaster.

Therefore, whenever hunters suspect the presence of a demon, they must conduct a thorough, painstaking effort to research their foe and gather as much information as possible concerning its actions and abilities. While doing so, avoid contact with the demon at all costs. Premature contact with the demon will only warn it of the group's activities.

There are unfortunately few ways to directly observe a demon except in battle. I cannot recommend that hunters attempt to infiltrate a lawful demon's cult. The probability of discovery and death—or worse, corruption—is too high. Therefore, observe the effect of the demon on the land and people around it. What powers does the demon apparently use? How

SECTION, THE FIRST:

does it seek to corrupt the people? Is it given to guile and intrigue, or blatant displays of power?

Compare the answers to these questions with the passages in this work. Demons are so rare in the lands that the one you face may be described herein. Also, your observations of the demon and its powers may allow you to determine the demon's nature—lawful or chaotic—and from there lay sounder strategies and attack plans. Careful research to determine the nature and powers of the demon will greatly enhance your group's chance of survival.

Phylacteries

Demons enjoy a number of tremendous advantages in combat. I have already discussed their ability to *teleport*, but an even greater one is the fact that each demon's spirit—its true essence—is stored not in its body but in a separate physical object. The only way to truly destroy a demon, therefore, is to destroy this object. This power is very similar to that of liches, and may support the theory that demons evolved from these undead mages. For convenience, I also refer to these objects as phylacteries.

I first came on a reference to demonic phylacteries in the writings of Zartin the Red, during a passage where Strahd is explaining the nature of the demon Inajira:

"The Vistani have been able to tell me that the jackal-headed cur is not so different from the foul lich. The beast bears its own chains. Not only does the fool need that precious book it seeks, but since entering my realm, it must ever be on guard to protect its own spirit as well. Their divining magic—which is still, I must admit, more powerful than my own—tells me the creature stores its life in some statue or trinket. As is the case with the lich, I am convinced that he who controls the demon's phylactery may have some

control over the beast. We must find its phylactery." I hesitated, still attempting to find a way to extend our quest. I sensed that we would soon be at our goal, and I knew that my companions and I would have outlived our usefulness to Strahd at that point. "If we have it, then the creature will let us be."

Strahd looked at me with a half-smirk. "Zartin, while Inajira might foolishly have let me acquire his Book of Keeping, I am confident that he will be a bit more cautious with his very life force. If you wish to seek out and battle him for his phylactery, you are free to do so on your own time. Presently, you have much more important tasks with which to concern yourself."

—Zartin the Red

Autobiography of a Wandering Mage

Unlike the lich's phylactery, it seems that a demon's phylactery need not be a precious item.

The only demon phylactery that I have had in my possession was Drigor's, a wondrous quill pen over 2 feet long and crafted of diamond, marble, and gold. Written accounts of the Whistling Fiend most likely reveal its phylactery to be the wicked pike it carries; it is a constant element of all reports. The same is true of the Beast of Ehrennton's whip.

Thus, it would seem, just as each demon is unique, so too is each phylactery. Its nature and form are undoubtedly linked to some strong personality quirk of the demon. (Drigor is obsessed with writing; the Whistling Fiend with random destruction; the Black Duke with driving underlings mercilessly.) While I am unsure what the destruction of a demon's phylactery would result in, I believe Strahd is correct in his assumption that he who possesses the demon's phylactery will have some control over the creature. I hesitate to extrapolate too far from one example, but Drigor did not attack Bethany while she held its phylactery.

As readers might know, the destruction of a lich's phylactery leaves

Fiendish Phylacteries

The phylactery of a fiend comes into existence as the creature enters the RAVENLOFT setting. The evil powers in the campaign world split the fiend's being into two parts, creating for it a method to return from certain death. The nature and powers of a fiend's phylactery in this campaign are similar to those of the lich (as noted in *Van Richten's Monster Hunter's Compendium, Volume Two*). When a fiend's body is slain, its life force immediately transfers to its phylactery. This occurs no matter where the body lies in relation to the relic, so long as both are in the RAVENLOFT world. The fiend may remain in its phylactery for an unlimited time if awaiting or growing a new body.

After resting for at least 24 hours, the fiend may search for a new physical form. Unlike a lich, the fiend must possess a living victim. The rules for this attempted theft of a body are identical with the rules for possession, except that the fiend need not await a specific victim. "Death" is still humiliating and inconvenient for the fiend, as it loses the physical abilities of its natural form. Still, it retains its Hit Dice, intellect, and spell-like abilities, and remains a powerful foe. Further, it appears that, in time, the life force of the fiend can reshape its host's form into that of its original shape.

The means to destroy a phylactery vary in each case. The Dungeon Master should devise a particular method suitable for his campaign. Destroying a phylactery should be an arduous task requiring quests for the proper site and materials; then there is the danger of summoning the fiend before the deed is complete. Indeed, destroying a fiend's phylactery may be the basis for an entire campaign itself.

If a fiend's phylactery is destroyed, the fiend dies and its evil essence disperses.

it vulnerable to final and total death. Perhaps it is the same with demons. However, during the short time I possessed Drigor's phylactery I was unable to discern any method of destroying it; we needed it for another use. Drigor's phylactery served as the key element in constructing a device that negated his ability to teleport.

The Mysfick Cage

The principal difficulty in forcing a final confrontation between your party and a demon is the fact that the foul beasts are tremendously mobile adversaries. The creatures all seemingly possess the ability to teleport, and may have other useful spell-like powers as well. To force the battle on the demon, its foes must somehow neutralize its mobility.

During my research, I discovered a magical device which makes it possible to hold a demon. Although devised by the ill-fated Brother Micah, I know that this device works, for we used it in the battle against the demon Drigor.

December 30th

Just before nightfall, as Samuel and I washed the plates, I heard a frantic pounding on the door. Alarmed, we seized our weapons and rushed to the door. Dr. Farringer was due back from Il Aluk any day, and I feared—well, in any event I opened the door and was



SECTION, THE FIRST:

*shocked to find Bethany Madrigore!
I leapt back, then I saw her eyes.
They shone clear and bright, and
terrified. Clutching a large package to
her chest, she pleaded with me to take
her in. Without a word, I hurried her
inside. Locking all doors and readying
my wards, I bid Samuel prepare himself
for any emergency. He nodded calmly
and continued pouring a cup of cider.*

*In the sitting room in front of the
roaring fire, it was as if I had opened the
floodgates! The young mistress of
Edrigan began pouring her heart and
soul into my hands as she described the
terror of life with the demon.*

*"He took me as he took us all, for
centuries! I had no hope, then you
came! Please, Doctor, you must destroy
him!" I tried to soothe her, but she
pressed the package into my hands.*

*"This is his. I hope it helps," she said.
"It is the only thing he cares about.
Keep it from him!" The shadows outside
my window darkened, and she cried
out in agony. She collapsed to the floor.
When I looked up from her dead form,
the sky was clear again, but my blood
ran cold. I quickly checked the package
and found a most beautiful replica of a
quill pen, made from marble and gems.
I knew instantly what it must be. That
poor child had given us Drigor's
phylactery.*

—From the private journal of
Dr. Van Richten

Construction

As with any magical item, the cage must be crafted with great care, from only the finest materials. Yet the relative simplicity of design and materials of this cage saves much of the time and expense common to such efforts.

The physical frame of the cage is a great wooden beam, which forms a circle. The beam itself must be 3 feet on all sides, and the circle should be at least 30 feet in diameter to accommodate the coming battle. The craftsman must cut a groove in the top surface of this beam, 1 inch wide and 2 inches deep.

Eight pillars, 4 feet tall by 3 feet square, are then joined to the beam at equal distances. The pillars must have sconces in their tops. Four other beams are also joined to the circular beam, curving up and across the center of the circle's area. These each connect two of the pillars, forming a vaulted "ceiling" for the device. Connecting at the very center of the circle, these beams should measure 2 feet in width and height.

A low, sturdy platform must be placed in the exact center of the circle. This platform must withstand the weight of the demon, and its dimensions should be approximately 1 foot in height by 6 feet in diameter.

Finally, a finely wrought, powerful bolt of cold iron must be driven into the juncture of the wooden beams. An iron chain several feet in length dangles from it. A box, also of wrought iron, must be suspended from the chain high above the wooden platform. The device may be constructed in sections, and assembled at the site of the battle.

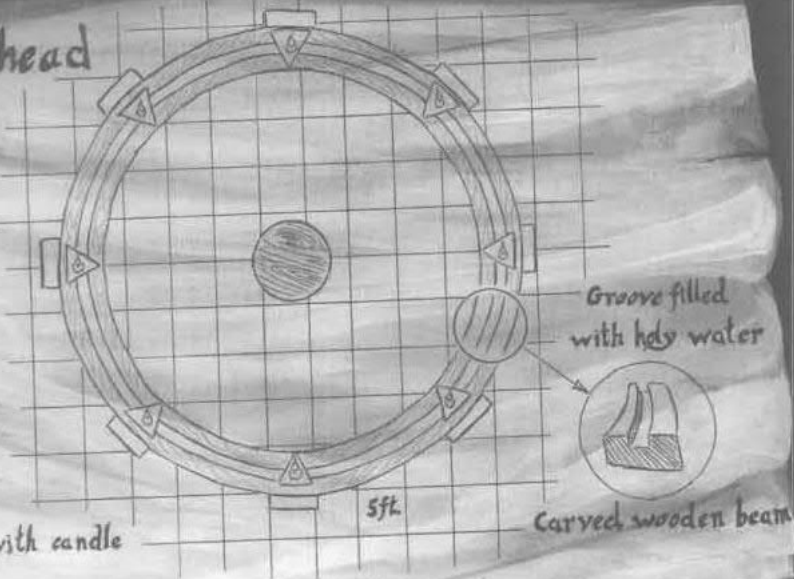
The mystick cage requires a minimum of one month to construct, at a cost of 5,000 gold. For each 5 feet in diameter above 30 feet, the cost rises by 1,000 gold pieces, and the preparation time increases by one week. Standard rules in the *DUNGEON MASTER Guide* concerning craftsmanship and material costs apply.

Activation

Upon assembling the cage at the location of battle, the casters must fill the groove in the beam with holy water, and the sconces with consecrated tapers.

The final component is the true key to the ritual—the phylactery of the target demon. Brother Micah's notes called for the utterance of the demon's true name in combination with a summoning ritual, and for some item representative of the creature to be placed at the center of the platform. My advisers, however, decided that using

Overhead



Pedestal with candle

5ft

Carved wooden beam



Platform

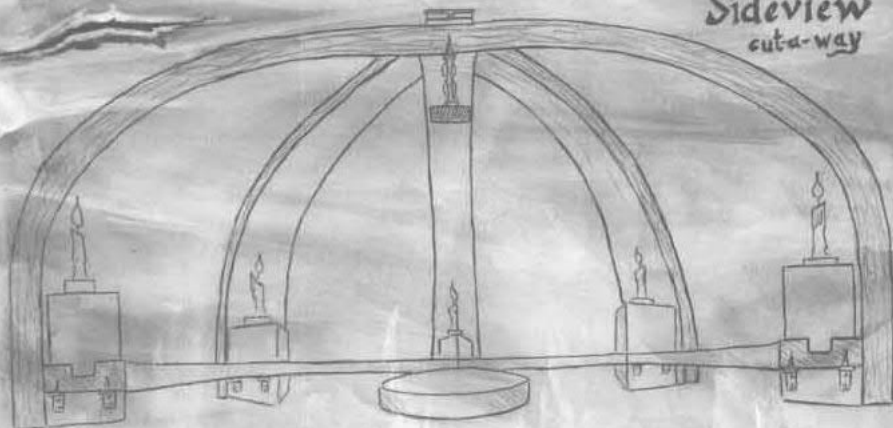


Case holding phylactery



Box suspended from chain

Sideview
cut-away



SECTION, THE FIRST:

Drigor's phylactery would make the mystick cage even stronger.

At this point, all those who will battle the demon must be inside the cage. The ritual requires at least four willing life forces. The caster then inscribes a circle of protection against demons (see later) into the circular wooden beam. Lighting the tapers, the caster speaks the final words of power. With a roar, the phylactery transfers from the platform into the iron box, and the demon appears on the platform in its place. The battle is joined!

The demon is trapped by the ritual, and cannot leave the cage until the battle is done. However, the ritual also exacts a price from its casters: while the tapers burn, the device holds, but it also drains strength from those battling the demon. To sustain the containment, the device must have four willing life forces inside it. When fewer than four remain, the spell is broken.

January 5th

Dr. Farringer returned today and greeted the news of events in her absence with the mix of shock and excitement I had expected.

I have finally firmed up the list of those who will be on the team to go up against Drigor, and there were a couple of unexpected, last minute additions.

Dr. Farringer grew furious when she saw I had left her name off the list. She will now be joining Annelyn, who has developed the circles of protection we will use and who will activate the Mystic Cage; Davyyd, priest of Tyr, who will provide much-needed magic spells and a hefty mace; and myself in the battle.

We were toying with the idea of a four member team, the ritual minimum, when Samuel walked into the room and wrote his name on the sheet in front of me. He said, "Doc, you got nobody there who can swing a sword. You need me."

I chided him, saying that no blade was going to win the day against the demon, but I could not resist the justice

of his words. So the five of us it is! We must make ready expeditiously, for Drigor knows we have his phylactery.

The cage for the ritual is nearly half complete. The workmen are doing a superb job under Annelyn's supervision. The phylactery was the key—now that we have it, we must strike! I have selected a location for the battle, an isolated patch of grassland, protected from observation and remote from innocent interlopers. The five of us are gathering each night to plot spells and strategy. I support five separate circles of protection around the demon, one protecting each of us while we prepare our attacks. It is a sound method, and I believe it will work.

—From the private journal of
Dr. Van Richten

Fighting the Demon

While I have taken as much of this section as possible from personal experience and reliable sources, some of the information presented below is theoretical at best. Should you seek to do battle with a demon, proceed carefully, making full use of your faculties. Every demon is unique, and thus every encounter will differ. Take all of this information to heart, and use what you may.

Weapons: Demons are vulnerable to enchanted weapons, although it may take a particularly powerful blade to penetrate a demonic hide. More readily at hand, however, is iron. We have evidence to show that the Whistling Fiend can be harmed by iron; it is possible that all demons have this weakness. Nonetheless, I advise you to acquire the most powerful weapons possible.

Attack spells: Any use of magic against a demon is uncertain at best, as all demons seem to have at least a partial resistance to spells. Still, magical attacks offer better odds than going toe-to-toe with a demon.

Acid: While acid had absolutely no effect on Drigor, this resistance may

The Cage Ritual

The cage ritual has two versions, one suitable for mages and one for clerics. In either case, the ritual is the equivalent of a 6th-level spell, requiring a 12th-level wizard or 11th-level cleric to cast. The spell requires three turns (30 minutes) to cast. It lasts so long as four of the original group remain alive inside the circle. The magic drains 1 hit point per round from each participant to sustain the containment.

The ritual traps the fiend and its phylactery inside the area of effect. If the fiend wins the battle, it is free to take its phylactery and depart.

differ for each demon. The records of the city of Lekar contain an account of a brief foray into the city by the *Whistling Fiend* ninety years ago. The demon caused terrible casualties among the efficient and aggressive Falkovnian garrison. While units of infantry harried the demon, observers carefully watched the beast, searching for weaknesses. Yet the demon's most serious injury came from its own actions in an alchemist's shop. While therein, the demon swept its pike across a high shelf, bringing a large jar of acid crashing to the floor. This acid burnt its legs terribly, causing the demon to scream with rage. The demon continued its rampage through Lekar, limping and roaring with pain.

Defensive Spells

When facing a foe as powerful as a demon, strategies of defense are as important as strategies for attack. Demons have many attacks, physical and magical, which can cause tremendous damage. Powerful weapons and mighty spells do little good if you die before raising your sword!

While a cunning brain and careful planning are the best defenses against the demon, defensive magic is invaluable as well. Particularly vital are magical defenses which allow you to attack the demon, but limit its ability to

strike at you. Several examples of useful defensive magic are set out below.

Protection from evil: Demons are perhaps the most thoroughly evil creatures one will ever encounter in our realms. The spells which priests and mages use to protect against evil may be of great use against these creatures.

It is my understanding that the *protection from evil* spell grants the recipient an aura of good similar to that of a paladin. For the duration of the spell, supernatural evil creatures such as the demon may not touch the body of the recipient, and find it much more difficult to approach the individual or attack them at all. This spell is only useful defensively, for any attack on the demon nullifies its effects.

The spells *protection from evil* and *protection from evil, 10' radius* function normally in the RAVENLOFT setting.

Circles of protection: One of the most powerful defenses against a demon is the circle of protection. Commonly used by powerful conjurers when summoning elemental creatures or other supernatural foes, each of these circles must be specifically designed for a category of creature. Some circles are crafted to contain a summoned creature, while others encircle the caster and his allies.

The mage Annelyn designed several circles of protection for use against demons, combining her own research with the notes we had uncovered. I provide diagrams of these circles elsewhere in this book, that all may share this knowledge.

One circle of protection is a "General Circle," protecting against all demons. The two other circles of protection are designed to protect against subcategories of demons—lawful and chaotic. Each of these circles is more powerful than a General Circle against one type of demon, but weaker against the other. Therefore, you must know

Magic Circles

Circles of protection against fiends have both clerical and magical versions. In both cases the spell is 5th level, requiring either a scroll or a 9th-level spellcaster. Two different types of circles are discussed below.

Protection from Fiends

This version of the circle of protection will protect the caster and all within a 10-foot radius against up to 24 Hit Dice of fiends of the proper alignment. The general circle of protection spell guards against up to 16 Hit Dice of fiends. A specific circle of protection used against a fiend of an opposite alignment only wards off 12 Hit Dice of fiends. Fiends may not enter these circles or attack individuals inside them.

This spell requires no elaborate preparation and lasts 5d8 rounds. Attacks out of the circle are possible, as are attacks into the circle by fiends with more Hit Dice than the circle can protect against.

Circles to Confine Fiends

Magic circles designed to confine fiends are crafted as part of the *binding* and *gate* spells.

Specialized circles of protection impose a -2 penalty on the fiend's saving throw to resist the circle when used properly. However, they grant the fiend a +2 bonus to its saving throw if the fiend is of a different alignment. For example, if Annelyn attempts to trap a chaotic tanar'ri in a circle of protection against chaotic fiends, she gains a +2 to her attempt to control the fiend, or a -2 to its saving throws. However, if Annelyn mistakenly uses a circle of protection against lawful fiends, the tanar'ri gains the +2 bonus to its saving throws against the spell. General circles of protection provide no modifiers to either party.

with certainty the alignment of the demon before you attempt to use one of these specialized circles.

February 7th

My hands still tremble to think of it. Oh, gods! Why her? Why not me? Why must the blood of those I love be spilled again and again?

One week past we battled Drigor. Tense, but confident, trusting in ourselves and our cause, we went to meet our fate.

Annelyn summoned the demon. A gross mound of reeking flesh appeared before us, cracking the platform with its weight. Nearly seven feet tall and almost as broad, its huge claws and dripping fangs completed the picture.

Circles cast, we buffeted the demon with potions, spells, and fire. While some of the blows staggered it, Drigor was largely unscathed.

Then, the heady rush of battle left me. "My friends," Drigor said, "What have I done to warrant such rough treatment? Please, let us discuss this like rational beings."

My companions faltered, too. I felt a wave of guilt sweep over me. An apology formed on my lips—how I detest myself for that weakness now—but Drigor spoke first.

"I, too, am a scholar and philosopher, Doctor. I am sure we can settle our differences rationally." Then the foul creature looked at the glowing circles around our feet. It roared with glee, "However, if you want a fight, you will have it!"

Drigor whirled, seizing Samuel, and dragged him through the circle toward his maw!

I suddenly once again saw Drigor for the horrible creature he is. I threw a vial of the flammable concoction I had secured from the alchemist, but it had no effect. He sank his hideous fangs into Samuel, who screamed—oh, how he screamed!

I blacked out. When I awoke some hours later, the cage lay burned and broken, and bodies of my friends lay all

around me. It was hours more before I could think again. The circles were wrong, and it was my doing! I convinced them Drigor was lawful! The circles were worthless, and dear Ottelie—and the others—are dead.

—From the private journal of
Dr. Van Richten

As I pen the final page of this treatise, I feel a great weariness settle across my shoulders. It has taken far greater effort to create than any of my previous works, yet much less has been achieved. I feel empty.

The evil embodied by the demon is so monstrous and elusive. Still, I must believe that if not for my tragic error, the battle with Drigor would have gone differently. It is the only comfort I have as I stand over the raw earth of my friends' graves.

The demon casts death and destruction about casually, delighting in human suffering. Its monstrous power is matched only by its brilliant cunning. Remember this, and beware! My conscience weighs heavily now, and I do not need more deaths added to this burden.

Every person whom I have cared for in my life has fallen prey to the forces of evil. From my son, Erasmus, to the present day, every time I have dared to love, to hope for a happier life of quiet contentment with a like-minded companion, my dreams have been shattered. Why am I spared, time and again, when so many good and brave souls die before my eyes? I know that I committed a great evil when I first started down the path I now tread, but surely I, and those I have dared loved, have paid for that crime. Surely, justice has been served by now? This query, which no research can answer, gnaws at my soul.

I hope the few words in this book will cause the reader to beware the demon, and insure that the young men and women who take up the fight against evil will suffer less than I, and be purer of heart than I. In them lies our future and our hope.

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These are the sources used to create this work, as well as a small sampling of others particularly useful to my research. Interested readers should search out tomes to further their understanding of the enemy. Knowledge is our greatest weapon in the battle against evil.

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- Kelman, Dr. Daffyd. *Comparative Toxicology: Pestilence, Poisons and Plague Between the Species.*
- Kilday, Dr. Jethra. *Desire: The Unconscious Guide.*
- Terelleian, Archmage Jacktin. *Wizards, Magic and Magical Items: A Primer for the Serious Scholar.*
- Tellurian, Dr. A. R. H. *Premises of Magical Study.*
- Zartin the Red. *Autobiography of a Wandering Mage.*



Of all the terrors that lurk in the shadows of the RAVENLOFT campaign, fiends (even the whisper of the existence of fiends) should most chill the flesh of stalwart adventurers.

Fiends are utterly alien, creatures beyond explanation from the darkest places beyond the campaign world. They are living manifestations of evil and hatred, born of fear and torment, and fulfilled only by profaning and corrupting all around them. When facing a fiend, there is no possibility of appeal, for the creature has no sense of mercy. Unlike lichs, vampires, and other creatures of great power, a fiend has no niggling echoes of humanity and decency within it.

Worse, fiends have remarkable cunning and intelligence, and make full use of their powers to get what they want. Some have spent centuries honing their tactical and battle skills. They can draw on the knowledge of a thousand lifetimes. Add to this the fact that fiends are nearly impossible to destroy, and you have an enemy worthy of only the greatest adventurers and the most dangerous campaigns.

Because of the immense power fiends possess, the Dungeon Master should use caution when introducing one of these creatures into his campaign. The true nature and powers of these creatures are still mysteries even to the most well-prepared adventurer. The characters should always remain uncertain of just how far their enemy's powers extend.

This chapter is devoted to giving the Dungeon Master hints for creating terrifying, challenging fiend-based adventures. If a fiend is used to its utmost advantage, the process of challenging and defeating such a foe can be the crowning achievement in any adventurer's career.

However, as useful as the following material may be, it nonetheless pales beside the stories that are the origin of the fiendish themes discussed in this section. When creating a particular fiend for the campaign, Dungeon

Masters can find unlimited inspiration in classic tales of temptations, supernatural bargains gone wrong, and the consequences of accepting deals that are too good to be true. Many stories and books found at the local library, such as "The Devil and Daniel Webster," "The Monkey's Paw," *Faust*, and *Paradise Lost*, can provide ideas for developing personalities and scenarios that will hold players on the edge of their seats.

Creating Fiends

Whenever the Dungeon Master decides to use a fiend in a campaign, he must spend a certain amount of time developing its personality, motivations, and goals. Fiends are never "just monsters." They should be treated as complex, fully realized characters with goals and survival instincts at least as focused as heroes.

Fiendish Types

The first step to designing such a unique adversary is to decide what type of fiend to use. The Dungeon Master should also consider the power level of the heroes and decide what sort of fiend would be a challenge for them without automatically defeating them. The Dungeon Master decides what sorts of fiends are likely to have the chance to enter the game world through transposition or summoning.

With these criteria in mind, several types of fiends can be eliminated from consideration. From those that are left, the Dungeon Master should select the one most suited to the plot that will feature the fiend; a crusade against a succubus should have a totally different flavor than one against a pit fiend.

Fiendish Personalities

While the *PLANESCAPE MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix* details the basic personality of each type of fiend, the needs of a RAVENLOFT campaign go beyond those simple paragraphs.

Dungeon Masters need to make each fiend a unique and fully developed individual. When detailing a fiend's personality, certain questions must be carefully considered.

- Why did the fiend come to the RAVENLOFT world? Did it have a choice? Was it summoned, did it arrive through transposition, and was it aware of the possibility of imprisonment before it arrived?
- What are the fiend's main goals in the campaign and on its native plane? Does it wish to escape the campaign world, or is it relieved to be freed from its duties in the Blood War? Does it have grand objectives that it keeps secret even from other fiends?
- How does the fiend feel about being trapped in the campaign? What steps is it taking to escape? Has it been seduced by the land, and if it has, what land-based powers has it been granted? What price has it paid for these powers?
- How does the fiend interact with mortals? Does it interact directly (either in its natural form or *shapechanged*), or does it operate through minions? Is it cold and calculating, or does it enjoy becoming passionately involved in the corruption and destruction of mortals? What powers does it use the most when carrying out its plans?
- Whom does the fiend rely on (if anyone)? What sorts of minions does it require, and how does it attract them and bind them to itself? Does it reward its minions or frighten them into submission? How loyal are the minions and followers of the fiend? Do they realize what sort of creature they serve, or are they being deceived? If its minions construct a series of lies, how does it keep track of what they are doing?
- How will the fiend react if confronted by another fiend,

especially one of a type that normally rounds up and punishes those shirking their duty to the Blood War?

- Who are the fiend's enemies? Why are they at odds with it? How does this enmity affect the fiend—and the adventurers? Would they assist the heroes in trying to destroy it? Would they expect some sort of reward for doing so? And are they indeed the fiend's enemies, or are they just another layer of the fiend's lies—minions acting as if they are enemies just to ferret out the fiend's opposition?

Consider the following archetypes when creating fiendish personalities:

The Manipulator: Manipulation and deception are standard elements of the personality of almost any fiend. The fiend weaves complex plots to amuse itself, to promote evil, to ensure its survival, and to pursue its goals of power and freedom.

Masters of manipulation, fiends are especially adept at the techniques of destruction by persuasion, convincing mortals to destroy themselves and those they love. Fiends carry out much of their actions through mortal pawns whom they have possessed, seduced, or otherwise manipulated.

Much of a fiend's efforts will take the form of agreements and contracts with mortals, from the initiation of transposition and throughout its efforts to deepen the shadows of the campaign even further. All fiends, whether lawful or chaotic, are honor-bound by the strict letter of their agreements with mortals, but twist the spirit of the words, taking advantage of every vague phrase and every opportunity for willful misunderstanding.

Most fiends prefer to reveal as little as possible of their true nature to anyone other than their closest minions. They are generally skilled in arts such as *shapechanging*, *suggestion*, and other magical forms of deception. They often appear in a



helpless or sympathetic mortal guise, appealing to adventurers to aid them in some seemingly innocuous or worthy task.

The fiend's true goals should remain mysterious to all but itself, hidden beneath layers of meaning in the same way that the fiend remains hidden behind a series of agents, and shifting forms.

For example, a fiend attempting to gain control of an artifact that might turn all residents of Mordent into mindless drones under its control might use an institution of higher learning as its front. While the teachers and students at this academy espouse the lofty goals of educating even the lowliest peasant so he may become a free thinker and captain of his destiny, all new students must first spend three months in total isolation from the rest of the world. During this time, the hapless individuals are stripped of all free will and original personality through torture and spells, then "reprogrammed" into unswervingly loyal minions of the fiend.

The fiends are age-old creatures with vast experience to draw . Fiends never rely on only one plan of corruption or one means of escape, preferring to provide themselves with multiple options.

Frustrated Obsessive: The fiends that now dwell on the RAVENLOFT world

are major forces in their own right, yet are in every meaningful way as much prisoners there as the heroes are.

Fiends are accustomed to moving through many planes of existence at will; here, although a fiend may be able to cross the borders of the various domains unchallenged, it is unable to leave the RAVENLOFT world. This inability to come and go as it pleases is a painful, claustrophobic state for a creature used to traversing multiple realities with but a thought, and many fiends devote their best efforts to finding a way out.

Eventually, most fiends become so desperate to escape that they fall prey to temptation and seize some of the power they can gain by yoking themselves to the land. If such a fiend is not careful, it will find itself an integral part of the RAVENLOFT world, and thus unable to leave the land even should it manage to find some means of escape. Additionally, the fiend's circle of influence is very small to begin with, and becomes smaller with every new power the fiend accepts from the land, circumscribing it more and more.

In effect, the fiend falls victim to the same temptations it uses so readily to corrupt mortals. As it recognizes the true nature of the trap, it is not unaware of this great irony. Each fiend reacts differently to this turn of events, but most fiends find the irony unbearable.

Fiends of this kind tirelessly attempt to discover or create magical gates or other means of escape. They will often use mortal newcomers to the RAVENLOFT setting as pawns in their elaborate, long-range schemes, such as trying to fill the labyrinthine sewer systems of one city with gates leading to any number of the Abyssal Planes. When its schemes fail, the fiend vents its frustration on its pawns (an event that could spell the doom of an entire city and all but the cleverest of heroes) and grows ever more determined to prove its superiority by finding some way out. Of course, this requires more power, which evil

magical beings and forces can easily provide, but it becomes even harder to leave.

The Philosopher: A fiend such as Drigor, Van Richten's shator enemy, might take a more philosophical attitude toward being trapped in the RAVENLOFT world. Such a fiend is an erudite intellectual who takes great pleasure in attempting to dissect the nature of its circumstances. A philosopher fiend involves itself in complex studies of the nature of the world itself, sending mortal pawns into any sort of situation or location where their actions (or mere presence) is likely to answer some question about the world. These fiends use the mortals that surround them as a scientist uses rats in a laboratory.

Of course, such a fiend's curiosity and intellectual exploration do not in any way mitigate its utter, vicious evil. Rather, its evil will often come through most clearly in the cold and callous way it uses sentient mortals in its experiments, inflicting untold physical, mental, and emotional suffering in the pursuit of knowledge. Whether it operates in a quiet laboratory, tricks heroes into entering the vast emptiness of the Shadow Rift, or incites a war to study mass hysteria, the fiend cares nothing for any being other than itself.

To these ends, the philosopher fiend may roam the lands in whatever guise best suits its purpose, or it may remain in a particular laboratory or library for decades. Even more than its freedom, such a fiend desires to control what it views as the immense evil possible within the campaign. It is doomed to fail, but it will pursue this goal nonetheless.

The Blood Warrior: Although residents of the game world are unaware that fiends have their own societies and social structures on their home plane, fiends have not forgotten their heritage.

Certain fiends (for example, the gelugon and balor) remain primarily focused on the Blood War, the epic

conflict between the baatezu and tanar'ri for the total control of all that is evil. The ultimate goal of this type of fiend is still victory for itself and its kin, even if that contest is far removed from the campaign world. In fact, this fiend may have originally come to the game world to harvest minions to serve as slaves or other pawns in the war.

Although still obsessed with finding a way to leave the campaign world, this type of fiend constantly pursues raw power so that it can return in triumph to the Outer Planes. For the Blood Warrior, nothing would be worse than to escape confinement but report to its superiors that it spent a century doing nothing for the cause. Because of the fiend's perceived need for power and resources, it is more likely to come into direct conflict with the campaign world's evil powers, and the heroes may be caught in the middle.

The Blood Warrior recruits mortals tainted by the campaign's evil powers, makes deals with powerful evil beings, and does anything else that might give it an edge when it returns to its home plane.

This fiend also carries the rivalries of the Blood War with it into the game world, and if it learns of the presence of any other fiends (particularly one from the opposing side), it will likely seek to continue the war on this new battleground.

For example, if the Whistling Fiend entered Nova Vaasa, the Black Duke would undoubtedly learn of its presence. Being of a fanatical military mindset, the Black Duke would use all its might, including loyal cultists and its own fiendish powers, to destroy this "enemy scout." Since it is standard procedure on the Outer Planes to wage war with little concern for collateral damage, this miniature version of the Blood War could devastate entire regions of the RAVENLOFT campaign, and averting such a collision of evil is the stuff of epic tales.

The Servant of Evil: This fiend dedicates itself to building a power base and expanding its domain on the RAVENLOFT world. Whether it is conscious of this servitude or not, this fiend has been seduced by local evil forces commanding powerful magic. It is so tied to the world now that its desire and efforts to return to the other planes have greatly weakened. The power offered by local evil beings, and the many souls on the world for the taking, have seduced this fiend as thoroughly as the fiend has ever seduced a mortal. As with its mortal victims, a fiend seduced to remain on the world has lost its self-control, self-will, and ability to forge its own destiny. It is trapped.

The primary interests of this fiend are now the expansion of its own pocket domain in the reality wrinkle (an impossible task, given the nature of its bargains with the world's evil powers); increasing its personal power; and influencing more mortals to fall under the sway of evil. If fiends were not so utterly evil, it might be truly pitiable to find a fiend that believes it is struggling to break free of the world when all the while it works to further enslave itself.

Heroes are likely to encounter this kind of fiend serving as the head of a cult that is devoted to new and magnanimous gods. The deities of this pantheon will always be touted as watching over the cultists, and as growing stronger from their acting out their innermost desires. Services always take place out-of-doors in natural settings, and it is likely that this fiendish cult will be mistaken for a twisted kind of druidic order. However, the violent and depraved nature of the worshipers—and their leader—should soon dispel such confusion. Soon, it should become evident that this cult is working to drain power from the land, to strengthen their leader so he may “travel to the Great Beyond.”

(Of course, a fiend who recognizes the intimate connection of the

Demiplane of Dread domain lords to their lands may seek to establish such a connection for itself. Such a fiend may try to destroy a domain lord rather than forge an alliance, hoping to gain control over the entire domain. The heroes may even be pressed into service or used as pawns by one side or the other.)

Other personalities and combinations of the above personalities are possible, and should be dictated by the needs of the Dungeon Master's plot. Once the basic personality of a fiend has been determined, certain finishing details should be added.

Land-based Powers

The Dungeon Master should consider the land-based powers the fiend may have received. The interaction between the fiend and the world's evil powers has trapped it with the promise of that power, so each fiend therefore claims different powers from the land. Dungeon Masters should feel free to develop unique land-based powers besides those described in this volume. Such powers, designed with attention to balance and playability, add to the flavor of a campaign and keep the characters wary.

Weaknesses

The Dungeon Master should create flaws and weaknesses in addition to the ones mentioned in Van Richten's discussion. These can be flaws in the fiend's character or judgment as well as physical weaknesses. Each fiend should have some weakness that the heroes can exploit, some chink in its apparent invulnerability, so the heroes have a chance of defeating it with skill, good roleplaying, and determination.

One possible weakness is overconfidence. Because they are among the most powerful beings in the world, fiends may underestimate opponents. A fiend may be bored from its long years of imprisonment and

decide to play with dangerous adventurers for amusement.

Another fiend may have a tendency toward procrastination or habitually overplan its schemes. Having centuries of life behind them and contemplating such a long span in their futures, many fiends take a long time in planning and are perhaps too meticulous. Or, they feel that *tomorrow* is as good a time to respond to something as today.

Finally, a fiend's own love of tangled webs of deception may be its weakness. Masters of deceit, fiends are often unable or unwilling to trust others, even their allies. Some fiends may be incapable of uttering the truth even when doing so might serve them better.

Regardless of weaknesses, the Dungeon Master must always bear the fiend's cunning and intelligence in mind. Under most usual circumstances, a fiend is more than intelligent enough to compensate for its weaknesses; its failings will only become evident if the heroes succeed in rattling the creature first.

Writing Fiend Adventures

Four core themes, together or separately, should play a role in an adventure featuring a fiend: deception, corruption, terror, and devastation. When a party crosses paths with one of these entities, it is a major campaign event, with ramifications not soon forgotten. When heroes tangle with fiends, they should feel lucky to return with their lives and alignments intact.

Deception

The fiends trapped in the RAVENLOFT world have frighteningly dark intellects and practice deception on a grand scale to achieve their ends. Adventures centering around deception, as many or most adventures involving fiends will, contain layer upon layer of agents and hidden meaning. Nothing will be as it seems.



Entire campaigns can be built around the theme of deception, with the party striving to separate fact from fiction, to discover the whole truth, and to learn the identity of their nemesis.

A common element of an adventure based on deception will be the pitfalls of bargaining with a fiend. Fiends adeptly prey on mortals in their moments of weakness, offering quick and easy solutions to seemingly insurmountable problems, or promises of wealth and power to those who covet material success. Bargains struck with these monsters may result in some short-term gain, but in the long run the hidden cost of the bargain takes its toll.

Mortals who rely on a fiend rather than themselves are drawn into a cycle of dependency. They become so accustomed to relying on the fiend and its powers (even when those powers deliver less than what was promised or exact a terrible price) that they find themselves no longer able to exist on their own. They become creatures without free will, pawns to the powers of darkness. Trapped, the victims are doomed to watch their downfall approach.

In an adventure of deception, the heroes seek to right what went wrong, or perhaps to find the cause of the distress and avenge themselves or their friend. However, such investigations can lead the heroes

onto the trail of the fiend and can also provide clues about the nature, powers, and motives of the enemy. *It is very difficult for the heroes to truly solve the problems that put them on this path, for they generally cannot change the past, cannot force the fiend to change the past, and dare not bargain with the fiend for satisfaction lest further disaster result. Perhaps, then, they can embark on a quest to prevent the fiend from completing the corruption of another mortal, averting a similar disaster elsewhere—or perhaps the fiend tricks them into an unwitting bargain that traps them in its web of deceit as well.*

Another possibility for adventure sees the fiend directly manipulating the heroes or their enemies to serve its own goals or needs. Either in disguise or through agents, the fiend hires the heroes or provides them with some information concerning a monster, treasure, or mystery that they are sure to act. *Regardless of the quest, the efforts and suffering of the heroes go to further the cause of this foul creature. Often, the heroes may not even realize they have been used to further evil until after the damage sought by the fiend has been done.*

A fiend might also use the characters' greatest desires against them by appearing to be a friend. It might, for example, urge them to build or discover a portal out of the campaign world, supporting them against all who oppose them. In such an adventure, the fiend is less likely to harm the characters, for they are, in effect, acting as its minions. Once the portal is secured, the fiend would use its powers to go through and try to destroy it so the characters cannot follow. Of course, as it escapes, the fiend would reveal its true nature, leaving the heroes trapped in the game world knowing they had loosed a great evil on countless unsuspecting realities.

One thing for Dungeon Masters to remember is to give the heroes glimpses of the truth through the lies, even in a campaign built entirely around deception. First, this allows them to eventually defeat the fiend, if they are cunning enough; while fiends are terribly intelligent, they are fallible. Second, there are few things more terrifying than for the heroes to be stranded on an island, surrounded by a stormy sea, only to learn from a hermit that their supposed benefactor is, at that very moment, preparing to slay the maiden they were trying to protect.

Corruption

A central motivation of all fiends is to steal the souls of mortals with evil. Fiends seduce them with promises of their heart's desire, and thus lure them down the path of darkness. Attempting to halt or reverse the effects of such corruption can make for fascinating and challenging adventures.

On a societal level, the corruption spawned by a fiend is often manifested in bizarre cults, which some lawful fiends find amusing or useful. These fiends promise riches, power, or rewards in the afterlife to their followers in exchange for unswerving devotion, rigid intolerance, and violence to achieve the fiends' ends. Another symptom of fiendish taint may be disorganized pseudoreligions devoted solely to debauchery or random acts of violence (the cults of a chaotic fiend).

The heroes may be drawn into action against a fiendish cult by opposing social policies that the cult is trying to impose. They may anger the fiend by defending innocent villagers. The heroes may also be hired or volunteer to attack or defend against marauding cultists, or may encounter groups of cultists working against them while they are on what they believed to be an adventure completely unrelated to any of these issues. Exploring the origins of the cult or penetrating deeper into the inner circle of believers then

leads the heroes to evidence of the existence of a fiend.

Combining such a plot with the theme of deception, a campaign might feature a cult that is believed by the general populace to be devoted to good. Even the heroes are occasional agents of the cultists and their grandfatherly leader, the "master of the one true path." However, they gradually uncover that the master is actually a fiend, and that which the cult promotes as light is actually the blackest evil. In their attempts to unmask and thwart the evil, the characters become outcasts, hunted by friends and foes alike; not only must they guard against the fiend's evil servants, but they must be leery of those of good heart who have been misguided. The heroes are in a race against the fiend for the fate of an entire community.

On an individual level, the heroes might battle the corrupting effects of a fiend by attempting to save a person (perhaps even a hero!) who has been possessed by a fiend, or who is in the process of transposition. Adventures like these, fought over the battleground of the mortal spirit, present exceptional opportunities for roleplaying and character development. Saving an individual from transposition is extraordinarily difficult, as is wresting someone from the grasp of a fiend. Yet while the risks are great, the heroic reward is equally great.

Terror

From the time we were very small, we have feared things we do not understand. For some of us, monsters hid in the closets. For others, things lurked under our beds at nights. And there were always those strange, unexplainable sounds. Fiends are perhaps the ultimate terror for mortals in our realms. They come from the outer darkness—inexplicable, alien, extraordinarily powerful and utterly evil.

Fiends are not native to the RAVENLOFT campaign setting. No one, not even Dr. Van Richten, knows the true extent of fiends' abilities. This unknown quality of fiends lends itself to terror.

A creative Dungeon Master can exploit the powers and mystery of fiends to promote an exhilarating sense of terror. The raw physical power of a fiend in a direct confrontation is enough to stun (and easily defeat) low- to moderate-level adventuring parties. But the true terror that a party may experience reaches beyond that superficial level. The magical and mental abilities of a fiend can defeat a party even more easily than its physical power, and the sense of an omnipotent or omniscient adversary manipulating events from behind the scenes can cause great fear and frustration.

One adventure might involve the heroes being stranded in some remote, desolate region, perhaps a barren plain. Low on supplies and possibly injured, they find themselves stalked by a mysterious being that is picking them off one by one. This is a fiend that is toying with the party, starting by killing off lower-level companions of the heroes. Weapons and spells have seemingly no effect on the monster, and just as it seems hopeless, they come upon a magical healing spring and the shack of a humble mystic. The mystic has just the herbs needed to ward off the fearsome beast, but she needs the heroes to perform a small service for her. The "mystic" is really the fiend in disguise, and the heroes might just be frightened enough to enter into a bargain with it.

Devastation

Beneath their varied exteriors, fiends have one thing in common: They come from the Lower Planes—the battlegrounds of the eternal Blood War. They are warriors, capable of massive carnage. As the heroes learn more



about their enemy, the threat of terrible destruction should hang over them like a cloud.

The theme of devastation can be introduced into the campaign from the outset. The party may hear of incidents of mysterious deaths, mutilations, or even the destruction of entire villages and small towns. The cause is a fiend that has gone mad during its imprisonment in the game world. Or, perhaps it suits some fiendish purpose to have minions roam the countryside slaying at will. The sheer brutality of these acts should keep any heroes worth their salt on the creature's tail, even after they learn that it has the power to kill them ten times over.

Beyond the threat of physical destruction lies the threat and the reality of the destruction of the mortal spirit, or the destruction of the emotional framework or the intellectual frame of reference of the heroes or characters. This type of destruction, in which the worldview of the characters is shattered, is a common result of a fiend's activity.

A possible scenario could revolve around a long-lost love of a hero. When young, his first love was a charming and stunningly beautiful woman. He left on an adventure, only to find her gone when he returned; he has pined for her ever since. Now a

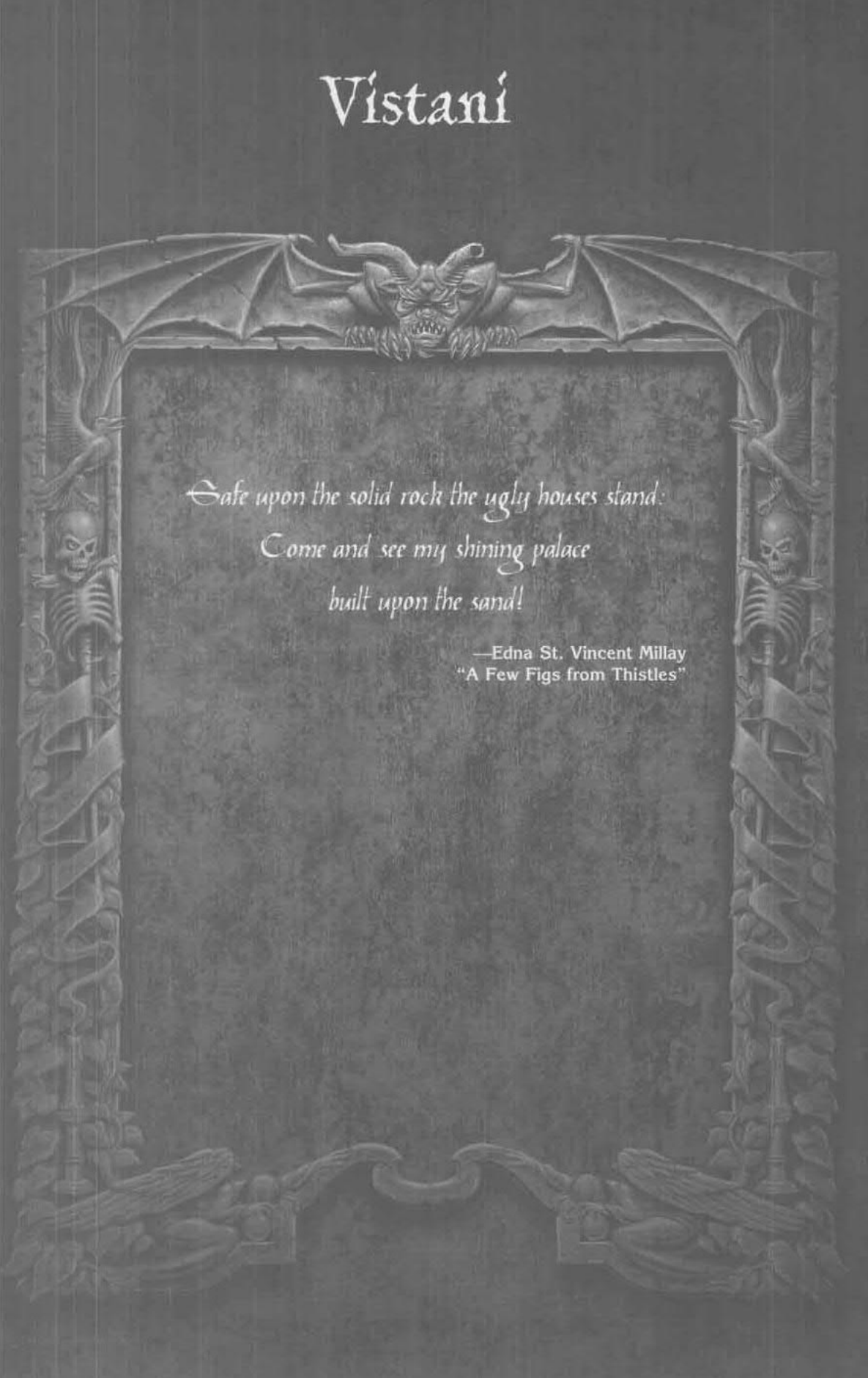
champion of goodness of growing renown, he and his companions are hot on the trail of a serial killer who targets young lovers. The hero discovers that the love he has considered ideal was all a sham: His beloved is an erinyes who would have slain him had she had the chance. Now, driven insane by a failed power ritual, the erinyes is preying on all who love. The hero and his companions will have to destroy her before the hero pays the ultimate price for once loving a fiend in the body of a woman.

Once heroes encounter a fiend, once they have been exposed to its multilayered schemes and lies where the appearance of ultimate good might simply be a veneer over the blackest evil, they may never be certain of their place in the world again.

As Dr. Van Richten warned in his introduction to this volume, "Those who fight the good fight always risk the possibility of wounds that may never heal, wounds of the spirit." Fiends touch the darkest of humanity, and in doing so they color even the brightest within. While the dying vow of a fiend—a vow that the hero will come to see that all he considered wholesome is truly that which is foul and putrid—is just one final, empty lie, the heroes will always be uncertain whether they have been tainted by the experience or not, and never again will they know for sure if they are truly on the side of good.

While the heroes may destroy a fiend, even to the point of blasting its very essence into nonexistence, the very exposure to its evil may haunt them for the rest of their lives. Even in their victory, they suffer a degree of defeat. If a Dungeon Master can properly convey this emotion, then the group has captured the true horror behind fiends.

Vistani



*Safe upon the solid rock the ugly houses stand:
Come and see my shining palace
built upon the sand!*

—Edna St. Vincent Millay
“A Few Figs from Thistles”

SECTION, THE SECOND:

*We are the music-makers,
And we are the dreamers of dreams,
Wandering by lone sea breakers,
And sitting by desolate streams;
World-losers and world-forsakers,
On whom the pale moon gleams:
Yet we are the movers and shakers
Of the world forever, it seems.*

—Arthur William Edgar O'Shaughnessy
"Ode"

INTRODUCTION



For more than three decades, now, I have undertaken to investigate and expose creatures of darkness to the purifying light of truth and knowledge. "Hero" I am named in some circles; "sage" and "master hunter" I am called in others. That I have survived countless supernatural assaults is a marvel among my peers; my name is spoken with fear and loathing among my foes.

In truth, this "virtuous" calling began as an obsessive effort to destroy a vampire who murdered my child, and it has become for me a tedious and bleak career. Perhaps Lord Azalin enjoys the mantle of nobility as he sits at Castle Avernus, but nobility is a dead weight hung from my own neck, and it grows heavier each passing day. Even as my life of hunting monsters began, I felt the weight of time on my weary shoulders. Today I am a man who has simply lived too long. Like a regretful lich (as I suspect Lord Azalin to be!), I find myself inextricably bound to an existence I sought in madness and, seemingly, must now endure for all eternity. Of course I shall die, but whether I shall ever rest in my grave haunts my idle thoughts, and torments me in my dreams.

By now, I can consider myself an expert on vampires, ghosts, liches, lycanthropes, golems, mummies, and all their ilk. Much have I written concerning

these evil creatures, and many of them have been properly expunged from the world as a result. Yet I do not believe that this land of ours is any purer for my efforts. And I must wonder: How many brave young heroes have sought glory, armed with my research, and met unspeakable ends in spite of it? How many have died (and worse) through some crucial omission of fact, some subtle failure to report the whole truth about one of those monsters? How many of my own, precious comrades have suffered—perished—as I collected data for my infamous guidebooks? Was there ever so ignominious a scholar as myself?

It matters little that my beloved friends and comrades-at-arms entered freely into my company. Small compensation that many of them have expressed a profound sense of fulfillment in aiding my cause, even in the midst of their premature death throes. The indisputable fact remains that I am ever awash in their blood, drowning in guilt, surely lost to redemption for my part in their destruction.

Without doubt, to accept my company is to embrace doom, and I cannot deny awareness of that fact. From the very beginning of my quest to destroy creatures of evil, I have carried Death itself with me like a virulent disease, infecting all who dared to walk with me!

A Confession

I expect that those who think me a hero will change their minds when they know

the whole truth about my life as a hunter of the unnatural. Nevertheless, I must reveal, here and now, that I have been the indirect yet certain cause of many deaths, and the loss of many good friends. Mistake me not! I do not merely feel sorry for myself. Rather, I come to grips with a devastating realization:

Though I would not at first acknowledge it, and for quite some time could not even concede the possibility, I now see that I am the object of a baneful Vistani curse. More tragically, the nature of this hex is such that I have not borne the brunt; instead, far worse, those who surround me have fallen victim to it! Let me go back to the beginning, to the day I became an unwitting tool of darkness, and enhance the reader's perspective with the whole truth, withheld until now.

In my *Guide to Vampires*, I related the tragic story of how my only child Erasmus was taken by Vistani and sold to the vampire Baron Metus. I explained how Erasmus was made a minion of the night stalker, and how it was my miserable part to free him from that fate at the point of a stake. Finally, I recounted the woeful loss of my beautiful wife Ingrid, murdered by that same Baron Metus in retaliation for my successful (if one could call it that) reclaiming of my son.

All that is true enough, and it pains me still these many years later. What I have neglected to illuminate is how I tracked those Vistani kidnappers across the land, or how I "extracted" Erasmus's whereabouts from them. To think back on it fills me with remorse and self-loathing, yet I must let the full truth be told before I can proceed to the subject of this, my latest treatise.

In fact, the Vistani took Erasmus with my own, unwitting permission. They had brought an extremely ill member of their tribe to me one evening and insisted that I treat him, but I was unable to save the young man's life. In fear of their retribution, I begged the Vistani to take anything of mine if they would only withhold their terrifying powers, of which I knew nothing. To my

lasting astonishment, they chose to surreptitiously take my son in exchange for their loss! By the time I realized what had occurred, they were already an hour gone.

Incensed beyond reason, I strapped the body of the dead Vistana to my horse and doggedly followed that caravan through the woods of western Darkon, naively allowing the sun to set before me without seeking shelter from the night. Shortly after darkness fell, I was beset by monsters who would have slain me, had not Lord Azalin himself intervened and spared my life, for reasons that I do not completely understand. He somehow detected me and, with his powerful magic, took control of a pack of zombies that wandered in the forest. He spoke to me through the mouths of the dead things, a feat doubtless easy for him to perform if he is, as I believe him to be, a wizard-lich.

In short, Lord Azalin placed a magical ward against undead on me, then animated the dead Vistana and bade me learn if it still possessed the ability to travel by magical means common to all Vistani, and thereby find its people. Unfortunately (I say in hindsight), the plan worked. I found the child-stealers, but my unwelcome entourage included a growing horde of voracious undead that could not touch me, thanks to Azalin's ward.

There is only a little more to tell, but it is the most difficult to report. I make no excuses for my actions: Indeed, none can be made. When I found the caravan, I threatened to set the zombies on the Vistani unless they returned my dear boy. They replied that he had been sold to Baron Metus.

Something inside me snapped. I went insane with fury and released the zombies, and the entire tribe was eaten alive! I brought about the horrifying deaths of them all! Yet the story has not ended.

Before she died, the leader cursed me, saying, "*Live you always among monsters, and see everyone you love die beneath their claws!*" Even now, so many years later, I can hear her words with painful clarity. A short time later,

SECTION, THE SECOND:

Erasmus and Ingrid were ruthlessly torn from my loving arms, and I foolishly believed that the curse had exacted its deadly toll. I wept until an insatiate desire for vengeance filled the bottomless rift in my heart.

Now, after more than three decades of bloodshed and agony and loss, it has slowly dawned on me that the Vistana's curse had never slaked its own thirst for revenge. Reluctantly determined to know the truth, I at last consulted with Inarin Alster, a diviner wizard of no small ability, and he confirmed my worst fears!

The curse lingers even to this day, and all the true and stalwart friends I have known and lost are victims, not of outrageous fortune, but of my actions. True to the words of the dying Vistana, my life has been shielded from fate again and again, while those whom I esteem above any treasure have taken my place! For my nearly forgotten act of hatred, I have served up the flesh of my most cherished companions to feed the appetites of darkest powers!

When the horrifying enormity of my revelation swept over me, I railed bitterly at the cruel irony of my life. I recklessly swore to burn every word I had ever written, and very nearly did so. I even contemplated deliberately ending my wretched existence in the most violent of ways. Most of all, I cursed the Vistani, who had made a monster of me and a mockery of my most noble aspirations, and I swore to murder every last Vistana I could find.

Thankfully, patience and wisdom stayed my hand. Drained of all spirit, I cast myself into bed and wept, as I had not done since my former, blissful life was forever ripped from me.

That very same night, I awakened from my nightmares with a start, for my well-ingrained instincts told me I was not alone. I sat up abruptly and stared about my bedroom, quickly focusing on a dark figure seated in the corner chair. As I struggled to part the void between sleep and wakefulness, the remnants of my night terrors took the intruder's shape and seemed to advance upon me

with deadly intent. Witless and frightened, I cried out like a snatched babe in the jaws of a fleeing wolf.

"Fear not, Rudolph Van Richten," said a gravelly, male voice. "I am come to heal you. I am come to heal us both."

Hastily I lit a lantern by my bed and held up the light to see my uninvited visitor. By then I had steeled myself against the unexpected. Yet still I gasped aloud, for the man had the look of a darkling, a creature who was once a Vistana but was cast out of his tribe for breaking a law or taboo. My first thought was that he had come to murder me as a means to appease his former people. Dark-skinned and gaunt, he gazed at me with eyes that burned cold. His bony hands rested in his lap, yet his long, jagged fingers flexed slightly, as if he might suddenly lash out at me.

I seized the silver dagger which I keep beneath my pillow and brandished it at him, yet he made no move except to smile grimly.

"I am Arturi Radanavich," he told me, and waited for the name to sink in. Sink in it did.

Radanavich was the surname of the Vistani tribe that stole my son, and whom I slaughtered in revenge! My jaw dropped in remembered horror.

"Yes, the same," he said in response. "I am the sole survivor of that terrible night so long ago, when you gave my people to the undead, though I was only a child then."

"I thought no one had survived."

"I hid in my Nana's *varado*, in a chest of magical clothing. The monsters would not touch it."

After an awkward moment, I mumbled, "What do you want of me?"

"I am come to heal you."

"Heal me? What do you mean?"

"You are cursed by my tribe, Dr. Rudolph Van Richten, as you now finally realize, to live forever among monsters and see all whom you love die by them."

"Yes," I growled. "I know."

"But I, too, am cursed—by you."

"By me?"

"Do you not recall? No sooner did Nana lay her curse on you than you

returned a deadly curse of your own. I will never forget the sound of your voice as you cried, 'Undeak take you as you have taken my son!'

"Yes, I have been pursued these many years by the walking dead. They follow me wherever I go, like a golem tracking its creator, and they make me an outcast. No tribe will grant me asylum. No Vistana or *giorgio* will take pity on me. Nothing removes the taint you have put on the name of Radanavich!"

Giorgio. I recognized the term Vistani use among themselves to signify outsiders, but vocabulary was not my overriding concern. "Can you blame me?" I cried, suddenly transported to the past. "You stole my child and sold him to a vampire!"

Arturi struggled with his own wrath, but he held up his hand in a gesture of placation. "I know, and that is why I am here. I wish to break our mutual curse."

I was stunned. "How can you do that?"

"I have the power to break the curse my Nana laid, but first you must lift your own."

"Again, how?"

For a moment, the exiled Vistana's face betrayed some carefully concealed pain or remorse. "Forgiveness!" he finally blurted. "You must forgive us."

My heart hardened at the thought. "No! That I can never do!"

"Then there is no cure for the curse," said Arturi, his face dark. "And there is no more to discuss." He arose and strode in the direction of the door.

"Wait!" I cried. He paused and turned. "I do not refuse you on a malicious whim. Tell me, how can I absolve the Vistani of evil when all I have known of them is cruelty beyond humanity?"

"The Vistani are not cruel, not evil! You *giorgios* hate them, for it is through fear that you see them. If you studied them as you have studied so many true monsters, then perhaps you would understand that."

Hope's first rays shot into the black void of my heart. Of course! That was the answer!

"Then teach me, Arturi," I told him. "Tell me about the Vistani, and help me to understand so that I may forgive."

A smile slowly spread across the man's face. "Perhaps I can do better. I cannot live among my people, but neither am I hated by them. I will take you among them, that you may learn their ways and comprehend life through their eyes.

"Your name is not well loved among the Vistani, Dr. Van Richten. They will not treat you with respect, though they may well treat you with fear—in that common emotion you may at least understand one another. But for my part, I believe they will tolerate you. Perhaps, in time, we can all accept each another.

"A curse brings no joy to the heart of a Vistana, my . . . friend. Only the powers of hatred which rule this land profit by it. Let us destroy the evil together, and allow the past to assume its proper place in our lives!"

He approached me, holding out his hand, and I took it with both of mine.

"Yes!" I said, suddenly filled with a sense of hope that I had forgotten existed. That brief and shining moment became the genesis of this, my *Guide to the Vistani*.

The Vistani are a complex people, with ancient roots that sink into the past beyond their own reckoning, so it is difficult to impart an objective representation of their culture. The only way to truly know them is to be one of them. Even such a rare *giorgio* as myself, who has shared their campfires and listened to their mournful hearts, cannot ever completely comprehend them.

What I can assure the reader is that these people are not to be trifled with. They are not nearly as malevolent as the subjects of my previous works, but they can be just as dangerous. They will not allow any familiarity. Those who have read this book, beware! To the contrary, they might perceive any who know of their ways as a threat. Never approach them lightly, as there is little hope for mercy if you enrage them. My own life should be ample proof of that.

SECTION, THE SECOND:

There is something in October sets the gypsy blood astir.

—William Bliss Carman
“A Vagabond Song”

CHAPTER ONE: HISTORY AND LEGENDS



do not believe that any Vistana (for that is the singular term, while Vistani is the plural) could be convinced to settle down

and claim a permanent home; a spirit of freedom and wanderlust permeates every fiber of his or her being. In a very real sense, a Vistana who ceases to wander also ceases to be a Vistana.

Nevertheless, every tribe has a legend of a homeland, recalled in bittersweet fondness and told in a voice animated by a spark of wistful hope, as if the eternal drifters expect to one day regain their blissful seat and never leave it again. Each night, when the indigo heavens shimmer with stars, they gather around their bonfire for a ritual they call the *prastonata*, wherein the Vistani dance and sing until the children's heads begin to nod. Finally, as the flames wink out, leaving behind a bed of embers that radiates waves of red and orange, the musicians rest and the tribal elders begin the *doroq*, telling tales of the home they left behind in days beyond memory. Time upon time they recount these same stories. I am sure the children hear them even in their dreams, so the words will never be lost, although their subject may never be found.

I have heard many Vistani legends, some translated by a Vistana youth who whispered in my ear while the elder spoke in the *patterna*, their curious “patchwork” language. The stories are masterpieces of folklore, lovely and varied, yet I have come to perceive common threads among them, in addition to their focus upon a lost homeland.

Most significant of these threads is the notion that the Vistani have been severed from their roots for some crime committed against the gods or some other superior being. Almost as

important is the corollary idea which postulates that those who exiled the Vistani were flawed themselves, if not evil altogether. Such myths explain much about the attitudes and demeanor of the Vistani, who are at once a contrite and defiant race. Stained by some primordial failing, they are nonetheless scornful of those who judge them, for in their mythos, the judges are certainly no better. It is to these conflicting influences in their history that the Vistani attribute their dread power to lay curses.

The unique skills celebrated in legend variants essentially define each “nation” of Vistani peoples. I use the term nation with hesitation, knowing it conjures in the reader images of land ownership and settlement. I prefer *tasques*, the term the Vistani use among themselves, to designate cultural and familial separation. Chapter Three describes in great detail the three *tasques* that wander this land of ours, and the distinctive tribes within them, but at this point I shall only name them. The *tasques* are the Kaldresh (CALL dresh), providers of services; the Boemians (boh AY me anz), the entertainers; and the Manusa (mah NEW sah), the workers of arcane powers.

The final universal motif in Vistani folklore is an immense sadness which belies their often idyllic lifestyle. Since I am not “of the blood,” as they say, I cannot ever fully comprehend this internal dichotomy. A Vistana is characterized by self-imposed nomadism, yet beneath this veneer of complete freedom lies a perplexed yearning for something which can never be. Quite often, we *giorgios* detect a faraway look in Vistani eyes, and attribute it to vision that somehow transcends our own. I rather suspect they are forever preoccupied with questions that pierce them to the heart, and to which they have no answers.

It would be a simple thing to fill the pages of this book with captivating Vistani legends, but I have chosen the

following three myths to document the points I have made above.

The Vanquished Conqueror

The tale of a great subjugator who led the Vistani far from their homes, only to abandon them to fate—this story is eloquently recited with only slight variations by the Kamii, Equaar, and Vatraska tribes, which are all members of the Kaldresh *tasque*. The Vistani were not soldiers—indeed, no Vistana I have ever met accounted himself a warrior—but rather smiths, animal handlers, and healers, on which a far-ranging army depends. In this tale, their “crime” was following a failed champion, for which they were stranded far from their native land. Cut off from the way back by spiteful *giorgios*, they wander, forlorn and hungry, in search of a new path to the “home forge.”

Of particular interest in the following myth is the name of the conqueror: Vistan, from which the Kaldresh derive the name given to them by *giorgios*. I asked one Vatraska captain (not “chief”) if his tribe accepted or rejected the term Vistani, and he answered, “The ignorant know not how to address their betters, and there is little profit in correcting them.”

Note that bracketed additions are necessary when translating the Vistani *patterna*, as much of that language is composed of concepts which have no direct translation into other tongues. See my notes in Chapter Two for examples.

The Tale of Vistan

Vistan was not our king, nor was he our enemy, but his ambition was great and his army mighty. Westward he marched before thousands of legions, to conquer the world and make it his own.

Vistan was not our king, nor was he our enemy, but his [resources] were great and his army well provisioned. Westward we followed him, to forge his weapons (or “shoe his horses,” or “heal his wounded,” depending on the tribe telling the story).

Vistan was not our king, nor was he our enemy. His cause was not ours, nor

were his spoils of war, yet his defeat was thrust upon us. In the land called Transyl, the conqueror was crushed by warriors of a nameless god, and all his legions were made slaves.

We were not, ourselves, brought into bondage, for Vistan was not our king, but neither were we allowed to return to the home forge, for the Transylites decreed that none should return with word of what had befallen Vistan and his armies. “Vistani” they named us, and made us [beggars], and promised they would murder us if our vardos ever faced east.

Then Kaldresh rose among us and spoke of a vision which taught him that the world was round, and he promised we should find the home forge if we continued moving always west.

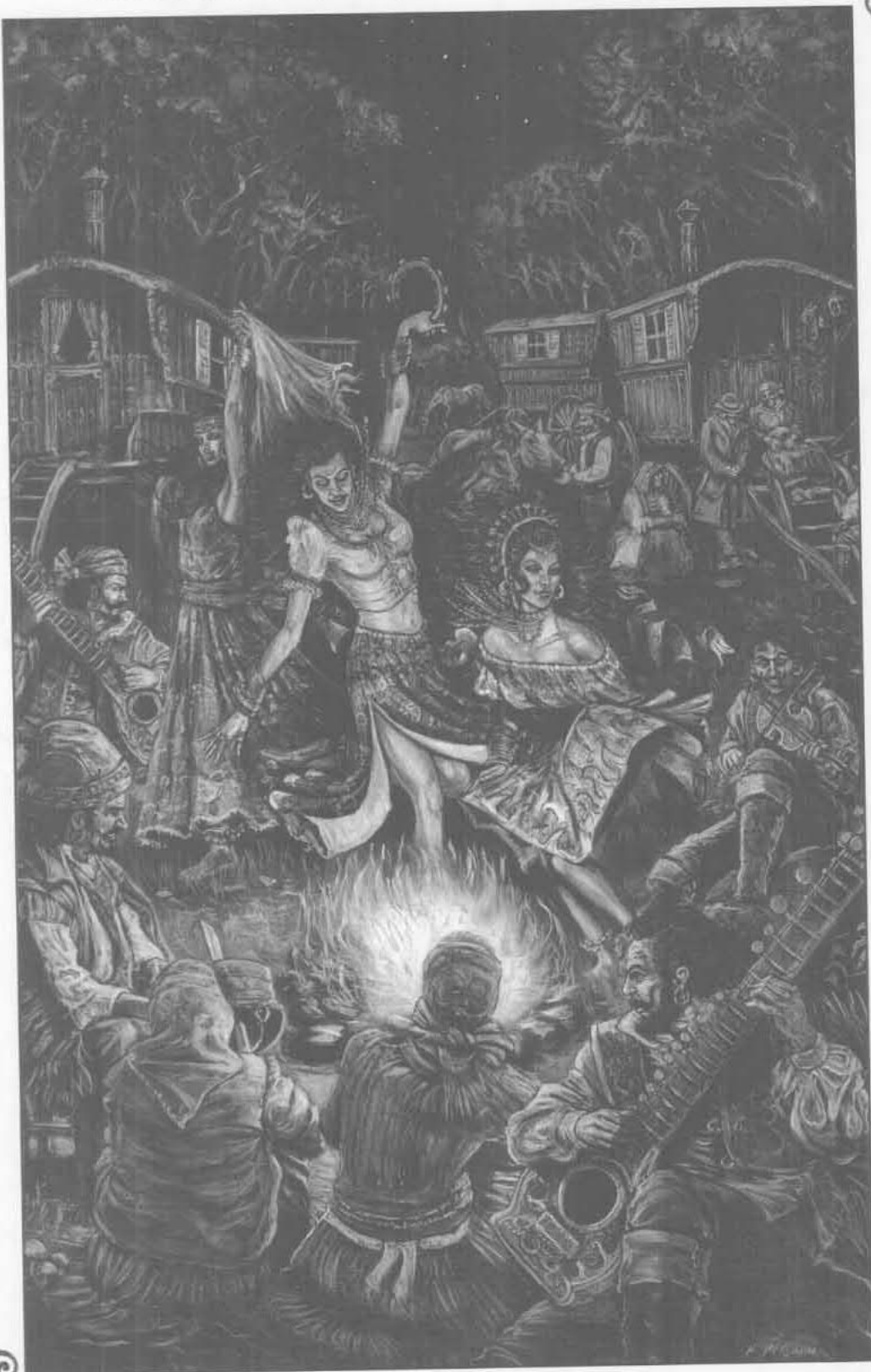
Vistan was not our king, nor was he our enemy, yet forever we bear his name and his fate, for the world is truly flat, and we shall never see our homeland again.

As an interesting aside, the Zarovan tribe (of the Manusa *tasque*) tells a variant of this myth in which a great warrior by the name of Strahd (presumably an ancestor of Barovia’s Lord Zarovich) actually conquered the world, but he would not give the Vistani a place in it because they had never sworn allegiance to him. In this case, however, the Vistani were forever trapped within Strahd’s new realm, never to see their beloved home forge again.

The Forlorn Wanderer

The Naiat and Corvara tribes, which both identify themselves as members of the Boem *tasque*, are perhaps the most self-pitying of the Vistani peoples. In the privacy of their camps, there is a sour bitterness in the tone of their voices, which scorns the world and flouts authority. When they engage in the *prastonata*, dancing for their own entertainment, the music and choreography are tempestuous, filled with barely constrained rage and heart-rending anguish. Similarly, their tales are dark and tragic, as if glory itself were but a flickering pinpoint of light in a sea of black, roiling muck.

SECTION, THE SECOND:



The song of the forlorn wanderer, commonly called "The Splintering" among the Boemians, is as woeful a parable as I have ever heard. Its rhythms and intonations in the *patterna* are reminiscent of the Vistani violin, with strains that pierce the spirit and evoke tears with the silver clarity of their mournful note. I find it ironic in the extreme that the Boemians are entertainers, engendering mirth and festivities as they travel; their lore is anything but cheerful.

The Splintering

*Why do you [wander], O maker of music?
Why do your strings weep?*

Why do you starve?

Because I have no home.

Because I have no hope.

Because I have no [harvest] to reap.

Where are your roots, O [wandering] slave?

Where are your ancestors?

Where are your gardens of plenty?

Torn from the soil.

Torn from the memory.

Torn from the feeble hands of my children.

How can this be, O tearful wretch?

How can this happen?

How can this go on?

Because I [murdered] my friend.

Because I [murdered] my comfort.

Because I [murdered] my place in the sun.

Why did you do this, O miserable one?

Why did you [murder]?

Why did you [kill] one you called friend?

He stole my true love.

He stole my own heart.

He stole my only reason to live.

What will you do, O cursed fool?

What will you suffer?

What will you do to make amends?

Nothing but [wander].

Nothing but starve.

Nothing but play my melancholy violin.

When will it end, O pitiable fetch?

When will it rest?

When will it all be over for you?

Never, never, never, never, never . . .

Of all the Vistani, members of the Boem *tasque* are most prone to lash out at the world, for they are bitter over their lot, even though they would not accept another lifestyle. The Boemians are largely responsible for the Vistani reputation of being thieves and cutthroats, if any such infamy is deserved. In particular, the families of the Corvara tribe are known as vendors of poison, confidence racketeers, and smugglers. If a person desires to acquire certain objects and services of little interest or use to respectable folk—spying, forbidden lore, evil potions, skeleton keys, and so forth—it is common knowledge that the Corvara know where such commodities may be located, and such is their bitterness toward life that no sense of morality stays their hands.

I must momentarily pause and submit that my opinions in this particular subject may be biased: The Radanavich family that stole my son belonged to the Corvara tribe.

The Spiteful Gods

The Manusa *tasque*, including the Canjar and Zarovan tribes, are easily the most willful of the Vistani. Although Manusa lore also bemoans the Vistani fate to wander the world, it embraces that fate with a great deal more enthusiasm than do stories told by other *tasques*. An unquenchable courage pervades Manusa legends, and a tenacity which would defy the powers that rule the universe.

"The War for All Time" pits the Vistani not against the rest of the world, but against all beings in the universe, be they mortal or divine. Having learned secrets that cannot be unlearned, the Vistani find themselves exiles in every world. Ultimately they emerge victorious, though, for they have learned to relish the new life thrust upon them, and they retain those powers that elevate them above other mortals.

The War for All Time

*In peace and joy, all mortals lived
among the gods, in a land of eternal
light above the void. Together they*

SECTION, THE SECOND:

shared a love of creation. Together they made the universe, in which to dance the *prastonata* and [multiply]. The gods created all the lands, while mortals forged many an [artifice] with which to tend them.

But the gods reserved the creation of time to themselves, saying it was not a mortal's lot to have power over the past and future, but only to live in the present. Mortals were content with that lot, for the universe held everything they ever needed to live in peace and joy.

Out of the [void] came dark powers, the shadows of the gods, who whispered in mortals' ears, telling them they would be gods themselves if they controlled the past and the future. They inflamed mortals' hearts with visions of power, and made them fearful of the gods, fearful of their lack of control over time. At last, the mortals and the dark powers joined to make war against the gods for all time. Only Manusa, mother of our *tasque*, defied her mortal kind and stood with the gods.

Though the mortals and the shadows of the gods lacked the power to overthrow the gods, their destruction across the universe was terrible, which smote the gods to their hearts. In the end, the gods enabled Manusa to see the past and the future, that she might walk among the mortals and forecast the doom of their creation, and the end of the universe.

Then the mortals were ashamed. Then they rejected the whisperings of the dark powers. They begged forgiveness of the gods, and the dark powers were driven back to the [void].

When peace and joy returned to the land of eternal light, the gods regretted telling the secrets of time to Manusa, but they could not take back what had been freely given. So they joined with the mortals and drove Manusa from the land, cast her into the [void], and gave her to the dark powers who clamored for revenge.

But Manusa would not give up. Manusa would not die. Manusa wandered in the [void] alone, fearless of

all beings, for she could see the future, and she foresaw that the gods and mortals would not [coexist] forever. Manusa saw that the spiteful gods would eventually cast all mortals from the land of eternal light, and abandon them in the universe they had created, and she laughed at the miserable fate of both gods and mortals.

We are the children of Manusa! We are neither mortal nor divine. We are wanderers in the world and through the [void]. We are unknown to mortals and unfettered by gods. We are merchants on the road of time, selling the past to gods and the future to mortals.

We are the children of Manusa!

To which all the tribe cries "Koorah!" meaning "Utterly true!" Those who hold tankards drain them, and music and dancing begin anew, invigorated by the tale. Of all Vistani lore, I find this legend most fascinating, an allegory of humanity itself. The Manusa are both frightening and alluring, personifying the mystique that all Vistani possess.

If the Dungeon Master intends to allow heroes to interact with Vistani beyond a simple fortune-telling scenario, the next step might be allowing the party to spend the night in a Vistani encampment, so that they witness dancing around the campfire and the recounting of Vistani legends. The *prastonata* and subsequent *doroq* are integral parts of this highly atmospheric experience. Incorporating Vistani even further into the adventure, the Dungeon Master might wish to hide information important to the plot within the folds of a fascinating encounter interrupting these Vistani rituals. Any number of events can occur in the midst of this scenario: Undead may encroach on the camp, one or more members of the party may be drawn aside for fortune-telling or exchange of information, or perhaps the Vistani might take advantage of the unexpected intimacy to rob the heroes.

*In all the endless road you tread
There's nothing but the night.*

—Alfred Edward Housman
“A Shropshire Lad”

CHAPTER TWO: VISTANI LIFE



In spite of isolationist tendencies, there remain innumerable observable similarities in Vistani lifestyles which bind all the *tasques* together as a single people. It is to these points I direct the reader's attention in this chapter, beginning with broad generalizations. They all own the name “Vistani,” of course, a word in their *patterna* that translates as “human” or “thinking creature.” They also share an ability to generate thick fog and travel through it to distant realms (*mist navigation*; see Chapter Five). All Vistani practice fortune-telling to some extent, and all of them can invoke the *evil eye* (see Chapter Four). And, of course, all Vistani are possessed of the dread power to lay curses on other people in the most terrible ways (see Chapter Four).

One can also easily infer all Vistani are related culturally if one notes the common presence of various belongings. For example, the construction of their wagons, called *vardos*, is remarkably similar from tribe to tribe, and virtually all of them use such trappings as the *tarokka* cards of fate.

It is possible that all these similarities occur not because the Vistani are, at their base, the same people, but because they all share the same lifestyle. They have no doubt shared and adopted one another's daily habits through centuries of crossed paths, gravitating toward the most efficient way to live as they all do. Hence, the round-topped *vardo* is the wagon design most serviceable to their daily lives, the nightly campfire is the best place to pass on their culture to future generations, and so forth.

As to the commonality of their arcane powers—the ability to curse, cast fortunes, and so on—my only guess (aside from the obvious one, that they are indeed interrelated) is an ironic one: Universal rejection by *giorgios* has brought them closer together, and they have combined their knowledge for mutual protection, giving us true cause to fear them.

A hard heart within my breast reinforced the wall between Arturi Radanavich and myself during our first two weeks on the road, as we sought first contact with the Vistani. The outcast and I spoke very little or not at all, adopting the reserved familiarity of people who are forced together, but are sure they will never see one another again.

It was not until we approached a Kamii tribe, late one afternoon, that the wall finally cracked. After I assured the captain and raunie (female leader) of my good intentions, the Vistani cautiously agreed to grant me the boon of spending a night in their encampment. Suddenly, Arturi was my ambassador, my translator, my cultural interpreter. I began to understand and appreciate what he was doing, gently nudging the Kamii and me toward each other, urging us to hold in check our fears. He became a source of moral support as I trembled and he asked my first few questions of his former people, granting reassurance that he would prevent misunderstandings and subsequent hostilities.

Then, when the sun set and the captain sparked to life what would grow into a merry bonfire, Arturi suddenly stood and walked toward the deepening woods. I struggled to my own feet and asked where he was going.

He replied simply, “The sun is going down.”

“You will not stay the night here?”

SECTION, THE SECOND:



"No," said a Vistana beside me. "He is outcast."

At that moment more than any other, the full weight of my curse—spoken all those years ago—smote my heart like an unholy mace. Before I could plead for him, Arturi held up his hand to me in a gesture of silence. He smiled sadly, turned, and disappeared into the forest.

—From the private journal of
Dr. Van Richten

Rituals

Almost every aspect of Vistani culture is steeped in ritual, from the way they sprinkle herbs into their cooking pots in a triangular motion (symbolizing the path of nourishment—from the ground, to the plant, to the body, to the ground) to the *prastonata* and the *doroq*. Rituals sustain the culture of a tribe when various caravans go their separate ways, binding them together although they may remain apart for months and years.

In the pages that follow, my remarks are generalized from one or two occasions of contact; I have had neither the time nor the opportunity to study any tribe until I had observed all their customs. Obviously, so small a sample renders suspect all that I have to report. Nevertheless, I believe my extrapolations create a fairly complete picture of the Vistani, and one by which the reader may achieve a basic level of understanding.

Indeed, the highly ritualized customs of the Vistani have allowed me to note certain similarities between one tribe and the next, which in turn demonstrate similarities to a third, and so on. By establishing a chain of common practices, I have proceeded to the hypothesis that most or all Vistani share most or all rituals of which I shall write. Of course, Arturi has reinforced my theories with corroborating testimony in many cases.

Unfortunately, much of Vistani culture remains a mystery to us *giorgios* because the origins of their rituals are so ancient. Further, for every noticeable convention, dozens of subtler customs are woven into their daily lives. I have not begun to catalogue these traits, and I doubt I ever shall.

If the Dungeon Master wishes to create a tribe of Vistani, the information presented in this and subsequent chapters can be used as a reference. Additional, original traits are encouraged as well, as the Vistani should remain forever enigmatic to heroes. Having met one tribe, a party of adventurers should not feel able to claim comprehensive knowledge of these people.

Setting and Striking Camp

One universal ritual is that of setting and striking camp. Sometimes the proper place to settle for the night is carefully scouted, and sometimes it is spontaneously chosen, but in either case the male leader of the caravan (called the captain) paces out the dimensions of the site, then finds its center and declares, "*Kir-yahg*," which loosely translates from the *patterna* as "Make fire," although the command is strictly metaphorical. If possible, he does not move from his position until all *vardos*, animals, and tribesmen have proceeded to points designated with a gesture of his first two fingers.

When the caravan has come to rest, the female leader (called the *raunie*) joins

the captain at the center of camp and confirms his choice. According to Arturi, there are rare cases when a *raunie* objects to a site, usually for mystical reasons, in which case the tribe must move on. Barring this happenstance, the *raunie* cries, "*Kir-yahg*," and the setting of camp proceeds.

When the time comes to depart the area and the caravan is packed up, the captain inspects the camp to be sure it has been properly cleared of all refuse and other objects, then places his hand

upon the spot where the ashes of the fire pit have been buried, proving to the *raunie* that the fire has been completely extinguished. He moves to the center of camp, declares, "*Dya-yahg*" ("Leave the fire"), then leads the caravan away.

The *Prastonata*

One of the most vivid images a *giorgio* may have of a Vistani encampment is the ritual dancing around the fire, the *prastonata*. This ritual precedes the *doroq*, the telling of stories and legends. Indeed, the

Prastonata

If the heroes are fortunate enough to be granted the privilege of spending the night with a Vistani caravan, do not gloss over the activities under the stars. Make it an event to remember, for such entertainment should be all but unheard of among *giorgios*. If the heroes are lucky, they may have the chance to participate in a Vistani campout once or twice during the current campaign.

After dinner, set the scene with a description such as the following text: *By the time the wooden dinner platters have been wiped (not washed) and put away, the sun has sunk beneath the horizon and stars have begun to brighten in the eastern sky. All across the domain, people are locking their doors, bolting their shutters, and huddling under their covers, but the Vistani are only beginning to come out of their shells.*

"Nightfall," lisps a toothless old codger, "is the finest hour of the day." A rather odd comment, considering the horrible things that come out in the dark, here in [kingdom's name].

With an ease that would amaze a ranger, the captain sparks a fire to life in minutes, using nothing but a flint block and kindling. The children have collected wood since camp was set, and now they begin to feed the flames, laughing merrily and chatting with each other in their colorful tongue.

One by one, the Vistani finish their final tasks of the day and join the

growing circle around the fire.

Someone produces a violin. After tuning the strings, he begins to ply his bow, striking up a spirited melody.

If the Dungeon Master has access to recordings of Gypsy violin music, this can be played (softly!) in the background as the Dungeon Master continues with the description of the scene.

Soon, the Vistani are clapping and singing. A beautiful young girl rises and begins to dance around the fire, shaking a tambourine to the rhythm of the music. She spins and twirls her skirt round and round, until you are dizzy just watching her. Suddenly, she comes to a stop before your party. Gently she sways before you, the slightest trace of a smile on her lips.

"Who will dance with Gitana?" asks a nearby man. "Hers is a rare invitation indeed!"

If any adventurer accepts the invitation, have the player make a Dexterity check with a -2 penalty unless that character has the Dancing proficiency (resulting in no penalty). Success indicates that the *giorgio* acquitted himself well, perhaps amusing the Vistani in the process. Such an accomplishment gives the tribesmen a favorable disposition toward the character. Vistani tend to address the character when they speak to the party, and any plan to rob or otherwise harass the heroes is reconsidered. Add a +1 modifier to reaction rolls, if applicable.

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dance tells a story of its own, not with gestures that represent words or ideas, but with movement and expressions that confer complex emotions.

If times are good for the caravan, the dancer, known as the *prastona*, moves wildly and freely, while stressful events engender anguished gestures, and mournful times yield sluggish, tortured steps. *Until I had observed this ritual several times, I believed each prastona moved to the music which accompanied her. But I was mistaken; the dance drives the music, not the other way around. In her art, the prastona effectively embodies the feelings of the entire group, reinforcing their community, and dramatizing both poverty and prosperity in lithe beauty.*

The *prastonata* is a living metaphor for the Vistani, as its constant, flowing, hypnotic motion reflects the life of these people, who never stay long enough to call any one place home. There is hardly a pause in a *prastona's* dance on which a viewer may seize before it melts away into a turn and a flurry of hair, from the moment she poses for the first note of the violin, to the final twirl and collapse to the ground. But in those momentary glimpses of stillness, her image burns into one's mind, and her depthless, black eyes pierce one's dreams for the remainder of the night.

The Doroq

Once the *prastonata* has concluded, the musicians retire and the time for telling legends arrives. I have already recounted the genesis myths of the three *tasques*, but there are many more tales to tell, stories of love, heroism, tragedy, time, and countless other subjects. The Vistani tell them with a flair that would put a Kartakan bard to shame. Often, since my visits with the Vistani, have I sat by my own little fire at home and regaled a guest with the *doroq*. Perhaps I shall someday write up these legends, and publish them as leavening for my previous, grimmer works.

The Vistani relish their stories, and various caravans, tribes, and even

Doroq

When the players finish roleplaying the *prastonata*, read the legend appropriate to the *tasque* with whom the heroes are staying. The Dungeon Master can require any character with the Ancient Languages proficiency to make a check to understand the Vistani *patterna*; with a successful result, give that player a copy of the legend and allow him to "translate" the words as a Vistana "speaks" them.

Heroes who react respectfully to the legend should be awarded a +1 bonus to reaction checks (not cumulative with any other bonuses); as well, the Vistani perform readings and otherwise provide information free of charge. On the other hand, heroes who make light of the event receive -2 penalties to all subsequent reaction checks (which are cumulative with any other penalties), and the Vistani charge them dearly for any services rendered. Furthermore, the Vistani might offer false information. If the adventurers are particularly rude, they are summarily tossed out of the protective circle of the camp as if they had never been invited to stay the night.

Assuming that no breaches of protocol occur, invite the heroes to tell a story. An anecdote, a recounting of an adventure, or even a good joke will do, but ideally the performance should be related to the campaign in some way. Reward those who entertain the group with experience points. (The Vistani mock any known bard who refuses to rise to the occasion.)

tasques tell the same legend with virtually no discrepancies between them! The *tasques* know each others' fables as well, and they sometimes debate the faults and merits of another tribe's stories over a bed of dying embers. They also appreciate the allegories of *giorgios*. I was both surprised and delighted by a warm reception when I told them the sad tale of Emil Bollenbach, a former assistant of mine whose twisted mind turned to evil. It was during those late nights, under a

pitch-black sky shot with glistening specks of white, that I felt closest to the Vistani. Fearless of the brooding night around us, we gazed content into the hypnotic glow of the fire. Sharing its ample warmth and security, we listened to one another's stories with hearts and minds. The wall between the Vistani and myself never came down, but during those nights we could at least talk with each other across the barrier.

Moon Rituals

Substantial evidence exists to suggest that the moon is a body of great power. Consider its influence upon lycanthropes, its sway over madmen, even its effect upon young lovers. Time itself is measured in cycles—in days and weeks and months—all corresponding to the sun and moon. Indeed, the word "month" is a derivation of the word "moon."

But the moon is also natural, and all power associated with it is similarly so. The moon is a telling factor in the quest to understand the Vistani. Its endlessly repetitive cycles mirror the rituals that define Vistani life, so of course the moon is a sacred part of their culture.

Typically, the Vistani spend all three days of the full moon away from *giorgio* population centers. During this time they engage in moon rituals. Lost travelers may happen upon a Vistani camp during the full moon, which ironically is the best time to pass among them: Rather than turn *giorgios* away at this important time, the Vistani prefer to keep strangers where they can be monitored.

Fulltide

The three days the moon is in full phase are called Fulltide. During this time the Vistani seek to bring all matters in their lives to fruition. When a Vistana makes a promise to do something, she often punctuates the pledge by declaring "*Lunadi*," meaning literally "By the moon" and figuratively "It shall be done." In essence, she is promising the task will be done before the moon is full, although the actual terms of the agreement may be altogether different. "*Lunadi*" is often a figure of speech, like

the *giorgio* habit of saying "I swear on my honor!" instead of "It is really true." The Vistani think in terms of completing as much business as possible before Fulltide, so they can begin new projects afterward. The full moon marks a small turning point in the lives of a people who otherwise do not pay much attention to the passage of time.

Magical undertakings typically come to a head with the full moon as well. A series of readings culminates at Fulltide, enchantments take effect, even curses have an increased chance to take hold of a victim. The Equaar create magical figurines that protect their herds while they engage in moon rituals, and the Canjar make moon jewelry, which takes its power directly from the light of the moon. Finally, Vistani marriages virtually always take place under Fulltide.

The Lunaset

During the three nights of Fulltide, the Vistani perform the *prastonata* and *doroq* as usual. On the third and last night, they also observe the Lunaset, a ritual that no outsider is allowed to attend. During this rite, the entire tribe files into the forest at midnight, when the moon is directly overhead. At dawn, as the moon sets, they reemerge from the darkness—haggard and

"*Lunadi*" is a Vistana's way of agreeing to something, regardless of the time factor involved. It is a way to say "Okay."

The natural inclination of a Vistani, however, is to designate Fulltide as the deadline for most agreements to be satisfied, if possible. This means that they are slightly reluctant to enter into business dealings just before the full moon, unless they can complete the tasks overnight. Also, when Vistani demand a service of adventurers, the heroes can expect to be given until next Fulltide to fulfill their end of the bargain. If the full moon passes before the heroes complete their mission, some Vistani tribes may refuse to honor the agreement, even if no harm was done by finishing late.

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introspective—and go straight to bed to sleep until noon. When at last they rise, the Vistani seem as jovial as I have ever seen them.

What they do out there in the woods, unprotected from evil which walks the night, illuminated only by the blue light of the moon, I cannot guess and Arturi would never divulge. His refusal to explain carried a certain uneasiness, as if I would have been revolted by the rite.

I confess, the temptation to sneak after the tribe and spy did come upon me, but I could not bring myself to move. Too many noises rent the night, neither human nor entirely bestial, which terrified me and kept me close by the fire. The thought of discovery held me in my place as well, for I suspect what Vistani do during Lunaset is forbidden, and outsiders who look on it must surely be doomed.

Perhaps they renew their strange and myriad powers in some ancient and cryptic ceremony which must remain pure to work—that would be in keeping with the cyclical moon, and the purity of their bloodlines. Perhaps they have another form, like lycanthropes, rakshasa, and countless other creatures that stalk the domains, and they must periodically return to that natural shape to survive. Perhaps they go to parlay with evil powers, to treat with lords of these dark domains, to traffic with wicked beings that own the night. Perhaps you and I cannot imagine what dreadful activities pass under the full moon, deep in haunted forests, when *giorgios* are hiding under their blankets.

Festival

As I have mentioned, the Vistani arise at noon following the Lunaset, and they are typically in a very good temper. It is a day of rest for them, during which time they feast, play games, and simply relax. Any business deals which have previously been struck are resolved on this day, but no new negotiations may take place until the following day.

Throughout this book, the word "ritual" comes up repeatedly, and some readers may even say to themselves,

Lunaset

Giorgios who spend a night in a Vistani encampment during Lunaset are sternly admonished by their hosts to remain in camp, on pain of a curse. The Vistani then leave the heroes unguarded and disappear into the woods for the night. This is an extremely secretive time for the Vistani, and even evil supernatural powers conspire to protect it.

If the adventurers insist on seeking out a Vistani tribe during Lunaset, they are likely to encounter some uncommonly awful creatures from previously published RAVENLOFT products, such as from any RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix. The Dungeon Master can roll percentile dice once per turn and assign a 75% chance that a monster appears and attacks the group, selecting the monster as well. Check for new encounters even while the adventurers are engaged in combat.

In the meantime, the Dungeon Master must decide how much the heroes see of the Vistani, if anything. They might find that the Vistani run through the forest at full movement rates, unencumbered by undergrowth or darkness, never tiring, meeting one another and continuing on their separate ways before the heroes can catch up. Or the heroes might witness a small part of a secret ritual, only to have the entire tribe suddenly turn, look on them with baleful eyes, and utter a deadly curse.

The occasion of Lunaset provides an opportunity to reveal an important clue or answer an important adventure question, but it serves mostly as a physical manifestation of the mystery that surrounds the Vistani. There are few hard and fast rules to apply, because players must not be allowed to learn and depend on them. Dungeon Masters can use the rite any number of ways, but adventurers should always know that by spying on the Vistani in their most personal hour, they take a big risk.

"Here is yet another ritual," even when I do not mark it so myself. That is a good thing, for even if you do not know what the customs are, a sensitivity to their existence will open many doors to communication that might otherwise remain forever barred.

Tribal Organization

Dozens of individual caravans of Vistani drive their barrel-topped *vardos* through our world's domains. Each caravan is part of a larger tribe, but each is also an extended family wherein every member is directly related by blood kinship or marriage.

All Vistani are led by both a patriarch and a matriarch figure, whom I have already identified as the captain and the *raunie*. Each has respective duties and spheres of authority. Captain and *raunie* may be husband and wife, brother and sister, or even cousins, but they always share the family name. All caravan members are related to them, be they parents, offspring, siblings, cousins, or spouses.

The captain is the caravan master, responsible for maintaining the equipment, *vardos*, and animals. He supervises each setup and breakdown of camp, chooses the site and when to leave it (if not forced to move on), and delegates responsibilities for gathering wood, water, and food. When commerce arises with *giorgios*, some captains openly take charge and some remain aloof, but all important business decisions are the captain's alone.

The *raunie*, often called *oma* by the younger members of the tribe, holds the highest authority in a Vistani tribe, however. When there are matters concerning the entire tribe, she is the one who presides over any discussion, and her decision is binding. The *raunie* sits in judgment of conflicts between members. Hers is the right to pronounce, and even inflict, punishment on transgressors. She is most often the treasurer of her people as well.

I do not believe there has to be a reason why Vistani are matriarchal, but

reasons enough exist: As females are the givers of life, it is natural, among a culture of survivors in a hostile world, to accord them the mantle of leadership. Vistani women are astute judges of what is best for their people, well suited to assume authority in planning and negotiation with others. Of course, the fact that only Vistani women have powers of prescience elevates them to a status of great power. Besides, the captain is occupied with the rigors of day to day life on the open road, so it falls on the *raunie* to manage the less-physical necessities.

In any event, when a Vistani man and woman marry, he enters her family. He takes her name, joins his property to hers, and so on.

It is not necessarily a simple thing to identify the *raunie* or captain in a caravan. They are fiercely protected by the entire tribe. One defensive Vistani strategy when dealing with *giorgios* is to send forth false leaders. Another strategy lets one tribe member draw the danger on himself, while the rest of the tribe spirits the captain and *raunie* away.

If and when a caravan grows too large to support itself, if it can no longer feed its members, or if its size repeatedly becomes a threat to *giorgio* communities, the caravan splits in two. The *raunie* chooses a male and female who will lead the splinter tribe in a solemn ceremony, which no *giorgio*



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may attend. (My knowledge of this rite comes from Arturi, of course.) Finally, after much revelry and not a few tears around the fireside, they sleep as one under the stars a last time, then each go their own way in the morning, crying, "Endari-vitir!" ("All paths converge!")

Adoption

When a *giorgio* endears himself to the Vistani, he is offered the honor of the blood rite. The ritual confers on him the status of a *giogoto* (jee oh GO toe), a *giorgio* who is "enlightened, yet not of the blood." The outsider may refuse the offer without penalty, but such opportunities are invaluable rare. One must weigh the advantage of allies among the Vistani against the possible repercussions from their numerous enemies, including the entire populations of some domains, and not a few of the domains' lords.

When the offer is made and accepted, the Vistana who sponsors the ritual stands face to face with he who is to become *giogoto*. He draws forth a knife and slices the left hand of the initiate with a single slash of the blade. He then opens his own palm and the two clasp bleeding hands. The Vistana wraps a sacred scarf purified by moonlight and some fey herbal tincture around the two members and says, "Hands bound, blood mingles. I cannot repay you for your act, but I will call you brother (sister)." While the tribe gathers round and chants, the two enter a dream state, and blood courses down their arms for several minutes.

When at last the two hands separate, each is covered with blood, but the wounds are miraculously healed. All that remains is a wide, purple scar which creases the palm, forever identifying the non-Vistana as a *giogoto*.

Exclusion

"A person is Vistani by right of birth." So say the proud people who wander homeless in our realms. One can never join their ranks, even if he travels with them for years. A non-Vistana can never be anything but a *giogoto*.

The *Giogoto*

An adventurer can be invited to take part in the blood rite and earn the status of *giogoto*, but not easily. The most likely circumstance is when a Vistana owes an adventurer a great debt that cannot be repaid. Perhaps the hero saved a Vistana's loved one, or shared a particularly dangerous moment with a Vistana and survived. Aiding a tribe through the course of adventuring is not, in itself, sufficient cause for induction. Often, only one member of a party of heroes performs such an extraordinary action as renders him or her worthy of invitation. The Dungeon Master must set the standard for the award.

Any Vistana can readily identify a *giogoto's* "tribal affiliation" simply by touching the scarred palm and sensing its origins. That person can freely take shelter for a single night among any tribe of the *tasque* who labels him (while other *giorgios* must either pay or, more often, find their own accommodations).

A *giogoto* is never swindled or lied to, and he is often given more information than he asks for. The Dungeon Master can use such a relationship to create a mysterious sage adviser in a local domain, whom the heroes can occasionally consult for answers. Since the Dungeon Master decides if, when, and where the Vistani can be found, he controls the dissemination of information. In fact, seeking the tribe that respects a player's character, and can unravel an impenetrable puzzle, might be an interesting side adventure.

Giogotos are never treated as part of the tribe, and no sense of camaraderie develops. Rather, the *giogoto* feels "tolerated." Non-Vistani cannot engage in the Lunaset, nor learn the *evil eye*, among other things.

Vistani automatically gain *giogoto* status among other tribes of their *tasque*. A hero generated from a Vistani kit has a percentage chance to be treated as one as well; see the DUNGEON MASTER Appendix for this section. The Manusa *tasque* (see Chapter Three), however, never recognizes a *giogoto*.

Most *giogotos* are actually children who have run away from home and joined the Vistani. Because they understand a yearning for freedom, Vistani caravans readily take in young boys and girls of ages eight to sixteen. After a season or two, the Vistani make their way past the various towns where runaways joined them, and they send the wayward children home to whatever punishments or cries of joy await them. The Vistani are not in the habit of kidnapping babies or small children—my own tale of Erasmus notwithstanding—for such practices would poison their blood heritage as well as earn them many dire enemies.

The fact of the matter is, the Vistani fiercely defend their bloodlines because there is little else by which they might identify themselves. In a fluid world like theirs, the only thing that runs true is the blood of their own families. Not even members of diverse *tasques* wed or breed. The Kaldresh and Boemians (see Chapter Three) do not intermarry, for example, and I do not think the Manusa marry or bear young at all. The exclusion of outsiders and the strict division of the *tasques* (see Chapter Three) preserves their sense of ethnicity, legitimizes their highly ritualized mythology, and—more practically—helps to protect rights of ownership in all matters, which is quite important to a people who carry everything they own, everywhere they go. Hence, even someone who is only ninety-nine percent full-blooded Vistani is regarded the equal of a man with nary a drop of Vistani blood in his veins. There is nothing spiteful or racist about the attitude; it is a cultural trait which has allowed them to survive in a hostile world for centuries.

Everyday Life

Unfortunately, I have had too little time among the Vistani to discuss their day-to-day life in any depth. Chapter Three describes each tribe of each *tasque* in as much detail as I could muster, but here my objective is to discuss what I think is common to most or all of them. Exceptions are

frequent, especially among the strange and reclusive Manusa.

Living off the Land

Our world is bountiful in most of its parts. With the possible exception of Keening, the Shadow Rift is the only thoroughly inhospitable place in the land. Certainly, danger and death are rife in the night, yet both the people and the land itself are ever more robust for that unhappy fact. The woods quickly ripen with fruit and berries, the stock fattens sooner, and the people—Vistani and otherwise—are born survivors.

Food and Cooking

The nomadic Vistani cannot grow crops, but they know the flora of the forest well, gathering wild turnips, mushrooms, berries, wild garlic, and soft roots. Their command of herbal lore rivals my own, and there is probably much they could teach me, were I more welcome among them. They are deft with spices. They are not hunters, but they often drive herd animals or net fish, so meat is a staple of their diet.

Since they cook exclusively over an open fire, soups, stews, and other kettle dishes make up the bulk of their repast. Vistani also like to skewer bits of meat on sharpened sticks and roast them in the flames—hedgehog is a particular favorite. One might think nomads eat poorly, but most of their day is devoted to gathering food and finding a place to sleep. The Vistani are more than proficient at both tasks. Some are able poachers to boot.

Water is the common drink of the Vistani, not wine or brewed *potables*. Although they sometimes serve drink to *giorgios* when conducting business with them, they themselves remain absolutely lucid and alert at all times. Only during solemn occasions such as weddings and funerals do they drink a little dry berry wine, full of body and bouquet, called *bourdad*.

All Vistani can identify plants, animals, and pure water with perfect accuracy. They also possess the Herbalism nonweapon proficiency.

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Fire Starting

As I have stated, the captain supervises the gathering of firewood as his caravan sets up camp. He dictates one of a half-dozen methods of arranging the wood inside the stones. He directs the use of a fire pit if the tribe is large; if the tribe is small, he lays the fire himself. Unless the *raunie* commands otherwise, he chooses when the fire is lit. He ignites the kindling, or at least stands by while it is done. It is all ritual; Vistani legends frequently mention the fire starter, essentially sanctifying the role.

I have no idea how he does it, but a Vistana captain can start a fire with wet seaweed and a piece of flint. Let it rain, let it snow, let the wind howl in the pit; he will have the fire going momentarily. No one tried to hide the method from me. I stood and watched captains spark a blaze in visit after visit, under the gamut of skies. There is no secret—they just do it. Furthermore, Arturi insists that all Vistani can readily build a fire, not just the captains. Even outcasts retain the skill, as he proved over the course of several months.

A Vistana can start a fire with anything that would burn if it were dry. Provided that proper materials are at hand, it takes a Vistana 1d6+4 rounds to build a fire with easily burned fuel, and 1d6+10 rounds to ignite rain-soaked mulch or the like. No proficiency roll is necessary.

Love and Marriage

Privacy is a sacred right to these nomadic people. They respect the individuality of each tribal member in a most fundamental sense. While each contributes wholeheartedly to the needs of the whole tribe, he is in turn accorded complete autonomy. A Vistana may come and go as he pleases; better, he can remain "alone" even in the presence of other tribesmen. To indicate he wants solitude, a Vistana clasps his hands before him. As long as he continues the gesture, the tribe simply ignores him as if he were not there. Nothing but an

emergency can induce them to speak to him. But I digress.

My point is that, among the Vistani, love is a personal matter in the extreme. Arturi has told me all I know of his people's love rituals. If not for him, I might not have admitted they were capable of love, such was my prejudice. But of course, that wondrous emotion is as important to Vistani as it is to any intelligent being.

Yet, spouses are less common than siblings in any caravan, and the Vistani do not multiply quickly. First, there are not many marriageable males and females among them all. Second, they cannot court as *giorgios* do, for eligible mates rarely dwell in the same caravan. Unless a boy and a girl who have grown up together are related only through marriage—an uncommon occurrence—they must seek love

The impending marriage of two Vistani can create an interesting side adventure. As Vistani often trade in favors, a party of adventurers that needs their fortunes told might be asked to take part in the upcoming event in return.

For example, the heroes can be sent to deliver an important message to the groom's caravan, presently several domains away. No one suspects that a darkling (first *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix*), a former member of the bride's tribe, is out to cause havoc. He stalks the party, steals the message, tries to enlist the party's aid, or takes any other action the Dungeon Master dreams up. Or, perhaps the adventurers are sent on a dungeon crawl to retrieve a rare mushroom that is the primary ingredient in stuffing baked hedgehog, a traditional dish at the marriage feast.

Heroes had best be on their best behavior when speaking of the marriage relationship and business relating to it. As Van Richten points out, the Vistani take love very seriously, and disrespect draws a curse of "embarrassing" strength.

during sporadic meetings with other caravans of their tribe. Thus, the ritual joining husband to wife is rare and quite treasured by the culture.

When love does occur, the parents of the prospective mates make inquiries of each other, to see if such an arrangement is possible and to discuss property rights. Next the children are formally asked if a match would please them. If the answer is yes on both parts, then plans for a marriage are forged in earnest.

Often the young lovers' caravans go their separate ways after the marriage agreement is struck, sometimes for months. During that time, both groups prepare to meet in the deepest forest on a full moon, share the ritual of setting camp, raise a bonfire, and bring the couple together. Without exception, as I have mentioned, the man and his property pass into the woman's family.

Death and Funeral Rites

A Vistana never dies in bed. In a land filled with death, the Vistani believe that they must shield their caravans from the taint of death. Ritualistically, they have expelled the grim reaper from their midst, and perhaps there is something more than superstition in those beliefs, for they sleep comfortably under the stars night after night, while the rest of us seek shelter behind bolted doors and shutters. I have no verifiable proof of this, but neither do I have any other means to explain this phenomenon.

In any event, a Vistana's last act is often that of walking away from his caravan. If he cannot manage to do so himself, he is aided by his closest relatives and friends, though they do not speak to or look at him after he requests to be taken into the woods. The rest of the tribe similarly pretends not to see the dying person leave. This custom is yet another example of the Vistani value of privacy. The tribes believe that if one sees a Vistana take his last breath, the newly deceased literally died of embarrassment rather than of whatever was killing him in the first place.

Vistani Geist

There is a 10% chance that an adventurer is haunted by a Vistana's ghost if the hero witnesses the sudden death of that Vistana. The likelihood rises to 50% if the hero had a chance to look away but failed to do so. If haunting occurs, the Vistana rises as a geist (see the *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix III*, TSR #2153) that follows the adventurer everywhere.

The sight of a person with a ghost following him around elicits an interesting assortment of reactions in any setting. Most citizens will be frightened, and their intelligence and sophistication should determine their reactions. In any event, the character is not welcome anywhere he goes. Set up encounters in which the hero must explain himself, intimidate his contacts, or concoct some ruse—anything to avoid being chased away and possibly slain.

The geist itself grows increasingly bitter with its lot. The Dungeon Master is encouraged to be devious, allowing the creature to disappear only to make dramatic and horrifying appearances later, or to linger over the hero's shoulder and shake its head balefully whenever he tries to conduct business, and so forth.

The members of the tribe of the dead Vistana might seek revenge if the adventurer caused the death of the Vistana who haunts him, but they otherwise refuse to become involved.

Vistani geists can be retired in the same way all geists are destroyed: by casting *abjure*, *banishment*, *dismissal*, *holy word*, or *wish*. However, a Vistana geist is entitled to a saving throw vs. spell (using its former Hit Dice if full character statistics have not been specified) to resist, and a caster who fails to destroy the creature cannot try again, ever. If the hero makes amends, either by offering a convincing apology (Dungeon Master's call) or by performing some task set by the surviving tribe, then the geist can forgo the saving throw and pass on.

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Further, the Vistani believe that one who dies in shame cannot leave this world. Hence, a dead Vistana reputedly follows a person who saw him die, unable to speak or do anything, until the offending voyeur dies. If a Vistana dies in battle or otherwise in the company of others, all other Vistani turn away and close their eyes, just for a moment.

On the other hand, the death of a *giorgio* does not bother them in the least.

Vistani Wakes

After a dying Vistana leaves the circle of the encampment, the *raunie* lights a small candle and places it in the window of her *vardo*; when the candle goes out (seemingly of its own volition), it is taken as an omen that the tribe member has died. Immediately after the extinguishing of the light, the entire tribe commences a terrible wailing. The men and women weep openly, sometimes yelling at the heavens, and even young children cry as if they had been lashed. As darkness falls, this grieving gives over to an eerie, rhythmic chanting. Strange shadows move in the trees, and sometimes the wind sighs like a ghostly violin, playing a heart-wrenching song in the darkness. The Vistani believe that this is the spirit of the departed, visiting his tribe once more before traveling onward.

I happened to be present among a tribe of Vatraska when one of them died from a disease which I suspected to be mummy rot. Despite their best efforts, the young woman could not be brought back from the great vault of the beyond, so with her last ounce of strength, she managed to get to her feet and stumble into the trees beyond the camp. No one except myself paid the least attention to her as she went. She fell loudly in the bushes, just out of sight, and it was undeniable that she failed to rise again, yet the Vistani took no notice of her.

Just a few minutes later, the votive in the *raunie's vardo* went out, even though there was plenty of wax left and no wind to snuff it. Mourning commenced immediately.

That night, the wailing became a skin-prickling chant as the tribe gathered around a bonfire and systematically burned every personal belonging of the deceased. I sat aloof, unsure of my part in the proceedings, if any. From my remote position, it seemed that the smoke of the fire twirled and danced around the ring of stones that contained the blaze, and my imagination conjured into it the image of the dead Vistana. I fancied that she had come back to dance once more, at her own funeral, before passing away. Indeed, the whole tribe seemed to be watching the swirling smoke, too.

In the morning, I searched the brush where I had heard the young lady fall for the last time, but there was no body to be found.

Nomadism

The Vistani are, above all else, nomads. Nomadism literally defines their existence, so much so that a Vistana who ceases to wander loses all powers associated with his former people (see "Static Burn" in Chapter Five). In fact, no *tasque* considers him Vistani. He becomes *mortu* ("more TOO")—the closest translation is "undead," although the Vistani do not mean what you and I call undead. To the Vistani, life without movement is not living at all. Although no tribe would confirm it,

Most *mortu* Vistani are purely tools of the Dungeon Master. Such a character can function as a *giogoto* who is an ally (or enemy) of the adventuring party, as a character with a secret past, as the focus of a side adventure wherein the *mortu* knows how to locate the Vistani (and may or may not be willing to do so), or in any number of other interesting scenarios where a character has deliberately chosen to leave the ranks of an exclusive and closed society.

Some who are *mortu* may be used by players as heroes; however; see the DUNGEON MASTER Appendix in this section for more information.

Arturi explained that all Vistani have a regular migratory pattern. The path might be limited to one domain, or it might stretch all the way across our realms. A caravan's route can be circular, crisscrossed, or even linear. The entire route, from one point to itself again, might be completed in several months or several years. However, it is always regular, always the same, at least by Arturi's report.

Dungeon Masters who have built a full RAVENLOFT campaign can sketch a map of the migration routes of every Vistani tribe present, but must not show these routes to the players. Discovering and charting the paths can provide an interesting challenge for the heroes, as well as a clever way to find the Vistani (although the nomads may not be pleased if they find out what's going on). As soon as they realize they are being scrutinized, the Vistani adopt a new path, at least until they are certain that *giorgios* no longer pursue them.

The Vardo

This quintessential part of Vistani culture actually does not appear in every single caravan in our realms. I have met both a tribe of Equaar (see Chapter Three) and one of Naiat (see also Chapter Three) neither of which owns a single wheel or a roof to mount over it. Nevertheless, the *vardo* is so widespread among Vistani that it is conspicuous in its absence. Even tribes I suspect do not physically move from place to place still occupy these rolling domiciles. Indeed, a *vardo* is a house, a shrine, and much, much more: A *vardo* is a symbol of rank, for rarely are there enough to house the entire caravan. It is a measure of wealth, and a possession in which to invest wealth. A *vardo* also represents commitment, for the owner or his subordinates must perform constant maintenance.

Even more important, it is a temple of privacy. And perhaps most vitally, a *vardo* is a repository of power. Within



its protected environment, a Vistana can safely fall into a trance, turn cards without fear of the wind, or possibly trap spirits to speak with them. Spell components can be manufactured. In short, ask any spellcaster about the importance of a secure place to work, and he'll tell you that magic demands it.

No Trace or Trail

It is monumentally difficult to tell if a Vistani caravan has crossed one's path. Even rangers are hard pressed to discover such a trail, let alone follow it. When the nomads break camp, they remove every trace of their occupation. They bury their bonfire ashes, then disguise the overturned earth with natural camouflage. They pick up every speck. Even the tracks of their *vardos* seem to blow away in an easy breeze.

This care is part of the ritual of striking camp, overseen by the captain himself. On a practical level, it preserves the locale for future encampments, and perhaps helps erase sour memories of any *giorgios* who wished them gone. On a more speculative note, it protects the Vistani from curses and other evil magic. They know personal possessions can be used to focus the *evil eye* (see Chapter Four), so they are meticulous in removing them. I visited the now-vacant site of a Vistani encampment which had been occupied only a few hours before,

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and I could find nothing to prove the tribe had ever been there. I must confess I am at a total loss as to how they perform this feat; all I can do is insist that it is so.

Like druids, who can pass through undergrowth without leaving a trail, the Vistani defy all attempts to track them. Even rangers cannot follow their paths. All Tracking attempts are made as if the Vistani deliberately attempt to hide their trail (-5 penalty).

Dark Neutrality

Are the Vistani evil? After hating them for over thirty years, my instinctive answer was yes. But now, having studied these many and diverse peoples, my ethical principles bid me amend that response to "Some are, some are not." Yet there is another possibility, one that my companion strenuously put forth on many a long hike under the sun.

Arturi insisted the Vistani are neither lawful nor unlawful, neither good nor evil. Their only philosophy reflects that of Nature itself, wherein a perfect balance of all things is the ideal. Like druids, these nomads neither initiate agendas nor oppose them. They seek harmony with their environment. Indeed, "*giorgio*" (which translates as "unnatural," lacking a better term) is the opposite of "Vistani" in the *patterna*.

Perhaps their "naturalness" accounts for the Vistani's herbal prowess, their affinity with animals, their skill at filling their bellies without farms to harvest, their ease under the stars, and their close association with the moon. Perhaps Nature is the wellspring of the fabled Vistani power over time. What is time but a natural progression, measured against nature's cycles seen in the rising and setting of the sun, the seasons, and all the rhythms of the world?

If neutrality is indeed the credo of the Vistani, still I submit that it is a decidedly dark shade of gray. Of

course, such a qualification is tantamount to negation, for darkness is not the middle ground, but rather the opposite of light.

Focus not on the idea of balance. If one examines Nature with an objective eye, one finds it simple to conclude that darkness, though not balanced, is quite natural. We live in a world where goodness is ever preyed on by evil. The domains are like red widows, entralling in their beauty, deadly in their embrace. Our world is often a dark place, so those who would commune with nature must be touched by darkness themselves.

In a sense, calling the Vistani "evil" by *giorgio* standards is comparable to calling quicksand diabolical, blight calculated, plague intentional. In a cruel world, it is apparently natural to be cruel as well. The wolf is a natural creature, and so is the Vistana.

Most Vistani are true neutral in alignment, like druids, although individual caravans can be neutral good or neutral evil at the Dungeon Master's option.

Law and Justice

Vistani justice is called the *vishnadd* (VEESH nod), meaning "dark blade." A Vistana often cries "*Vishnadd!*" when he has exacted revenge or emerged victorious from any given situation, but in cases of dispute or accusation, the term takes its formal meaning. All Vistani consider the *vishnadd* deadly serious, and woe to him who scoffs or scorns it.

I witnessed the *vishnadd* thrice in my first few months of studying the Vistani. The first time was occasioned by a dispute of ownership among the Equaar, and the second occurred as the result of an accusation of disrespect among the Naiat. The third time was the night I met the Corvara—Arturi's relatives—the extended family of the tribe that had taken my son, and had died by my curse. They waited until the sun set and Arturi had been banished to

the night; then the *raunie* drew out an obsidian blade and called my name.

"I will kill you, if you do not face the *vishnadd*," whispered a large Vistana behind me, brandishing a shiny blade of his own. Instantly, cold sweat started across my brow and trickled down my back. Every *nightmare* about Vistani I had ever experienced sharpened into deathly clarity in my mind's eye.

"Approach Madame Vassaevich and hold out your open hand. Do not speak unless you are told to," instructed my menacing captor.

The *raunie* clutched my wrist with surprising strength and placed the tip of her dark blade against my palm. The cold edge bit into the tender center of my hand and I recoiled, but I could not break her grip.

"Please," I begged.

"Silence!" spat the *raunie*, driving the point deeper into my hand. I froze in shock, suddenly transfixed by her whitish eyes, which rolled back into her head. My tongue wagged, but my throat gave no sound to it.

"If you lie, I will know it, and summary punishment shall fall on you," said the old woman from her self-induced trance. "You are the murderer of my tribe, slaughterer of my blood, a deliverer unto death. Do you plead guilty or innocent to my charge? Speak."

I looked into the unseeing eyes of the *raunie* and opened my mouth to protest, to accuse them as they accused me, to sneer at their fantastical court. But what she had said was true, and I was horribly afraid.

"Guilty," I pled, echoed by a murmur that swept through the Corvara all around me.

"Tonight, you are the guest of Arturi Radanavich," continued Madame Vassaevich. "For his sake, we protect you from our justice. Tonight, we treat you with respect, but tomorrow you are our enemy once again.

"The curse of Firdusa Radanavich lies strong on you, Van Richten. Continue to live long and suffer!"

Madame Vassaevich released my wrist and relaxed her eyes, emerging

from her trance. She looked on me and smiled kindly. Needless to say, I slept not a wink that night.

As my experience shows, when the *vishnadd* is convened, the *raunie* sits, resting her obsidian blade in her lap.

Vishnadd

If adventurers ever oppose or harm Vistani characters, any tribe of any *tasque* they meet can become suspicious. These suspicions culminate in the *vishnadd*. Only this ritual removes the stigma, and only if the adventurers are acquitted of or pay for their "crimes." If the heroes ever need Vistani help again, they almost certainly have to endure this ritual.

The *vishnadd* is convened when an accusation is made in the presence of the *raunie*. (Sometimes she makes the accusation herself.) A single character who represents the accused steps forward, as does one who represents the accuser; each identifies himself or herself. The involved parties then observe the ritual described by Van Richten. The *raunie* prompts *giorgios* if they do not understand what is happening. If an accused non-Vistana refuses to take part in the *vishnadd*, she is immediately ejected from the company of the tribe—by curse or other fell power if necessary—along with any and all comrades.

Obviously, the Dungeon Master is a judge to whom an adventurer cannot lie. If a character uses magical means to shield her thoughts, or influence the trial in any way, she must roll a saving throw vs. spell for each lie or deception, with failure indicating that the *raunie* penetrates the deception.

The *raunie* tolerates three "displays of disrespect" by a *giorgio*—speaking out of turn, making snide remarks, refusing to answer a question, or similar infractions—but only if the offending character allows her to inflict 1d8 points of damage upon her hand with the knife. On the fourth slip-up, the case is lost and judgment follows immediately.

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Her eyes roll back white, and she enters a trancelike state. In this condition, she becomes judge, jury, and executioner. Her tribe believes she hears what they think and cannot be deceived, so they accept any action she takes without question.

In matters of dispute, both adversaries approach the *raunie*, stand before her, and offer their open hands. Neither may speak until she takes his hand in hers and places the point of the knife against the palm. She asks a question or bids him tell his grievance. Only then may he speak, though he can say anything he wishes; if either party answers out of turn, his case is summarily lost. There is nothing if not order in the court of the *vishnadd*.

After the *raunie* has heard each side and passed judgment, all differences are declared resolved. I was present at one proceeding wherein two Vistani argued bitterly over the ownership of a litter of puppies, and was amazed to see the adversaries embrace heartily moments after the *raunie* had awarded the whelps to the owner of the bitch, based on the fact that she was the better hunter. No trace of frustration or resentment darkened the loser's face, and soon he was bartering for the pick of the litter. Were a *giorgio* to enter into such an action and lose his claim, I am sure that he would be forced to leave the area at once.



Combat Resolutions

There are rare occasions when neither party has the better claim, and no judgment is possible. In such cases, the adversaries are invited to settle their differences through a feather-blade duel. Their weapons are pheasant feathers whose tips are dipped in an herbal poison. I was unable to ascertain all the ingredients, but one component is a lichen which gives off a faint phosphorescent glow.

In play, both characters strip to the waist, removing both mundane and magical armor, and fight arena-style with feather-blades. Each hit is a "touch" that leaves a telltale phosphorescent glow. Also, each successful hit releases a dose of contact poison, such that the victim must make a saving throw vs. paralyzation. After three failed saving throws, the victim succumbs to the contact poison and falls unconscious for 1d4 hours. The first character to fall unconscious or concede the match loses the judgment.

Acquittal

If a man is accused and acquitted, there is a feast in his honor. The victim of the trial is expected to raise his flagon and make a toast to peace and forgiveness. Then, when the tribe has gathered about the campfire and the *doroq* begins, he is allowed to tell his tale in full, showing how the misunderstanding occurred and why he is blameless. Curiously, he is not challenged if he tells a *feeshka*, a little lie as the Kartakans call it. He is subtly encouraged with favorable reactions if he dramatizes the

This same honor should be accorded to a hero who endures the *vishnadd* and is vindicated. A feast is a great chance for master roleplayers to take center stage and have some fun recalling the incident "in their own words." If a hero has been found innocent of all wrongdoing, he is accorded *glogoto* status.

account with melodramatic or even comic episodes. He has been found innocent of wrongdoing, after all, so the story might as well be interesting.

Punishment

In matters of guilt, punishment is immediate and not subject to appeal. The sentence imposed by a *raunie* is ungoverned by standards or degrees. As she passes judgment while in her trancelike state, it might be argued the *raunie* achieves what the Vistani consider a state of infallibility; whatever she decides is the right thing to do. Punishments run the gamut from a public flogging (mostly for young offenders) to exile (see later). Death penalties are possible, but unheard of.

Convicted *giorgios* are never subject to execution, but they can be cursed. They certainly will not be welcomed into any Vistani encampment in the future. If the transgressors plead for mercy and offer to make restitution, the *raunie* might accept, but her demands are not likely to be simple or pleasant.

Banishment

Vistani offenders may be banished from the tribe, condemned to walk alone in our realms. They become *mortu* if they seek and settle down in

A guilty adventurer is subject to a curse whose strength depends on the seriousness of the offense against the Vistani. The punishment should fit the crime, and often an ideal punishment presents itself. If nothing obvious can be done, the Dungeon Master should see Chapter Five herein for curse ideas. If the Dungeon Master is unsure of how strong the curse should be, consult Chapter Twelve of *Domains of Dread*.

The only difference between characters who sue for clemency and those who defy the *raunie's* judgment is that the former have an escape clause built into their curses, something like, "Unless you agree to my demands . . ."

the company of *giorgios* in their misery. If the *raunie* judges that the convicted tribesman is no longer fit to live among his fellows, but deserves no worse punishment (as if that were not punishment enough!), then he is banished—they call it *karash* (ka ROSH). Such unfortunates are treated as if they were mere *giorgios*, which is torture to them. I know this all too well, for I unwittingly put the *karash* upon Arturi Radanavich when I cursed him long, long ago.

"How will they receive us?" I asked the Vistana on our third day in search of a caravan.

"They will not dare to refuse you," answered Arturi. "All Vistani know you, Van Richten. You are part of the *doroq*, the tales they tell around the evening fire."

"Gracious! I shudder to think what they say."

"You will hear what they say soon enough, but you may be surprised to learn how you are depicted. Among some tribes your name is revered, for you have power over the Vistani which no *giorgio* has ever possessed. It is not loving reverence so much as grudging respect; even the most evil characters in a story may excite the imagination and gain sympathy."

"Will they not kill me, or at least wish to?"

"No! We are not murderers. Why should we attack you unless to defend our *vardos* and children? It is only your enduring malice that threatens the Vistani, and none of them would wish to enflame it with acts of aggression."

"And what of you, Arturi? Will all tribes open their arms to you, though you may not live among them?"

"No tribe will open its arms to me. I am the Outcast, for your curse follows me and descends upon all Vistani who tarry with me after dark."

—From the private journal of
Dr. Van Richten

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See the first *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix* for a description of a darkling. This creature is a natural villain or plot complication in any adventure involving the Vistani. Whether the heroes are *giorgios* or *giogotos*, a darkling can plot against them. Its taste for cold revenge means that it is a good candidate to construct elaborate, twisted plots which can weave through the main quest of a campaign, or turn into a campaign of its own.

Exile

For heinous crimes, the offender is cast into the darkness, exiled, *shalach-ti* (SHA lok TEE). When this judgment is pronounced, the *vishnadd* knife is thrown out of the camp and the guilty party is ordered to go take it up. Since only a *raunie* may wield the *vishnadd*, the offender's grip on the obsidian blade

at once soils its sacredness, and confirms his own exile. Now he is truly outside the *raunie's* sphere of influence and protection.

Although the *raunie* takes no physical action to enforce her final command, Arturi tells me a Vistana offender almost always takes up—and keeps—the knife. Over time, he loses the balance, the naturalness, that the Vistani so prize, and becomes a darkling, an evil creature with a twisted mind.

I confess, that first night I saw Arturi Radanavich in my bedroom, I took him for a darkling. I now realize the depth and offensiveness of that error.

Communication

There are some scholars who claim that the Vistani have a pronounced accent. (I am frequently amused when I hear these words pronounced in an accent of

Creating a translation matrix for the *patterna* would require volumes of space. It would be like learning a language almost completely composed of slang. A hero attempting to comprehend a *patterna* conversation is like a second-year French student eavesdropping in Paris: The student picks up bits and pieces, but never the whole range of conversation.

To create this feeling in game play, the Dungeon Master can create a short list of offhand remarks that might be overheard and spontaneously translated. Some should be what the Vistani are actually saying ("I think the *giorgios* are dangerous, so we must—" and the rest makes no sense); some should be misinterpreted but seemingly understood ("Their hearts will make good stew," when they're actually saying "They will be warm to the heart after we feed them."); and, for a few laughs, some of them can be complete nonsense ("I'll bet the mage can hang from his toes in a *vardo*").

As the adventurers overhear the *patterna*, allow them occasional chances to understand. As often as the Dungeon Master wishes (depending on the number of prepared translations),

let the heroes make an Intelligence check: If it fails, they must continue to listen for 1d4 rounds before attempting another check; if it succeeds, they pick something up. The Dungeon Master then rolls percentile dice behind the screen, assigning a 50% that they hear one of the prepared phrases. Use this mechanic to disseminate information, true or false, as the adventure dictates.

The *patterna* allows the Vistani to talk with one another in the direct presence of the heroes without their being able to understand a word that's spoken. This can be annoying at the least and terrifying at the worst, depending on when and how it is employed. For example, if a seer turns a *tarokka* card, gasps, and says something incomprehensible in the *patterna*, the heroes probably beg for her to repeat herself in an understandable tongue. Instead, she mutters in the *patterna* and plays the next card, at which point she gasps louder and cries out aloud, shouting strange words that are repeated in alarm by other Vistani outside the *vardo*. A dramatic and diabolical Dungeon Master can tease his heroes with a wealth of information they cannot hope to understand.

A Sampling of Tralaks



Vistani
badly
received



Vistani
hated



Vistani
persecuted
here



Generous
giorgios



Very
generous/
friendly
giorgios



Haunted



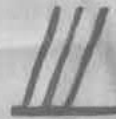
Recent
death by
disease



Recent
death by
murder



Marked
by Lord



Cursed

their own.) To me, the Vistani do not vary the shape of words in any way that could be called an accent. What separates their special language from most others is the way it communicates.

As a people who travel in small numbers, spread across the domains, they have developed means of communication which is short and to the point. They do not often have the opportunity to linger on with other caravans of their tribe and *tasque*, so they tend to pack as much meaning into each syllable, each written character, even each gesture as they possibly can. While *giorgios* are constantly expanding their vocabularies to enhance expression, the Vistani find simple, subtle ways to say a thousand words.

The Patterna

It was my original intent to establish an extensive glossary for this strange language which is a mixture of local tongues, several humanoid dialects, and a unique slang, unspoken by any other

race than the Vistani. Some of the more common terms and expressions can be found at the back of this treatise, but I found my attempt to catalogue a working vocabulary an exercise in futility, useless to anyone, including myself. This is because the *patterna* is conveyed more by context and intonation than by meaning or root words. Many ordinary words have no translations in the *patterna*. In fact, the Vistani dialect appropriates *giorgio* words when needed, without interrupting the rhythm of speech.

There are also many words and phrases in the *patterna* which have no parallels in any other language. Were I to utter a sentence of words based on their nearest common translation, a Vistana would hear only gibberish. Indeed, one or two such attempts on my part elicited uproarious laughter from them, as I had apparently hit on a combination which meant something ridiculous.

Tralaks

The written language of the Vistani is similarly image-intensive. While many

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can write in other languages, letters are forever as foreign a notion as living in one place. A *tralak* (trah LAK) is like a symbol or sigil, expressing a whole idea with a single character. A Vistana does not write love letters or grocer's lists to another using *tralaks*. Rather, these characters are normally carved in wood or stone along trails and roads, just outside towns and villages, but hidden from immediate view. So many *tralaks* exist that long and detailed messages can be constructed that any Vistana can read and understand.

Tralaks can appear anywhere adventurers roam, carved into wood, painted on, scratched in, burned in, and so forth. Furthermore, *tralaks* can be claimed as a learned language (see the notes on Intelligence in the *Player's Handbook*). The Dungeon Master can create Vistani *tralak* characters and their translations for a hero who has learned to interpret them.

Tralaks can be used as lures, warnings, red herrings, clues, and simple messages, even if no one in the party can read them.

Paaterns

One who is wise in the ways of the Vistani can sometimes detect a *paatern* (pah TAYRN). These are personal communiqués—prearranged signals left behind by a Vistana who knows that another particular Vistana will pass by. A ranger or druid might note one if he were intently studying the area where it lay, though he would never find one "just in passing." Only a Vistana readily spots a *paatern*, and he must at least suspect where it will be.

Paaterns are subtle indeed. A knotted willow branch, a feather lodged in the bark of a tree, a dead branch wedged into the "V" of a dividing tree trunk, a narrow stone teetering over a gopher hole—all these things and more are used by the

Vistani to pass along warnings and messages. Obviously, the range of messages is extremely limited, but I suspect that *paaterns* are mundane tools that make the Vistani appear more prescient than they truly are.

Paaterns are a more subtle form of *tralaks*, with more potentially sinister applications. A ranger or druid can recognize one on a roll of 1 or 2 on 1d6, if actively searching the area. A *mortu* hero (as per this section's DUNGEON MASTER Appendix) may be able to spot *paaterns*, and all Vistani can instinctively and easily find them, provided they know to look.

Conclusion

I remained thoroughly uncomfortable among the Vistani, despite the frequency of my scattered days and nights among them, and I cannot suppress a pang of regret that I did not learn more about them. Certain of the topics I have addressed in this chapter are universal, I am sure: the rituals, the nomadism, the *paterna*. Most others I have observed in only a few caravans, and I cannot help but wonder if I am attributing my observations too broadly.

Furthermore, I begin to fear that perusing my thesis on the Vistani will lull the reader into a false sense of familiarity. Heaven forbid some blithe rogue should insinuate himself upon the tribes by demonstrating his knowledge of their customs and beliefs—or worse, some hapless farmer, smug in his narrow understanding, should offer grave offense, thinking he is acting out a familiar ritual! For all I have written and will write, these wandering peoples are as individualistic and mysterious as they appear to be when first you meet them. Their powers are fell, and you and I are not quite human to them. For your own sake, assume nothing!

The prophetic tribe with burning eyes
 Took the road yesterday, carrying the children
 On its back, or giving to their fierce appetites
 The ever ready treasure of pendant breasts.
 The men go on foot bearing their sparkling weapons
 Along by the wagons in which their families huddle;
 Scanning the sky with eyes dulled
 By the sad regret for missing chimeras.
 From the depths of his sandy retreat, the cricket
 Watches them pass, redoubles his song;
 Cybele, who loves them, redoubles her ventures,
 Makes water flow from the cliff to flower the desert
 Before these travellers, for whom is opened
 The familiar empire of future darkness.

—Charles Baudelaire
 “Gypsies on the Road”

(translated from “Bohémiens en voyage”)

CHAPTER THREE: THE TASQUES



It never ceases to amaze me how apparently intelligent people call on simple generalities to define reality. Even more astounding, the words “When you’ve seen one, you’ve seen them all” comprise a ridiculous declaration of bravado among too many adventurers who should know better. I have personally found myself in the position of destroying a vampire who, only a week before, was a tough-talking man who claimed he needed nothing more than a stake and a mallet to be a hero. His belated discovery that not all vampires become comatose when the sun rises was but one of several fatal miscalculations.

Perhaps most people can be forgiven for failing to understand the subtle nuances among monsters, as experiences with them are either brief or lethal. However, nearly everyone has

had some dealings with the Vistani, and they have certainly lived to talk about it. Hence, I am even more perplexed by self-assured, all-encompassing, and thoroughly erroneous attitudes toward them. I have found that the various natives of this land, including denizens of big cities such as Il Aluk, are quick to denounce the Vistani as practitioners of forbidden lore and dark pleasures, as thieves and allies of evil. In a sweeping gesture of condemnation, they confidently declare that “Vistani are all alike.”

I believe this common misperception is based on the fact that the Vistani are a transient people. “Where are you from?” is a polite way of asking “Who are your people?” and the answer to that question can tell us a great deal about a stranger. For good or ill, we draw conclusions about a man based on our knowledge of the place from which he hails—often regardless of the actual length of time he has lived there!

For example, I have lived in Mordent for decades now, but I was born and raised on my family estate in Rivalis,



Darkon, so I am forever a Darkonian in my own eyes and others'. Were I originally from Nova Vaasa or some other domain, a new acquaintance would have a distinctly different impression of me on learning that.

As the Vistani are not from any particular place, we are deprived of a basic means of identification, which makes us feel uncomfortable. Thus, it is unfortunately all too natural to mistrust and fear the Vistani, to accept often unfounded accusations of sinister behavior, and to allow speculation to cement their undeserved notoriety. It becomes an easy thing to say that a Vistana is a Vistana, and an evil creature at that.

If these people are not merely traveling bands of organized swindlers or mystical creatures in league with the powers of darkness, then what exactly are they? Are they simply homeless people, or perhaps lost sheep? Are they fugitives on the run from who knows what, or seekers of some divine truth? It would be very convenient if the Vistani fit neatly into any of these categories, but the answer is not so elementary. They are all of the above, and none of them. They are one thing on Monday and another on Tuesday. They are above us, below us, and exactly our equals. We sneer at them, then seek them out, because they are everything we fear yet everything we want to be at the same time. I have already postulated that

there is no way to truly understand them, and I reiterate that belief now. The best we can hope for is acceptance on both our parts and theirs.

Before continuing, let me pause and insert what has become an all too familiar disclaimer: As those who have read my various dissertations surely know, my observations are strictly that: observations. I cannot attest to the absolute veracity of anything I have learned about the Vistani. In fact, I am even less sure in my "knowledge" of them than I am about any other subjects of my research. While powerful monsters can have some unpredictable abilities, the Vistani are mysterious by nature. Little about them is immutable. Further, they have both the will and the ability to change. I can well imagine them reading this book—not to see their names in print, but to review adjustments they can adopt to confound "knowledgeable" scholars, simply because their inherent disposition requires them to defy identification.

Overview

There are, in fact, no less than three distinct groups of Vistani wandering the domains; as noted before, these are called *tasques*. Upon discovering that the nomads considered themselves divided into these large and diverse groups, my first inclination was to classify them as clans. After some study, I concluded that they are not actually linked by a common root kinship. Over the years (and perhaps centuries), I suspect there has been some intermingling of blood between the *tasques*, but each has managed to maintain a cultural individuality that merits acknowledgment, examination, and respect. Quite possibly each *tasque* comes from its own homeland, somewhere in the distant past. However, not even the Vistani know the names of those places, so I cannot say with impunity if this is the case.

Since the Vistani cannot be clearly classified by their physical origins, and because they are not given to mingling with outsiders, one must find other ways

to identify them if one cares to know exactly with whom one is dealing. Fortunately, those who know what to look for can do so at a glance, as each *tasque* has its own style of dress. There are other important differences as well. Each *tasque* exhibits its own attitudes and behaviors, its own system of beliefs about time and reality, and certain mystical powers that are tied to its individual culture.

The most important difference between the *tasques*, at least according to the Vistani themselves, lies in the services and crafts they provide—in their professions, if you will. Of course, a given *tasque* is not limited to a single skill; in fact, there is a strong possibility of finding one tribe practicing several of the trades which I shall shortly ascribe to others. As each *tasque* takes its identity from its primary craft, however, the services or wares that it produces are generally of higher quality than one can find anywhere else.

The Kaldresh

As the "Tale of Vistan" (see Chapter One) reveals, the Kaldresh are eternal

While the Vistani are proud of their heritage, they are never eager to share information with any *giorgio*. No one ever says, "Hello! I am a Kaldreshite of the Vatraska tribe." More likely, Vistani identify themselves by family name, rather than by tribal or *tasque* affiliation. They prefer the term Vistani because it identifies them without saying too much. Despite Van Richten's confident assertion that members of each *tasque* may be identified at a glance, such is not the case. Nomadic people do not have the luxury of choosing either their "look" or their standard equipment. While the information that follows can certainly influence the appearance of a given tribe, there are few absolutes, and the Dungeon Master is encouraged to defy all attempts to pigeonhole a Vistani tribe by their fashions alone.

camp followers; they define themselves as creatures who draw their *vardos* behind armed forces on the march. One can spy a Kaldresh caravan from a distance, since tribes of this *tasque* travel laden with the tools of their trade. Their *vardos* positively clang with iron, and entire herds of animals trample and fuss in their wake. Half-naked, dirty-faced children hoot back and forth while they run alongside the train with long reeds or slender branches, urging stray animals back to the fold. Men on horseback ride from end to end of the caravan, supervising the day's journey, or they scout ahead for a good place to camp. The Kaldresh make no effort to be silent, for they depend on trade with those who hear them coming, and they have no fear of creatures that stalk the night. Tribes of the Kaldresh *tasque* tend to be larger than others—as many as forty or fifty members may live in a single caravan, but the volume of business they conduct offsets the strain of so many mouths to feed.

Kaldresh men are muscular and bucolic creatures who tend to dress in somber colors. Their clothing is designed for durability and comfort—to protect them from forge sparks and to cushion them against long days in the saddle. They often wear cloth hats with turned-down brims, which shield them from the sun and absorb sweat. Their knee-high boots are well made from leather of the highest quality, and it is said that a man who wears Vistani boots never blisters or even grows footsore.

Only elderly Kaldresh males wear a beard, but all men of the *tasque* are dark with chin shadow. They grow their hair long, binding it behind their heads so that it does not hinder their work. Their hands are rough and armored with calluses. They are quiet among *giorgios*, preferring to let the women speak for them, but in the privacy of their encampments, the men are more clearly in charge of daily life.

Kaldresh women dress for a life of hard labor as well. Heavy cotton dresses cover their legs completely, though they are roomy enough to allow free

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movement. Plain-colored shirts are buttoned all the way up to their necks. Many women, especially among the Equaar, wear pants. Elderly women wear scarves over their hair, while the younger ladies usually allow their locks to flow freely. Some women prefer boots like those the men wear, but many wear sandals which conform to the feet and have the same reputation for comfort as do Kaldresh boots. Other Kaldresh women avoid footwear altogether, having feet as tough as leather.

Kaldresh children wear hand-me-downs or nothing at all (if weather permits), for the Vistani are free of the mores of civilized society and do not teach their children to be ashamed of their bodies. There is no distinction between the sexes of children before the age of ten years in terms of treatment, responsibilities, or games they play, except that boys are more often charged with the care of forge tools. As those instruments are quite heavy, I suspect such chores help strengthen small arms for the day when they will take up smithing.

Despite the clear presence of three and four generations of Kaldresh in a single tribe, aging is apparently unknown to them. They seem to reach a stage of maturity with which they are comfortable, then stop growing older. By their own report they are extremely long-lived, and a child I would have taken to be about ten years of age told me he was actually sixteen "by *giorgio* count." When I asked a Vatraska captain to reckon his "*giorgio* age," he merely shrugged, "Your own birth and death are but a tiny piece of reality," which, I eventually learned, meant that he had been born before me and would be here long after I died.

The Kaldresh adorn themselves with precious little jewelry, although they decorate their *vardos* and their prize stallions with elaborate metalwork. Vanity is unknown to them, and they are quite unconscious of fashion. Ironically, Vistani adornments become very popular in larger cities from time to time. The Kaldresh do not understand

why their ornamental wares are ignored in one place, then sell out completely in the next, but they care little what *giorgios* think and take no pains to meet the superficial demands of style.

Attitudes and Behavior

The average Kaldresh Vistana is quiet and withdrawn, given to minding his own business, unlikely to answer the challenge of an aggressive *giorgio* who seeks to harass him. This *tasque* has survived by remaining nonthreatening, not only because its members are consistently mistrusted by outsiders, but because they are used to dealing with soldiers and other aggressive types of people. Historically, if an army they were following was overrun, the routing forces quickly saw that the Vistani had no resistance to offer, which may have many times spared them persecution and bonded servitude.

The Kaldresh are polite to non-Vistani, but never friendly. Their status as camp followers occasionally leads a *giorgio* to mistake their women for prostitutes! To the contrary, they are very protective of their women and careful to guard against contamination by *giorgio* blood.

As a matter of fact, the Kaldresh are rather staunch and reserved. I have not seen any evidence of passion between them, especially in comparison to members of the Boem *tasque*, who positively radiate emotion. Like all Vistani, the Kaldresh are extraordinarily private creatures in general. For example, I recall excusing myself from the circle about the campfire one night, casually mentioning to some of the men that I needed to relieve myself; the shock and repugnance on their faces immediately told me that I had spoken improperly, and alerted me to the discreet Vistani practice of slipping away without a word, deliberately ignored by one's fellows.

The Kaldresh are completely apolitical, and it is impossible to involve them in intrigue of any sort unless you pay them money. Even then, they accept no personal stake in the matter. They will sell a sword to a known and dangerous

fugitive, then sharpen the blades of the mob that is hunting him down without concern for either party's agenda. They will honor a pledge to transport a man using their mystical ways, then abandon him to a pack of wolves at his destination, having discharged their agreement. A dying man who lies bleeding in the road is of no concern to them. They will not act to save him, but neither will they rob him or allow their animals to trample him. They want only to be left to themselves, for which favor they stay briefly in the area, then move on.

Beliefs Concerning Time

The Kaldresh believe that they have been removed from time. They do not measure the hours of a day or the months of a year, for such things have no relevance to them. Every moment is the sum total of existence, which does not pass away when the next one arrives, but becomes a part of an ever growing reality. They do not remember the past, they simply look upon it as part of the whole. A Kaldresh Vistana does not say, "I had forgotten that." He says, "I did not notice that."

No doubt, this disdain for measured time has evolved out of their nomadic lifestyle. When the road traveled stretches to eternity, time loses its meaning. Why consider yesterday or tomorrow when they are largely the same as today? Long-term prisoners report a similar cessation of the experience of passing time, as do elves, who live so very long that human terms such as "old" and "forever" have little meaning. What renders Kaldresh philosophy so distinct is that they do actually seem to exist outside of time.

They "recall" (for lack of a better term) events of the distant past as if they just experienced them, and the future appears to be as easily accessible to their minds as the past, if they can be convinced to look at it. The Kaldresh neither reminisce nor dream, for all of life is found in the here and now.

This sheds a whole new perspective on fortune-telling. Since time does not march inexorably forward for the

Kaldresh, the future does not remain ever "ahead." A seer need not look forward to see the future, but rather in a direction of which *giorgios* are not aware. Hence, a Vistana does not look beyond the present to glimpse the future; he discovers it where it lies, near at hand, already there.

Specific Powers

Of all the *tasques*, the Kaldresh appear the least overtly magical in day-to-day life. They do not weave musical magic as do the Boemians, nor relish the arcane as do the Manusa. They make little of abilities which all Vistani possess.

However, they do have one curious faculty which smacks of mysticism: Whether the tribe seer, a spy, or some magical spell informs them, the Kaldresh have an uncanny talent for homing in on conflicts. If war is brewing, or a mob is on the march, or even when a wealthy party of heroes prepares a final assault on a stronghold, the Kaldresh seem to instinctively sniff it out and position themselves to profit by the blood to be spilled.

Furthermore, the tribes of this *tasque* seem to intuitively know what equipment, stock, and rations are most needed by both parties, for those items are ready for sale with a consistency that defies luck. Such supplies are expensive, as they are no doubt dearly needed, but those who deal honestly with the Kaldresh receive good value for their money. I do not



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imply that the Vistani unfailingly provide critical magical items (although they are known to deal in these as well), but a combatant looking for, say, a battering ram or a mancatcher is often amazed to discover that very item for sale in the back of a Kaldresh supply wagon that rolled in unexpectedly.

An enterprising Dungeon Master can use the Kaldresh as a fallback source of supplies. If the heroes have neglected to pick up some piece of equipment vital to their mission, a Kaldresh caravan can come rolling along. Of course, items the adventurers need should cost at least 50% more than they would in town, but all wares are of excellent quality, unless the Vistani have cause to cheat the heroes. (Unless the Dungeon Master specifically wants to supply the adventurers with a magical item, the Kaldresh only stock items from the tack and harness and weapons lists in the equipment section of the *Player's Handbook*.)

The Defining Craft

The Kaldresh pride themselves on their ability to provide the tools, beasts of burden, and services necessary to engage in conquest. Although they are not warriors themselves, they recognize the fact that a traveling army needs more than muscle and blood to fuel its progress. Every few years, when Lord Drakov of Falkovnia mobilizes his forces and marches against Darkon, it is said that the Kaldresh gather and take their places in the rear lines, prepared to support and profit from the effort. By my observation, the tribes merely wander where the winds blow them, offering their wares in towns and occasionally accepting special orders for custom work.

The price one pays for the services of the Kaldresh can be wildly negotiable, for they do not expect to grow rich by their trades, but they do expect value in return for their work. Each tribe within this *tasque* carries instruments of blacksmithing. All can produce metal goods of a quality equal

to those produced at a permanent forge. Weapons, pikes, horseshoes, nails, and even ornamental ironwork of Vistani make are highly prized among the Falkovnians, who appreciate such things. It is said a Vistani-forged sword never loses its edge, a Vistani-hammered breastplate cannot be pierced by nonmagical weapons, and a Vistani-made horseshoe is never thrown.

Those of Kaldresh blood are expert breeders of large animals such as horses, cattle, sheep, and oxen. The bloodlines of Nova Vaasan horses were refined to their present excellence by the Vistani. Many a breeder in Kantora, Egertus, and Arbora would pay a Kaldresh Vistana handsomely to become chief handler on his ranch. One telltale sign that the Vistani on the outskirts of town are Kaldresh is the presence of herd animals. Such stock is well tended, yielding sweet, tender meat

Gold is usually part of the equation when conducting business with Vistani. When setting up shop on the edge of a city or village, they sell commonly available items (those wares listed on the standard weapon and equipment charts—Dungeon Master's discretion) at or slightly below market value. During market days, they are always quick to entice *giorgios* with items not openly for sale: fortune-telling, *evil eye* amulets, cursed items. Those items are offered privately, usually for a substantial markup.

The Vistani are also willing to negotiate for favors and pacts almost as often as they are for gold. Usually they bargain from strength, when buyers need their services more than they need whatever a *giorgio* offers. Vistani never require evil acts of a *giorgio*, but their tasks might entail great danger. Those who try to renege on an agreement struck with a Vistana are subject to a "frustrating" or worse curse, depending on the degree to which the Vistana has been cheated. Unfortunately for them, heroes who are cheated must find their own recourse.

and thick, soft wool. Beasts of burden display almost human intelligence in their ability to learn and understand commands.

Tribes of the Kaldresh *tasque* are especially knowledgeable in the arts of healing. Though all Vistani have a working knowledge of natural medicines and curative elixirs, members of this *tasque* produce healing agents more quickly, with less raw materials, and with greater effects than even some clerics I have known. Only the Kaldresh know how to make *porda*, an extract of nightshade which can actually heal wounds.

Adventurers can purchase 2d4 doses of *porda* from any Kaldresh tribe for 100 gp per dose (no experience-point value granted). Upon drinking the brew, the imbiber immediately makes a saving throw vs. poison. If the save is successful, the elixir acts as a *potion of healing*; if it fails, the imbiber is not healed and suffers a -1 penalty to attack and damage rolls for 1d6 hours, due to nausea.

The Kamii

I chuckle to recall that my old friend, the late Geddar Ironheart (a dwarf of gruff manners), never had much to say about humans which could be construed as positive. In his sardonic eyes, we humans are too quick to react, too soon to give up, too careless, too forgiving, too sweet-natured, and so on. In particular, nothing drew more scorn from him than the work of human blacksmiths. He claimed he could tell a human-made sword just by the "pitiful cling" it made when struck against other objects. "Good thing it's magical," he once sneered at a potent holy sword. "All this frilly metalwork would fall apart with one good hit."

Imagine his surprise when he praised a newly discovered warhammer for its obviously dwarven construction, only to learn that the weapon had been forged by a Vistana. Even after the truth had been revealed to him by my wizard

friend Shauten, he could not help but admire the hammer's balance, its resistance to denting and chipping, the ingenuity of the fluted grip, the economy of materials, the sublime configuration of the head, and more. When Shauten identified the make of the weapon to me, I could only shrink from it and call it cursed, for I was blind to the talents of the Vistani, and I had no idea what the Kaldresh were.

Geddar's surprising warhammer was, in fact, created by the Kamii. This particular Kaldresh tribe excels in the skills of the forge, working in tin, steel, silver, gold, and many other metals with equal ease and expertise. They create not only weapons, but armor, shields, nails, horseshoes, bridles, wheels, axles, locking mechanisms, jewelry, and remarkable puzzles to be taken apart and put back together again (with a great deal of perplexity and frustration on my part). These wares are not magical, but they often behave as if they were, so cunning is their make.

The speed at which the Kamii work is a marvel as well. Their forge hammers rise and fall in blinding rhythm, filling the air with frenetic sparks that appear to swirl around the smith in a magical pattern. Two and three smiths may pound a single metal strip at the same time, yet they never interfere with one another's strokes, and they never seem to confer on the intended shape of the object they mold. It is said that when they plunge a red-hot weapon into a cold bath to temper it, the rising steam takes the semblance of the man who will wield it.

Objects for Enchantment

While the Vistani are not commonly makers of magical items, Kamii smiths

Weapons produced by the Kamii are not magical in themselves, but they behave as +1 weapons for the purposes of the creatures they can strike. Weapon speed is reduced by 1 as well, because of the superior balance of Kamii craftsmanship. Cursed weapons will function differently, of course.

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are sometimes called upon to produce objects that are subsequently enchanted by wizards. It is no secret that magical weapons, armor, and jewelry must be constructed with materials and craftsmanship of the highest quality before they are imbued with power, and there are very few *gorgio* blacksmiths with the talent to achieve work of such quality. However, virtually any smith of the Kamii tribe can accomplish such tasks. In fact, I learned while I was among them that they had even fashioned a number of amulets which would eventually become lich phylacteries. While such intelligence did not endear the Kamii to me, it did impress me, for there are few constructions as exacting as a phylactery, and for an aspiring lich to trust such important work to another is astounding!

Cursed items: While the enchantment of magical items is largely outside the sphere of Kamii workmanship, I fear that cursed items are not. The Vistani are well known for their power to curse, and this ability extends into the Kamii smithy as well. Of course, they can make weapons which seem to strike wide of the mark every time. There are more subtle and insidious contraptions, befitting the Vistani reputation. The Kamii create for those who seek fiery recompense or cold revenge. Kamii have shown me rings that induce nightmares, neck chains that weigh mere ounces but weary the wearer as if



The Kamii can produce weapons that are subtly inferior, inflicting a -1 penalty on all attack and damage rolls. They sell these "cursed" weapons to *gorgios* who display a lack of respect at any time during their visit with the tribe. Dungeon Masters should allow a player to think her character has a superior weapon (for a time) by quietly assessing the attack and damage penalties when such rolls are made. Note that the "curse" is not magical; it is a manifestation of intentionally defective workmanship.

Other items forged by the Kamii actually are cursed, but only to an "embarrassing" extent at best (see Chapter Twelve of *Domains of Dread*). Such an object should be little more than a nuisance to the character who owns it, and easily discarded once its nature is detected (unless it is an object that sticks to the hero like a piece of unruly tape). Van Richten has already mentioned some possibilities, but the *Dungeon Master* is encouraged to invent his own insidious devices. Assign subtle powers to the item, which do not immediately implicate it when the hero begins to experience problems.

Anyone who purchases these cursed items with intent to inflict them upon another is subject to a 1% powers check.

they weighed a ton, buckles that lock shut and cannot be opened, pocket knives that cannot slice warm butter yet become razor blades when touched to one's own hand, and other objects which are mere nuisances at best and lethal traps at worst. A man who purchases one of these items risks his own safety, for evil sent abroad seldom fails to find its way home.

The Equaar

Many a battle has been won or lost when the general's horse stumbled, and many an army's sweet victory or bitter defeat depended on the taste of their dinner the night before the final conflict.

Any soldier will tell you how difficult it is to fight a bloody war hundreds of miles from home if one has been forced to carry his weapons and supplies the whole way.

Animals account for the success or failure of campaigns in ways that we do not much think about until their absence forces us to do so. The Vistani are sensitive to this issue, the Equaar especially; they are expert animal handlers. I have met precious few non-Vistani who have displayed the same affinity for all natural creatures, big and small, and I include rangers and druids in my mental survey!

All Vistani seem to speak with animals and be understood, but the Equaar know bestial hearts better than the rest. I chuckled the first time I saw a Vistana speak to a cat as if it were human, telling it to go and have a specific one of the many children milk a goat for her stew. Then I gawked like a Barovian woodcutter at a fireworks display when that very boy appeared a half hour later with a sloshing bucket in his hand. Was this a Vistani display of power, the prowess of a not-so-dumb animal, or an elaborate conditioned response? I cannot say.

There is no such thing as a mad dog, a ferocious wildcat, or a rampaging bull in the presence of a an Equaar Vistana. He speaks a few soothing words or sings a gentle melody, and the snarling lip relaxes, the ripping teeth disappear behind an affectionate tongue, the menacing claws retract, and the charging horns come to an abrupt halt.

My first encounter with the Equaar was on the horse plains of Nova Vaasa. Arturi rightly guessed we would find them there, and our timing was excellent, for we chanced to see them at work before they were conscious of our presence. We were rewarded with a rare sight: the "capture" of a wild stallion.

We had climbed a bluff just south of Briarweed Forest to gain a more commanding view of the grassy, yellow tableland. I was searching the northeastern horizon with a special invention given me by my old comrade

Alanik Ray, an adjustable spyglass with two lenses, when Arturi tugged at my sleeve and directed my attention eastward. Through the knee-high straw thundered a score of fine horses, their muscles rippling in the hot sun. I raised the tubular spyglass to my eye and admired their graceful forms racing the wind across the prairie. As my optical enhancer drifted over the herd from the lead stallion to the sturdy mares half obscured in a billowing cloud of dust, my sight came to rest on another pair of horses close behind the herd, ridden bareback by swarthy women with streaming black hair. I gasped, marveling at their riding skills, for they grasped their mounts by the mane and directed their steps without the use of a bridle!

"Equaar," pronounced my guide with a hint of admiration in his voice.

The Vistani somehow urged their horses to all speed, with neither crop nor spur to drive them on, and the graceful beasts accelerated until they galloped amidst the herd. I thought that I would never see a more masterful display of horsemanship, when suddenly they hiked themselves up and stood upon the shoulders of their animals! Quite leisurely, they took stock of the creatures all around them, maintaining their breakneck speed the whole time! In a blur of hair and motion, one woman leaped through the air and landed on the back of one of the wild stallions. The other Vistana quickly followed suit. The two gripped the manes of their new mounts, who broke from the herd and began to buck wildly. No knight could have stayed atop a spike-goaded horse with the ease these women showed. In what seemed mere moments, the untamed beasts grew calm and responsive to their rider's ministrations. Meanwhile, the mounts they had ridden in pursuit followed dutifully behind, conspirators in the capture of their fellows.

I was amazed, speechless, humbled, and altogether taken with the beauty and grace of those Vistani, though I had not come any closer to them than my spyglass brought me.

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My respect for the Equaar's animal husbandry only grew when I met them in person. The Equaar do not fit the common perception of a Vistani tribe. One expects to see a caravan of *vardos* and women with bells on their toes and *crystal balls* in their hands. Instead, the Equaar are *wranglers and shepherds* who carry all their possessions on the backs of their animals. They sleep in tents or under the stars. Their women rarely wear dresses, for such clothing is not amenable to the saddle. One might easily mistake them for ranch hands on a cattle drive or common shepherds taking a herd to market.

Animals for Sale

Those who seek a riding or pack horse to ease the long road of a quest would do well to trade with an Equaar. But do not assume that a few coins will seal the bargain. These people have a more than personal interest in their stock. After negotiating with a Vistana for the opportunity to purchase, the buyer must offer his payment to the animal itself, along with a suitable tidbit of food—an apple for a horse, an ear of corn for a cow. If the animal accepts the offering, the Vistana consents to the deal.

This ritual is not merely showmanship; I have seen a man beg to buy a horse, agree on a price, and tender his gold, only to be rejected by the steed. After a few words with the Equaar, he apologized to the animal for undervaluing it and doubled his offer! At last he was accepted. Whether the horse responded to what it considered a proper price, to a man who displayed an earnest desire to own it, or even to signals from its trainer is debatable, but the fact remains that the horse itself consented to the transaction. Such an animal is obviously more intelligent than the average jade, and therefore is worth its higher cost.

Stock animals are not the only creatures that Equaar husbandry renders unequivocally superior. These Vistani raise dogs that always respond to a master's command the first time, and that readily obey rather complex hand signals as well. Whatever the

specific breed and skill of the dog, it performs its duties without supervision all day long and displays loyalty worthy of a tale. Hawks and falcons instantly imprint upon whomever owns their jesses, and they can slip and pursue an

Equaar tribesmen are adept with both wild and domestic animals to the same degree as a ranger, and they also can employ the spell-like power *animal friendship*, three times per day. They can use this ability either to capture wild animals, or to send them away. With wild horses, they can use the ability automatically (no saving throw) and as often as they like, not counting it against their daily allotment. Furthermore, all Equaar automatically possess the *Animal Handling*, *Animal Lore*, and *Animal Training (Horse)* nonweapon proficiencies.

Equaar-trained riding horses cost no less than twice the market price. (The *Player's Handbook* suggests 75 gp, but *Dungeon Masters* must set their own economic index for their individual campaigns.) The Vistana may actually agree to a lower price, but the buyer must then offer his money to the horse itself. The base chance of acceptance is 75%, minus 1% for every gp below the Vistana's asking price. An Equaar-trained horse accepts no rider but its owner, has an effective *Intelligence* of 2, and obeys as if its owner had the *Animal Training* proficiency.

A prospective buyer of other Vistani stock must offer payment to the animal as well, for the Equaar consider all natural creatures "free" to choose. Animals other than horses indicate their acceptance by little or no reaction; the animal's most typical negative behavior (a dog snarls, a sheep flees, a hawk ruffles its feathers, etc.) shows rejection of the offer.

In general, such an animal does not display any remarkable skills, but it can be considered the best specimen of its breed found anywhere: Stock animals yield the best meat, work animals perform consistently well, and so forth.

individual quarry in a flock if the falconer can clearly identify it.

Tracking

The Equaar are expert trackers as well, and though they think of themselves primarily as camp followers, I doubt not that they are occasionally recruited as spies by the armies they follow. They might employ dogs for the purpose or they might follow a trail as rangers do, but in any event they reported to me that they could pursue a man whose path had been lost to others several months in the past. I suspect that they combine their innate prescient abilities with more mundane tricks learned from centuries of life on the open road to achieve the success of which they boast. However, their methods are ever secretive, as are most Vistani proficiencies, and even the wisest sages can only speculate.

Equaar enjoy the tracking proficiency with a bonus of +4 to the roll. Furthermore, they can employ a limited form of *object reading* (see *The Complete Psionics Handbook*, page 31) to determine which way their quarry went. To use this ability, a Vistana must place his hand on an object the quarry has touched in the last seven days, and he must make a Wisdom check with a +5 penalty. If the check is successful, the Vistana turns toward the quarry's present location and gets an impression of how far away (in miles) it lies.

Personally Chosen Familiars

Wizards who know the Equaar sometimes pay them handsomely to raise and train an animal that will become a familiar. Such creatures are captured young and fed a diet of their favorite sustenance spiced with special herbs and a modicum of the mage's blood. When the animal reaches adulthood, it is introduced to the wizard in a formal ritual, supervised by the Vistana who raised it, during which time the bond is transposed to the

A wizard who buys a hand-selected Equaar familiar first pays 1,000 gp per experience level. If the Vistani do not have the desired animal in their caravan, a period of 1d4 months is required to trap and train the creature, at the end of which time the Vistana trainer contacts the buyer. (Needless to say, trust is involved here, and an Equaar does not hesitate to cheat a *giorgio* who offends him in any way.) Once the animal is selected, the wizard must give one pint of his own blood, losing one-fourth of his hit point total in the process, to be mixed with the prospective familiar's food over a period of one month, from new moon to new moon. The Vistani do not allow the wizard to live with them while the animal is prepared.

When a month has passed, the buyer is contacted again, at which time he casts *find familiar* in the animal's direct presence. The creature makes a saving throw vs. spell. If it fails, it becomes the wizard's familiar, conforming to the details of the *find familiar* spell. (The familiar will not be a pseudofamiliar, as per the *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix III*.) If the saving throw succeeds, or if the wizard is unavailable within 24 hours of the new moon (when the spell should be cast), the process breaks down and must be started anew. No refunds are given for failed attempts.

wizard as he casts his *find familiar* spell. According to my sources, such familiars are no different from those summoned in the traditional manner; the main advantage is that a mage can choose his particular lifetime companion. However, the creature in question must be a natural animal.

Mystical Figurines

Perhaps the strangest and most magical products of the Equaar are the tiny figurines of animals that they carve. During the three days of the full moon and the one day of the new moon, these little statuettes come to life. They walk among their natural counterparts as

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guardians so that the men and women of the tribe may attend and participate in moon rituals (see Chapter Four) without fear for the safety of their herds. The Equaar create only one or two of each figurine, and they never sell them to other tribes, let alone to *giorgios*.

The Equaar carve animals of wood that conform to the rules listed for figurines of wondrous power in the *DUNGEON MASTER Guide*. However, only ivory goats, obsidian steeds, onyx dogs, and serpentine owls are found. Also, they can animate only during the periods Van Richten specified earlier. These magical creatures serve strictly to guard Vistani possessions. If they are stolen, they automatically attack the thief after animating.

I must pause to point out that, like most Kaldresh, the Equaar are not overtly magical people. Yet, like all Vistani, they remain magical by nature. Some of the common traits I have ascribed to them above could be accounted arcane, although I am more disposed to think of them as natural byproducts of the tribe's mystical temperament, rather than the conscious construction of components and formulae, combined with a harnessing of sorcerous energies. The distinction is a fine one, yet it is worth noting.

The Vatraska

No monster hunting party, or any group of adventurers for that matter, is complete without a priest. Certainly his holy symbol plays a definitive role in battling creatures of the night, but it is the healing power of a cleric which remains his most invaluable trait.

War is another matter. The average army would require an entire platoon of priests to service its wounded. Perhaps in history legions of warrior-priests have marched off to wage holy war, secure that they could take care of themselves when a day's blood had been shed. But most military forces now are made of soldiers, trained to kill and not to cure.

When they need care, they turn to the third tribe of the Kaldresh *tasque*, the Vatraska, whose niche among the camp followers is healing.

The Vatraska remind me of an officious aunt of mine who cared for me when I was a child. I never sensed any love from her—indeed, I thought that she disliked me very much. She tended to my scrapes and bruises with detached efficiency, and she poured foul-tasting concoctions down my gullet without explanation or apology, presuming that my only reasonable reaction was to feel better and be grateful for it.

When I became a physician, old Aunt Shariss took it upon herself full credit for making me what I was. By some stretch of the imagination, I suppose she was right: I knew there had to be a better way to heal the sick, and I was bound and determined to find it.

Like my aunt (and, on reflection, all Vistani), members of the Vatraska tribe remain detached from the personal feelings of those outside their circle. Also like Aunt Shariss, they apply their remedies without any indication of caring if they'll work. Their curatives are herbal and frequently induce stomach cramps when ingested, yet they do seem to be effective.

Unlike my aunt, however, the Vatraska are motivated not by any sense of duty, but rather by profit: They barter in gold and favors like their kin. Their behavior is such as one might expect of a people who are professional healers in the wake of an army of strangers. They are not doctors, which is to say that they do not enter their profession for humanitarian reasons, nor are they patriots seeking to advance the cause of the armed forces they serve.

As members of the Kaldresh *tasque*, the Vatraska are difficult to discern from the Kamii. They are skilled blacksmiths and animal handlers who draw wagons and *vardos* with them as they travel, although careful observation indicates that they pack a great deal more foodstuffs and stores of herbs and spices than other tribes.

There seem to be fewer Vatraska than any other Kaldresh tribe, however. I only had the opportunity to meet with one such tribe, and Arturi explained that he had only met three Vatraska caravans in all his travels over the years. Since the Vistani are not overfond of *giorgios*, and *giorgios* tend to seek out clerics and doctors for their medical needs, it is not surprising that so few of these people are found in our realms.

Restoratives

The Vatraska cast no spells of healing, nor do they brew magical potions, but their ability to cure is perhaps superior to my own as an herbalist physician. I conferred with them regarding the particular herbs and poultices common to their medicinal stores and found that there were few Vistani balms with which I was not already acquainted. The only real surprises to me were the myriad poisons that they somehow used to advantage, breaking fevers and healing various diseases with extracts of belladonna, strychnine, hemlock, and hellebore. As I have already mentioned, all Kaldresh know how to concoct an elixir of nightshade called *porda*, which

Vatraska restoratives are effective against all nonmagical diseases and mummy rot as well, but they cannot halt the progress of magical diseases or lycanthropy. The price for such aid should be dear, usually sucking up most of the party's ready cash and even a magical item or two, and the results are not guaranteed.

Furthermore, 3d20 hours are required to gather the proper ingredients for the particular disease to be treated.

A character who drinks the herbal extract is thoroughly nauseated and incapacitated for 1d20+4 hours while the serum works its way through the body. At the end of that time, the character makes a saving throw vs. poison with a +4 bonus. Success indicates the treatment was effective, while failure means that the disease is still there, but it has not spread further since the serum was ingested.



has a limited effect on physical wounds. None of these recipes would they share with me, and none would they sell for any amount of money, unless the potion was consumed under their supervision. They insisted that their remedies would not work unless they personally administered them, but I suspect that they were simply protecting their secrets.

Curatives

The restorative value of chicken broth is well known to mothers everywhere, although its alchemical workings are not understood, but the Vatraska seem to comprehend the principles which render soup an effective medicine. A freshly cooked meal served up by these people has the effect of speeding up the natural healing process and affording a significantly better night's sleep.

(Perhaps the two are interdependent.) This applies not only to their chicken stock, but to everything they prepare to eat, including the rations that a soldier might carry in his pack. Once again, I am at a loss to explain the reason for this benefit. I observed no special methods of preparation of these culinary cures, and an alchemist friend of mine in Mordentshire analyzed a bit of jerked beef prepared by the Vatraska, only to conclude that it was "food, a bit spicy, nothing more." His proposal that the edibles healed through the power of suggestion intrigued me, but I learned

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that they were effective even on people who did not realize what they were ingesting.

Any type of food or drink prepared by the Vatraska has the effect of naturally healing hit point damage at double the normal rate for 24 hours, and allowing spellcasters to regain spells in half the normal time, provided it is eaten or drunk directly before a resting period. There is nothing magical about the process; the effect is more like that of having eaten a "good, old-fashioned, home-cooked dinner."

If a *giorgio* spends the evening in the company of a Vatraska tribe, he is treated to such culinary delights as a guest. However, trail preparations cost 20 gp for one day's rations.

Poisons

With all their traffic in toxins, it cannot come as a surprise that the Vatraska are also vendors of poison. Such elixirs are quite cunning in their effects, for few of them are so mundane as to simply kill their victims. Some of them weaken a man, either temporarily or permanently. Others steal away sight or one of the other senses, or induce madness, or even turn the skin an unnatural color so as to make the imbibers appear undead. Vatraska venoms can induce intermittent sneezing attacks, persistent itching, chronic disorientation, or intolerable body odor.

There are more insidious antigens, too. For example, they brew a potent drink called *braxat*, which is indistinguishable from certain wines. A man who imbibes a glass of it feels a warm, pleasant glow that lasts throughout the evening and sends him to bed in a very mellow mood. Sometime during the night, however, he awakens sweating and finds that he cannot easily relieve the fever coursing through his body. Cool baths may alleviate the symptoms, but they cannot eliminate the problem. Over the next few days, his temperature continues to rise, affecting his judgment, temper, and effectiveness in day-to-day life. Eventually, he begins to go mad with

fever and lash out at those around him. Finally, if an antidote is not administered in a timely manner, the poor wretch literally explodes from an extreme surfeit of internal heat!

Another maddening tincture of Vatraska making is *etherol*. This colorless, odorless liquid may be taken for a rather flat-tasting water, far from refreshing. One to four days after it has been ingested, its victim begins to lose his appetite; food no longer tastes palatable, and it rests heavily in his stomach. Soon after, he begins to lose his sense of touch, which inhibits his motor functions and capacity to recognize pain. Eventually, someone points out that he seems to be translucent, that he almost glows if a bright light shines behind him. At that point, the poison's effects accelerate considerably, and the victim begins to literally fade away. Over a few short days he becomes increasingly transparent, and ultimately he fades completely,

As many players are likely to read notes meant for the Dungeon Master, precise game mechanics are not included for the poisons described above. However, Van Richten's description should be sufficient to generate them. The Dungeon Master is encouraged to invent a few toxins of his own imagining, using the following guidelines.

The poison should never be instantly fatal, but should have progressively debilitating effects leading inexorably toward doom.

The final effect of the poison should be something worth talking about for years to come, especially if the character does not survive it.

Roleplaying incentives such as madness (see Chapter Six of *Domains of Dread*), surprising new powers related to the nature of the poison, or odd side effects are always a plus.

Finding the Vistani who created the poison and who therefore have the antidote can be the subject of a rapid side trip or an extended adventure, but it should not be a simple task.

helpless as a geist. Worst of all, once he has passed a certain point, nothing can save him, for he is no longer substantial enough to take an antidote or receive any form of magical absolution. Madness is not inevitable, but it is certainly likely, for the victim's fate becomes plain to him well before it claims him.

Of course, the Vatraska produce an antidote for every poison—but knowing one exists is one thing, and procuring it is another.

The Boemians

Quite unlike the Kaldresh, the Boemians seem to appear out of nowhere. Indeed, this *tasque's* flair for the dramatic may well demand an entrance. Once it is noticed, a Boem caravan bursts to life like a *fireball* in the night. The people sing as they go about their daily business, and their laughter is thoroughly musical. Townsfolk may grimace and shake their heads at the approach of a Boem *tasque's* caravan, yet they cannot help but peek through their shutters at the approaching spectacle.

Handsome young men balance atop the *vardos* and wagons as they roll up to a town, sawing merrily at violins and strumming guitars without missing a beat. Raven-haired beauties, wearing bright floral dresses and bejeweled with sparkling crystals, lean out the doors and windows of their moving domiciles, promising revelations of the past and future with their dark and shining eyes. The *vardos* themselves are painted brilliant colors. Every trimming is gilded, then hung with swinging oil lanterns sheathed in colored glass. The horse teams are matched so perfectly as to be identical, with coats of unusual colors and a myriad reflective spangles swiveling from their tack. Dogs, nimble and bright-eyed, bound over rocks and tree limbs alongside the caravan. Muzzled bears, fuzzy and playful, caper about on their hind legs as if there were no possible alternative way for them to walk. Song birds in brilliant, impossible shades of red and yellow and blue

twitter about in the trees overhead, chirping in a delightful cacophony that *underscores the musicians*.

There are rarely more than two dozen members of any Boem tribe in a single caravan, yet the display they present makes them appear to number many more. My good friend Sage Ralphusus Wilyams tells me the Boemians are nothing more than a "traveling circus." I had never heard the term before he coined it, but it certainly does describe the Boemians: Wherever they stop, a great circle of *giorgios* is sure to gather round!

A male Boemian is dapper first and handsome second, dressing in silky shirts that afford plenty of room to dance, play music, and gesture melodramatically at every passing moment. His trousers, on the other hand, are invariably dark and form-fitting, perhaps flaring outward at the boot. His jet-black hair twists into chaotic ringlets unless it is slicked back along the sides of his head. He often sports a goatee and a waxed moustache which points straight to the sides or curls back toward his full lips. A Boem male's ears are quite commonly pierced, and his nose as well. Silver, gold, and gems sparkle on him like magic on a faerie. His face—indeed, his whole body—is exceedingly expressive; the Boem man weeps unashamedly and often.

The typical female of the Boem *tasque* is mysterious and sultry. She dresses in clothing that accentuates her mystique—typically in bright-patterned dresses that swirl as she walks, and sheer blouses that distract the *giorgio* eye. Like the men, she pierces her body to decorate it with jewelry. Quite often she goes shoeless throughout the day, although she might adopt tall-heeled, leather boots that lace up the calf. Her lustrous black hair glints blue here and red there in direct sunshine, and it tumbles in thick, abandoned tresses over her shoulders. Her eyes are usually dark, yet occasionally a female Boemian's eyes are crystal-clear blue. Even elderly women of the *tasque*

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remain dark and beautiful, altogether free of the ravages of time.

Boem children are rare in the extreme. In my travels with Arturi Radanavich, I spent time with three Boem tribes, and I saw just two children, both male. Whether this is intentional I cannot say, for, as with all Vistani, one simply does not discuss subjects of a personal nature. In any event, both young men were dressed very much as their elders, although I saw no signs of body piercing upon them.

Attitudes and Behaviors

The Boemians are a passionate and lively people in public. Well aware of *giorgio* attitudes toward them, they are deliberately charming, always on stage. The men speak in poetic flourishes, and the women radiate mystery. As a group, they exude an idyllic contentment to let the world pass them by while they make merry. Such a festive nature is contagious, and soon even the most cynical townsfolk warm to the Boem folk. Theirs is the romantic image of life on the open road. They fire the imaginations of *giorgios* who yearn for excitement and escape.

Only in the woodsy privacy of their encampments, away from village and city folk, do the Boemians reveal another side—equally passionate, but dark and brooding. A great anger churns within them, never finding its way into words, perhaps because complaining is fruitless, and perhaps because they cannot focus on any one thing that troubles them. I think they envy the *giorgios'* stable life, even as they vehemently insist they want no part of it.

During their *doroq*, the Boemians rail against their lack of a place to call home, yet any suggestion that they should settle down repulses them. They often bemoan the scanty respect accorded them, but they have no compunctions about engaging in rather questionable activities, and I seriously doubt they have the least respect for themselves.

In the privacy of the forest, the Boem folk speak little to one another, but go about their daily tasks, maintaining the

caravan. At night, they gather around the campfire as all Vistani do, yet they often simply stare glumly into the flames. They do not sing, although the women do dance with slow, plaintive gestures or feverishly, limbs akimbo, while the men play tempestuous strains on their instruments, sometimes weeping silently as they ply the strings. The stories Boemians tell are tragic, often gruesome, obliterating all hope and happiness. The Forlorn Wanderer (see Chapter One) is typical.

It was a tribe of the Boem *tasque* that stole my son Erasmus and sold him to the vampire Metus three and a half decades ago, so I was never in the least comfortable with these people (nor were they pleased by my presence, I might add). Hence, one might well think that my time spent among them was thoroughly depressing, yet such was not the case.

After I had adjusted to the palpable tension between them and myself, and after I began to comprehend the relationship between their public and private personae, I began to discern a tragic beauty about them. Like a mother who lovingly swaddles her dead infant, or a man who buries the remains of a vampire that was once his true love, the Boemians live in a state of anguish. They are tragedy in motion, a living reflection of this land: vibrant and attractive by day, bitter and lost by night.

Toward *giorgios*, the Boemians feel a little bitterness and a great deal of condescension. Outsiders are, in their eyes, like troublesome young children who cannot be blamed for being what they are—they must be tolerated and cajoled although they are rude and selfish. The Boemians harbor no direct malice toward *giorgios*, no true evil inflames their hearts when they commit criminal acts. They are amoral, not immoral, so neither the joy nor misery of non-Vistani are of concern to them, even when they are the cause of either.

The world owes nothing to the Boemians, so far as they are concerned, and they owe nothing in return. There is nothing self-righteous

about their attitude, nor anything defensive. *Destiny rules their world*; they can neither take control of nor accept responsibility for their existence. That which they do is neither good nor evil, only "necessary."

Beliefs Concerning Time

The Boem conception of time is probably closest to our own, for they postulate that time is a single line spanning the breadth of reality. There is no way to deviate onto other paths, regardless of relative power; even the gods have no influence over time's passage or direction, for all existence, including their own, lies inside the solitary line. And time is the universe—discussions of what lies on the "other side" are pointless, since no one and nothing will ever go there.

A Boem seer has a rather straightforward approach to both past and future. A mystical navigator, she need only trace a well-defined trail into the past, or map its course into the future. When she casts the *tarokka*, looks into a *crystal ball*, examines tea leaves, and so forth, her mind's eye looks back and forth on the road of time, witnessing what cannot be changed, and what must certainly be.

However, the line of time is not perfectly straight. Like the Old Svalich Road through Barovia, there are twists and turns and hills and vales, all of which obscure parts of the road in both directions. Even with a superior vantage point, there always remain lengths of the time line which cannot be seen from the present. Therefore, a seer may know with certainty that particular events occurred in the past, and other events are unavoidable in the future, yet she cannot always know exactly how the past led to the present, nor how the present leads to the future. She must sometimes guess at what lies beyond the slope of a hill or what lurks around a nearby corner, even if she has a clear picture of actions that have taken place, or of milestones inevitably lying in the future. The very best of seers does not look away from the present with any

more clarity than the worst—she merely makes better guesses as to what remains unseen.

Specific Powers

Although they are *not nearly as magical* as the Manusa, members of the Boem *tasque* are quite clearly enchanted, or rather, enchanting. Certainly they are skilled manipulators of words, expert salesmen, and silky-tongued charmers. Yet their calming influence on others is too consistent, too all-encompassing, to be dismissed as merely the result of fast talking and personal charisma.

I have seen the Boemians enter a village amidst cries of "thief" and "monster," sell their wares, perform for the masses, *enthrall the young men and ladies*, and leave that same municipality to farewells of "friend" and "ever welcome." Only after they have moved on are they remembered as squatters and

As Van Richten suggests, the Boemians do exude an aura that has the effect of a *charm person* spell. To retain negative feelings, a hero must make a successful saving throw vs. spell during each round of contact. However, the effect automatically wears off 24 hours after Vistana and *giorgio* part company.

Anyone who has a specific reason to *dislike the Vistani* (any *tasque*, not just Boemians) need only make one saving throw at first meeting, with a +4 bonus to the roll. If the save succeeds, the character's dislike and his apparent desire to harbor it ward off the Boem influence. The Vistani realize this, though they do not necessarily take any action based on that information.

The Boemians do *not consciously* cast this spell-like power. More accurately, they tend to dispel negative impressions by their presence. If a Boemian deliberately attempts to cheat or misuse a character influenced by his Charisma and the character realizes this, the victim is entitled to another saving throw, with a +4 bonus, to break free of the effect.

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larcenists, as if the prevailing attitudes had never altered in the slightest.

Such is the simultaneous power and weakness of the Boemians, that they make and lose friends quickly. *Giorgios* who pass among them become captivated, regardless of previous skepticism. The Boem folk are largely unwelcome wherever they come, yet they are allowed to stay with little or no resistance, only to be spat about after they leave.

The Boemians have no explanation to offer for this pattern of behavior, other than to accuse *giorgios* of hypocrisy and pointless fear. However, I suspect that they have a magical aura about them. This acts upon the mind as a charm person spell, but only as long as one remains in their presence. The effect cannot be overpowering, for I myself have never felt inclined to like them. (Of course, my history with this *tasque* would render anyone immune to their charms.) Perhaps they merely have the capacity to unveil feelings that already exist, but which people deny. Even those who hate the Vistani may still enjoy, secretly or otherwise, the entertainment they offer. Perhaps a man's opinion about the Vistani is one thing, and his feelings about the diversions they offer is another. In any event, the atmosphere between Boemians and *giorgios* is distinctly more positive when they gather together than when they are apart.

The Defining Craft

The Boemians do not market a craft as do the Kaldresh, but they do provide services. To be sure, they have any number of trinkets and elixirs to sell, but their showmanship really makes them what they are. They are entertainers all, as well as horoscope readers, cartographers, music teachers, and seers. Often they bring news of events abroad. They answer almost any question for a few coins, though they do not promise the truth.

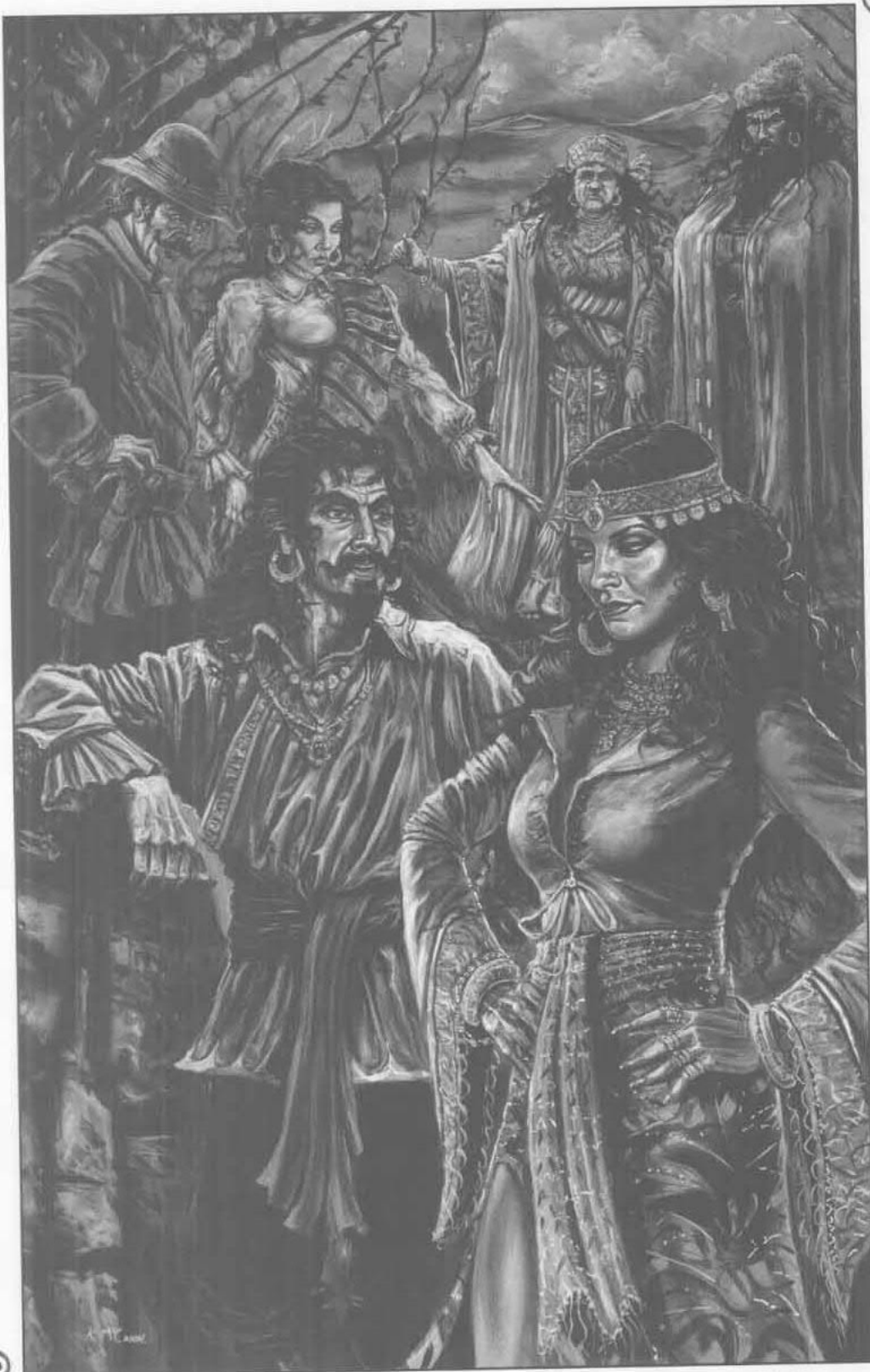
There are a few other "services" which the Boemians are all too willing to perform as well. These are the acts for

The Boemians readily deal in gold, but they are apt to require other commodities of those who seek the services only they can offer. Such payments may include temporary servitude, a short and perilous mission, achieving the release of one of their number who has been arrested, or even providing services for another tribe with whom the Boem trade.

The Boemians are especially likely to require special payment for their "select" services even though they do not feel they are lawbreakers; they still definitely know when they are breaking the law. Such aid has a value that cannot be measured in gold pieces, and they are well aware of that as well.

Note that "breaking the law" does not necessarily refer to injuring the innocent or otherwise committing an act of evil. In a RAVENLOFT campaign, committing a crime may occasionally be an act of good by most standards: Examples of a "good crime" include defying any directive of a domain lord, retrieving a stolen artifact though generations have passed since it was taken, setting up a corrupt politician to receive his just desserts, taking hostage the chief minion of a diabolical monster to discover his plans, and so forth. Sometimes adventurers find themselves adopting a Boem morality to achieve their objectives, at which time the questionable attitudes of the Vistani might seem a bit more palatable than they rightly should.

Nevertheless, the Dungeon Master must be wary of such philosophy and adjudicate accordingly. The Boemians do not court the heroes by tempting them to abandon their morals in favor of expediency, yet they respond in character if they are approached and propositioned. Remember that the means cannot justify the end, and a powers check might be in order, even if the day is saved, when questionable actions are undertaken by heroes.



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which all Vistani reputations suffer: smuggling, assassination, and kidnapping. Since Boem fate dictates that whatever happens is preordained, they do not hesitate to commit such deeds, for by their reasoning such things were meant to happen. They argue that if they do not take advantage of the opportunity, someone else will. According to their twisted logic, their acts are not cruel, for they are performed without malice or prejudice. Therefore, the victim is not injured by them, but by inescapable destiny itself. For such injustices they cannot be held responsible, in their opinion, and they do not allow guilt to trouble them in the least.

As a researcher, I must force myself to view the facts from their perspective, and in that spirit I must conclude that they are not wanton criminals. They do not actively seek to engage in reproachable enterprises for their own profit, but merely accept when they are offered a job by folk who do deliberately break the laws of government and humanity. As a wronged father, however, I cannot help but despise them for their heartlessness!

The Naiat

At first glance, it is possible to mistake this tribe for the Equaar, as the Naiat share that tribe's affinity for animals. However, brightly painted *vardos* and slightly more exotic creatures quickly separate the Naiat from the quiet Kaldresh tribe. As often, the Naiat are taken for a traveling carnival or troupe of actors. They are uninhibited, spirited, and quite diverting as they roll into town—not at all the dark and mysterious wayfarers that one most often imagines the Vistani to be (until one observes them in the privacy of their camp, of course).

Carnival Fun

The activities offered by a caravan of Naiat are quite entertaining, although some are not without their perils. Those *giorgios* who enjoy physical contests of strength can pay a gold piece or two to wrestle a muzzled bear while the crowd enthusiastically cheers. Others might

have a taste for battling exotic monsters, and the Naiat have created a strange contraption called the House of Mists, which operates on principles of illusory magic: A person steps into a rather small booth, only to discover that inside it is gigantic and occupied by strange and ferocious creatures!

Events at a Naiat Carnival

Bear wrestling: For a gold piece (or a price suitable to the individual campaign), any character can wrestle a Naiat-trained bear, as Van Richten reports. To establish an Armor Class and THACO, the Dungeon Master should choose a bear with Hit Dice about the same as those of the heroic challenger (see the *MONSTROUS MANUAL™* tome for possibilities). The animal is muzzled and its claws are sheathed, so the hero must shed all armor and weapons before entering the ring.

Both contestants start with 20 "wrestling points." The opponents deplete their points, round by round, by executing various wrestling moves. The victor reduces the adversary to zero points, or executes a successful pin.

Each round, both contestants declare their attack forms simultaneously, then roll 1d20 and add Strength bonuses, if any. If both attack rolls fail, a standoff occurs. If one roll succeeds and the other fails, the successful roller automatically executes the declared maneuver. If both rolls succeed, consult the chart below to see whether the character (C) or the bear (B) is successful, or if a stand-off (S) occurs. A bear hug or limb lock (arm or leg) may be automatically sustained from round to round, requiring a successful attack roll on the part of the victim to break free.

To pin his adversary, the contestant must declare "pin," make a successful attack, then roll once more and achieve a result equal to or higher than the adversary's current wrestling-point total.

Bear Wrestling Table

CHARACTER	BEAR				
	Hug	Throw	Punch	Lock	Pin
Hug	S	C	C	B	B
Throw	B	S	B	C	C
Punch	B	C	S	C	B
Lock	C	B	B	S	C
Pin	C	B	C	B	S

Bear hug: -2 to attack roll; depletes 2 wrestling points per round sustained.

Throw: -4 to attack roll; depletes 4 wrestling points per successful maneuver.

Punch: depletes 2 wrestling points per hit.

Limb lock: depletes 1 wrestling point per round sustained.

A hero who successfully pins a bear receives the animal's full XP value.

For a little extra excitement, the Dungeon Master can roll percentile dice each round; there is a 5% (noncumulative) chance that the bear's muzzle or one claw sheath falls off (roll randomly to determine which). If this occurs, the bear adds the appropriate attack (bite or claw) to its normal wrestling maneuvers—inflicting real damage. Neither the Vistani nor the townsfolk intervene when this happens, and the adventurer is entitled to double experience points if he successfully pins the bear anyway. If other heroes step in and slay the bear, the Vistani expect compensation for the loss of their animal. Note that it is possible for a bear to eventually shed all of its restraining devices.

The House of Mists: The Naiat have a somewhat sinister "virtual reality" booth. A character pays a nominal

fee appropriate to the campaign, then steps inside a black box about the size of a telephone booth. Inside, he discovers an infinite space in which to maneuver, all of it shrouded in thick mist; the Dungeon Master can place rocks and other natural terrain within the area as well. Then, from somewhere in the mist, a creature stalks the characters and attacks. The monster can be literally anything the character requests (he's the paying customer), including a creature he would normally not be able to beat. If the character wishes to be surprised, the Dungeon Master can choose any creature from the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome or any *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix*. Be devious with the choice of simulated monster, and ruthless with its tactics, for the character can always play again.

For the purposes of the carnival game, the creature has the same AC and THAC0 as the player. Furthermore, successful attacks do not score damage, but only "hits." However, every monster retains its normal attack forms—a red dragon can breathe fire, a vampire can *charm*, etc. A successful saving throw against any attack indicates no hit. Monsters who deliver multiple attacks do the same in the simulation.

Five hits inflicted on either adversary ends the simulation; the door to the booth opens, and the adventurer emerges into normal daylight (or night). A hero earns no experience points for his misty battles.

Unfortunately for the simulation player, all mental effects suffered in the House of Mists are lasting, and any defeat by attacks on the hero's mind requires a madness check (*Domains of Dread*, Chapter Six).

Musical Instruments

The Naiat create some very special musical instruments that they play for the amusement of the crowd; these are also for sale. They claim that even a

tone-deaf squawker such as myself can master one of their instruments with a minimum of practice. Natives of Kartakass hold Naiat guitars and violins in high esteem.

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Adventurers may purchase any stringed musical instrument made by the Vistani for 200-500 gp, depending on the campaign economy and the character's ability to haggle. Such instruments convey the Musical Instrument proficiency without requiring the use of any proficiency slots. Bards who own a Naiat-made instrument can modify by 1 all dice rolls related to playing it (including encounter reactions, morale rolls, and saving throws as per the *Player's Handbook*).

The Corvara

How shall I address the subject of this tribe in any objective way? Regardless of my desire to forgive those who have injured me, in spite of the fact that I have come to consider Arturi Radanavich a personal friend, and even in my fuller understanding of what the Vistani are, I cannot help but think ill of the Corvara.

Though I am an experienced observer of the world who has witnessed terrible cruelty, though I have looked into faces evil beyond the power of words to express, though I surely have become inured to the depths of darkness that pervade this land, still there is one small part of my heart that can never accept the loss of my son. I may forgive, yet I can never forget, and my observations regarding this tribe are best read with that fact in mind.

The Corvara are tinkers, jacks of all trades yet masters of none. They are perhaps the black sheep of this *tasque*. They excel at few things of value to most *giorgios*, so they are least welcomed of all visitors. Sometimes they imitate the Naiat and attempt to generate a carnival atmosphere, but the entertainments they offer are along the lines of gambling, drinking, contests of pugilism, and other unwholesome attractions. Often they engage in scams, or sell elixirs of dubious quality and effect. They excel at twisting *giorgios'* words to their own advantage, staying within the letter of an agreement

but brutally perverting its spirit. The Corvara's one true skill is adeptness at opening locks and manufacturing skeleton keys for that purpose.

This tribe frequently finds that it has overstayed its welcome, for it sets up camp where it can best take advantage of local grasslands, fishing holes, and villages where the residents are foolish with their money. The Corvara remain camped until they have taxed the limits of those resources, which angers the populace. All too often the Corvara are escorted from the area by the local militia, or chased away by mobs.

One day, as we searched the domains for a Corvara tribe, Arturi told me of a particular exploit in which one of his tribe was approached by a wealthy merchant of Lekar. The merchant wished to avenge himself on a rival by having him arrested for gambling, an offense punishable by death in Falkovnia. The merchant planned to goad his rival into accepting a challenge at cards, and asked the Corvara to play the part of "scheming, opportunistic rogues" (he foolishly used those words) hosting the game outside of town. Of course, the merchant intended to set up both his rival and the Vistani. He informed Lord Drakov's militia of the impending illegal activity and promised to lead them to the tribe of law-breaking Vistani (and his rival as well).

On the appointed day, he and a force of thirty soldiers marched to the agreed-upon place. But the merchant's plot backfired. They found no one but his puzzled rival at the gambling site. The "scheming, opportunistic" Corvara were instead engaged in clearing his house of its valuables. With the majority of police out of town, they had no trouble looting the premises and escaping.

Arturi could not hide a certain amount of pride as he told that story, and I was reminded that he was one of the people who had stolen my child. For a moment, I wondered if they had known that the death of their tribesman was inevitable, and counted on my fright to betray me! Had they meant to take Erasmus all along, and brought their

dying companion only as a method of initiating contact? I remained in control of myself despite that thought. Eventually, I suggested that such behavior would not endear his people to the residents of the domains. Arturi responded by asking what would endear the Vistani to *giorgios*, and my failure to answer that question only confirmed his assertion that the Corvara are justified in their actions. To him, they simply did what was necessary to survive.

The Corvara may indeed be responsible for the reputation commonly attributed to all Vistani of our lands, for they are squatters who take advantage of any hospitality offered to them without offering anything of value in return. They are charming in the way of all Boemians, but their hearts are bitter, and their smiles are false. If they love the freedom

The Corvara possess all the usual powers of the Vistani in general and the Boemians in particular, yet time spent among them is like camping with a band of highwaymen. They can be engaged as henchmen in a plot involving deception, but they may cheat and run unless they are convinced that fulfilling their part of any agreement leads to a greater reward. Depending on this tribe can complicate an adventure wherein Vistani skills are crucial to its success. While the motives and actions of all Vistani are viewed with suspicion by most people, the blatantly treacherous attitudes of the Corvara can drive adventurers to distraction.

The only skill specifically attributed to the Corvara is an ability to make skeleton keys. Given the opportunity to examine any nonmagical lock, a Corvara can produce a key that eliminates penalties of 25% or less to a thief's Open Locks rolls. Furthermore, any trap (magical or otherwise) that would normally be activated by failure to use the proper key does not go off when a skeleton key is used. Each key requires one day to construct, and it works only on the lock for which it was designed.

of their kind, it is only because they have no choice but to embrace it. Of all the tribes in all the *tasques*, the Corvara seem to miss their homeland the most, yet there is no place for them in civilized society. These Vistani often earn our wrath, but we may have good reason to pity them, for they have not the Naiat's talents, nor the skills of the Kaldresh, nor the powers of the Manusa. They are truly the unwanted, the unloved, and there is little in them that could be considered redeeming.

The Manusa

This *tasque* is the rarest met of all Vistani. I believe that merely a single caravan represents each tribe, for every account I have heard of them (and I grant there have been precious few) has included a description of one member or another. Though the salient characteristics varied somewhat, I have little doubt that each observer was describing the same persons. In fact, Manusa tribes are so small, they encompass perhaps five or six members and no children whatsoever. Perhaps they are slowly dying off, and one day there will be no more Manusa. On the other hand, one Manusa encounter I use as a source occurs in a diary penned by Shanshirron D'Oltier, a vampire of Chateaufaux, who existed a great many years ago!

I dared not ask any tribe members what their actual ages were, while I walked among them, for most questions to which I gave voice were answered with a mute grin or cryptic words that I could not understand. The firsthand information I have, I gathered either by observation, or from their lips without asking for it at all. They controlled every moment of my visits with them, and taught me what they deemed fit for my knowledge.

I never even learned any of their names—or even if they had names at all—except for that of the leader of the Zarovan tribe, the legendary Madame Eva herself.

Indeed, I have no idea why they allowed me into their midst, but if they

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had not wanted my company, Arturi and I would never have found them. One cannot simply seek and locate a Manusa tribe, as one might seek an armorer to commission a breastplate; one must "happen" upon them. I suspect they can remain unseen at will. I myself only passed among them during the evening, and Arturi and I could not locate them by day.

Thoroughly asocial, the Manusa are never encountered near any city or village, nor do they speak to *giorgios* unless it be for their own, enigmatic reasons. Both the Kaldresh and the Boemians suffered my presence, I believe, because they wanted me to understand what they were in some small way. What reasons the Manusa had for briefly sharing their peculiar lifestyle with me are beyond my reckoning, and they are probably still chuckling among themselves at my conspicuous puzzlement.

A Manusa caravan typically consists of several *vardos*, one occupied exclusively by the leader of the tribe, and several more that are shared by the other members. Manusa *vardos* are not heavily weighted down with tools and wares to sell, as are those of the Kaldresh, nor are they painted so brightly as those of the Boemians. Functionality as a place to live seems to be their primary quality, and mobility does not appear to be a factor at all. In fact, although I noted that each *vardo* had a single horse tethered to it in camp, I have never actually seen a Manusa caravan rolling down a road. On this slimmest of evidence, I venture to guess that they travel strictly through *mist navigation*, which of course does not require them to physically move at all. If this is the case, then horses are unnecessary, except perhaps to shift the *vardos* to a slightly better position, once they have arrived in a new place. For all the power and wile they possess, Manusa males appear unkempt and beggarly to the average observer. They wrap themselves in heavy woolen robes, bereft of decoration, which stretch down to their shoes and skim

The Manusa live with one foot in the campaign world and another in the Border Ethereal. At will, they can invoke upon the entire caravan the powers of a *wraithform* spell, becoming dim, shadowy forms that are not clearly visible except in bright sunlight. This ability does not allow them to pass into the Deep Ethereal and, thus, beyond the RAVENLOFT campaign setting. Rather, they use the ability to create a private haven, where they may remain unmolested by both *giorgios* and the dangers of the world at large.

Van Richten confuses this *wraithform* ability with *mist navigation* (see Chapter Five), which it is not. The Manusa must still physically travel through the domains while in this form; they cannot use it to travel hundreds of miles in the blink of an eye. The advantage in using *wraithform* lies in remaining effectively invisible until a time of their choosing.

along the ground, clotting with dirt at the hem. The robes tend to lie open at the chest, revealing a vest of sorts, sewn with many small pockets into which they dip their fingers, drawing forth a pipe and a pinch of weed to smoke or some shimmering bit of magic. Upon their heads they wear a loosely woven wool cap that rises to a soft point. It is not much like a wizard's cap, yet the Manusa's obviously magical nature leads me to wonder if there is some connection between the conical shape and arcane power.

All men of the *tasque* allow their hair to grow down their backs. They do not shave their beards and moustaches either, and these reach prodigious lengths. They may never cut their hair at all. Beneath a tangle of bangs and bristly eyebrows, their eyes shine with a supernatural brightness that seems to pierce whatever they look upon. In stature they are shorter than average, leading the uninformed to conclude they are frail beings. The weathered grip of a Manusa man quickly dispels any

notion he is physically weak, however.

Females of the *tasque* are heavysset and fairly unattractive by *giorgio* standards. Their faces are well lined and somewhat puckered. The reader will form a good mental picture by imagining a dried potato with deep-set eyes, a large nose, and a thin-lipped mouth. When they smile, their teeth glisten and reveal wide gaps between them. Curiously, in spite of their apparent age they show not a single gray hair, but whether this is natural, arcane, or the result of dye I cannot say. (To ask so personal a question of this *tasque* would be sheer folly!)

Typically, female Manusa wrap colorful scarves over their heads. Their blouses are deep blue or purple silk, embroidered with many colored threads. Stitching patterns range from simple floral designs to complex, magical motifs. Their dresses are layered with several skirts which flow gracefully as they walk.

The most striking physical feature of all members of this *tasque* is their eerie eyes. When squinting, as is their constant habit, their eyes disappear almost completely within folds of leathery skin, but there is no doubt when they are trained on you, whether you can see them or not. You feel a Manusa's gaze looking straight through you as if you were glass. Sometimes a ghostly white light glows pale in the darkness of their sockets. They appear possessed by some luminescent being. If you are walking in some isolated place and you come upon a destitute beggar, search for a queer flash in his eyes before you decide whether to raise your hand or open it to him.

Attitudes and Behavior

This is a breed of people who have completely separated themselves from the rest of the world. Their society is entirely their own, and they obviously do not desire to share it with anyone. Even the other Vistani *tasques* find Manusa strange and unapproachable.

When outsiders make contact with the Manusa, they cannot hope to take



charge of the encounter, but must wait on the wisdom and judgment of those Vistani. Manusa powers are unmeasured, and their ability to inflict extreme misery with a curse should breed respect among the most puissant heroes. Effortlessly they held me in a state of awe and fear while I was among them.

Each time I came into contact with one of the Manusa tribes, they were already waiting for me. The Canjar fished Arturi and me out of the Arden River after we had decided to brave a set of rapids without a boat rather than face a werejaguar; "Right on time," one of them remarked as he dragged me from the water, half drowned. The Zarovan tribe I met when I fell into a hidden cave—as I came to a crashing halt at the bottom of a bumpy ride, Madame Eva herself handed me a cup of tea, freshly poured in anticipation of my arrival!

Even more disgruntling, after a few hours with each tribe, during which I mostly sat and listened and watched, I turned my attention away from them momentarily, only to look back on a different scene. Each tribe, having discharged its business with me, disappeared without a trace!

The demeanor of the Manusa leaves one with the impression that they are watchers of the world, separate from reality and largely unconcerned by it. Some special purpose places them in our world, some mission whose details go beyond the simple minds of *giorgios*.

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An encounter with the Manusa should leave the heroes feeling like animals who vaguely realize that humans know something they do not. These Vistani never display an active interest in the affairs of heroes; when they play a part in an adventure, it is for their own reasons, which the heroes probably will not comprehend.

Tribes of this *tasque* simply appear when they find it convenient to do so, and disappear when their role has been fulfilled. Only under the most extraordinary circumstance would they allow a *giorgio* to spend any amount of time among them. The experience should be like living with aliens of a superior race.

If the Dungeon Master wishes to construct a fortune-telling scenario with the Manusa, the forecast should be by far the strangest, most cryptic babble any Vistani might utter. Interpreting their predictions should be both a matter of unscrambling the message as well as watching for clues that give sense to the words. For example, a Vistana of the Kaldresh or Boem *tasque* might say, "You will find your enemy when the raven's moon shines on his ebon blade" (whatever that means), but a Manusa would deliver the same prophecy by saying, "Black feather, white face, sword of darkness, foe's place." Interpretations, of course, are not considered necessary.

When the Manusa have tired of or finished with a group of heroes, they simply disappear while the adventurers are not looking.

They exhibit no compulsion to get along with others, no dependence on anyone, not even a need to convince others to do their bidding. They are breathing harbingers, the lips of Fate itself, and their predictions are inescapable, as if the events they foretell have already occurred.

Beliefs Concerning Time

Time itself is a toy to the Manusa, a faithful servant, a simpleton in their

care. The most direct answer I received from any of the tribes was in response to the question, "What is time?" One old Canjari answered, quite casually, "It is nothing." Although I could not press her to elaborate, her tone conveyed a great deal more meaning than her words (as is always the case with this *tasque*). I understood her to mean that the nature of time is of no concern or mystery, that I might as well have asked, "What is the nature of water?" For the Manusa, there is no cumulative reality, no road of time, no need for analogies whatsoever; one either comprehends or he does not. And the Manusa certainly comprehend, while you and I do not.

Specific Powers

Control over time itself is the most amazing ability of the Manusa. Their full comprehension of its nature apparently allows them to merely look ahead or behind, without any dependence on tools such as the *tarokka*, *crystal ball*, or other mechanical means. From my experience among the Zarovan, I imagine they can see any time period in any place they choose.

If such is indeed the case, the Manusa could manipulate the past and future at will, creating any reality they desire! I marvel that they have not done so, and thereby placed themselves on the throne of the universe. I can only conclude that *giorgio* and Vistani minds must be two fundamentally different things.

Mist navigation: The Manusa seem to be at one with the strange mists that sometimes envelop our land. To most readers, these mists are little more nuisance than heavy fog, rising from the land by the cool of night. Others believe, however, that they are almost alive, and that they can carry a man from one domain to the next, even if he stands still from the moment they swallow him to the point they fade away.

Once I dismissed these claims as childish imagination, but now my own experience lends credence to the legends. The Kaldresh do not seem to heed the mists, and the Boemians travel with them wherever they blow, but the

The Manusa are capable of seeing into the past and future with near perfect clarity, but Van Richten overstates their prowess a bit. Specifically, in matters directly concerning themselves, they (and all Vistani) are either unable or unwilling to see beyond the present.

This fact is particularly important in light of their additional control over time, at which Van Richten hints: The Manusa can actually travel through time at will. They simply think about where in time they want to go (thus entering the Mists in the Demiplane of Dread campaign). Their grasp of time is so complete that they exist at any point in time by their own choosing. However, this does not mean they are in the habit of manipulating either time or events in the lives of adventurers—quite the opposite. Any plea to “go back in time and change the future” is met with disdain. Being able to operate

independently of time, but unable to manipulate their part of “history,” effectively disassociates the Vistani altogether.

Mechanically, the Dungeon Master can place the Manusa at any point in history necessary to explain some story element in an adventure. They can literally know anything, since they only need think about some point in time to be there.

This power can also be an enormously helpful tool in adventures where time plays a crucial element, but during which the adventurers fail to keep up. If the heroes are losing a race against time and the Dungeon Master wants them to have another chance, a Manusa caravan can carry them any place they need to be, and put them there yesterday, if need be.

Once again: Having this power does not dictate its use or abuse.

Manusa can direct them. If tales be true, this tribe can command that the mists carry their caravans to any precise time and place they choose, or even send the mists to do their bidding.

The Manusa can be a Dungeon Master's tool, deliberately invoking the Mists (in a Demiplane of Dread campaign) to relieve the monotony of constant coincidences when the Mists spring up to cast the heroes into another adventure. A new scenario can begin with an encounter with the Manusa, during which time the Manusa summon the Mists to either aid or punish the heroes.

Prescience: Because of their knowledge of time, it stands to reason that the Manusa can know who you are, what you have done in the past, and what you will do in the future. They can even know the moment of your death, if they care to look for it, but they would never reveal it to you. The only explanation I can offer for this lies in the legend of “The War for All Time” (see Chapter

One): Their knowledge of time is a “secret” given up by the gods, who regret giving it to them. Perhaps the Manusa fear divine retribution should they share their secrets with anyone else. Whatever the reason, I think it is probably all for the best that they keep such knowledge to themselves. I, for one, do not care to know what they do.

The Defining Craft

I would generally refer to the Manusa as “arcanists,” if label them I must. All Vistani are magical to some extent, but this *tasque* is overtly so. While all Vistani cast the *tarokka*, time is no mystery to this *tasque*. All Vistani travel using *mist navigation*, but the Manusa do so with apparent ease.

While the Kaldresh produce goods for consumption by the military and the general public, and the Boemians provide services for *giorgios'* entertainment and other goals, the Manusa do not share their “craft” with anyone unless it be for their own purposes. One cannot engage a Manusa to read one's fortune, nor ask him to ferry passengers through *mist*

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navigation. No amount of gold can sway him, and a personal entreaty must be extremely convincing. The Manusa are unaffected by politics, religion, love, hate, idealism, cynicism—by all the causes and beliefs which drive most of us all our lives. If you are approached by a member of this *tasque*, I would heartily recommend that you listen very carefully to everything he says, follow any instructions he gives you to the best of your ability, and do not ask for anything if you can help it. If you are lucky, the

Van Richten's observation regarding the Manusa's potential omniscience is included purely for dramatic effect, although it can be of use in play under the right circumstances. In effect, the Manusa know anything the Dungeon Master knows. This can be used as a last-resort game mechanic for revealing information to adventurers who somehow miss all the clues put in their paths. However, its main effect is to make the Vistani a bit more frightening and intimidating. They know what the heroes fear and desire, and they have information that most heroes would wish they did not. When the Manusa look on a character who knows what they are, he should have the uncomfortable feeling that they are thinking about events he would rather forget, or perhaps they are contemplating the character's death.

Manusa will have a positive effect on your life, but even when they prove to be the bane of your existence, you can do little but embrace the will of Fate.

As Van Richten suggests, the Manusa do not trade in coin, unless it serves a secondary purpose. Perhaps, in return for their services, they might tell a party to recover a valuable gem; however, the adventurers must kill a particular person or monster in order to get it, and that being's death is what the Manusa really want. They cannot be bought at any price, for in general they need nothing. Whom they serve, if anyone (or anything), is known only to them.

When I muse on those Manusa powers which I have witnessed, then speculate on the possible range and application of those abilities, I am as dumbfounded as I was when I began to learn about the salient powers of vampires, so long ago. Were these people as evil as *giorgios* suspect them to be, then the most terrible monsters in the universe would be mere pets to them. Truly it is by the grace of the gods that the Vistani do not ply their capabilities with a vengeance!

The Canjar

That some beings possess the powers of the Manusa and those of a spellcaster as well is a humbling thought, but such is the nature of the Canjar. Imagine the possibilities: No matter how powerful a wizard becomes, he is rendered useless to himself and others if he has not memorized the proper spell. With the power to predict the future, the Canjar can theoretically arm themselves with the exact spell needed for every occasion. They waste not so much as an ounce of power, and that is only the first advantage they enjoy. I shall not waste ink detailing how the Canjar profit from their natural abilities, for a mere wizard's apprentice could fill a book.

Sadly, I have had precious little time to observe them, but I believe the Canjar are capable of casting any

enchantment a *giorgio* spellcaster can undertake. The manifold tiny pockets in their vests, to which I referred earlier, are ideal receptacles for spell components. I did note that their fingers dip in and out of them with extraordinary alacrity. What makes their magic different is that it seems to have a life of its own.

All members of the Canjar tribe are generalist mages, reaching a maximum of 6th level. If such a Vistana is in the position of becoming an adversary to the heroes, the Dungeon Master should take care in choosing the nonplayer character's level. Since a Canjar can, in effect, "glance ahead" and know which spells he'll need for the day, the Dungeon Master can simply choose his spells from the *Player's Handbook* or *Tome of Magic* at the time of casting, employing whatever spell is best suited to the immediate situation. This certainly increases the effective potency of a Canjar wizard.

The Living Night

Arturi and I were crossing the rainy blue domain of Sithicus, which is ruled by a powerful knight called Soth. Night smothered us like the ceaseless wet mists that seeped through my wool coat and sapped my warmth. We had abandoned hope for contact with the Manusa and turned our ambitions to finding a tribe of the native elves instead. It had been a wearisome journey west from Skald; three days through Kartakass and three more in Sithicus, and all we had seen was a pack of starved ghouls and a massive flight of bats winging north. The rocky, tumbling Musarde River rolled noisily along to our left as we followed the road to Har-Thelen, often teasing us by making us think we heard the coarse grind of wagon wheels somewhere nearby.

All of a sudden, I began to sense something alive in the darkness. Arturi sensed it also, so we paused and armed

ourselves against an ambush. My skin prickled sharply as I probed the shapeless void about me with some sixth sense of mine (which I had begun to cultivate after a few meetings with the Vistani). Whatever I sensed, it was all around me—not "they," but "it;" I was sure that a single presence closed about us as our eyes darted here and there, seeking the invisible menace.

The darkness itself began to feel sticky, clinging, as if it were thickening into a dank sheet that bodily wrapped about us and began to constrict. With a gasp, Arturi beside me dropped his weapon.

"It is the night itself!" he cried. "The darkness is alive!"

In spite of considerable experience which taught me that carrying a torch in the open night is foolhardy, I began to grope frantically in my pack for my magical lantern.

—From the private journal of
Dr. Van Richten

Arturi has had no experience with Canjar magic, but he knows many *doroq* tales about these distant cousins of his. One tale insists that Canjar magic is actually alive. Most people might call this a metaphor or romantic conceit, but I have walked the night too long to dismiss such ideas as mere fancy. As it happens, when I finally met the Canjar, I had not yet made the connection between that sticky darkness and their subsequent appearance. I remarked that I had no idea how I managed to find them.

A grizzled Vistani crone grinned toothlessly at me and replied, "We sent *zsalev* to fetch you. The breath of night blew you to us." *Zsalev* is a Canjar word with no direct translation, but which means, roughly, "magic" or "power." I told her the night had come to life, and she nodded enthusiastically. She might have merely recognized the sensation, but I prefer to think she was saying I was exactly right.

I now believe the Canjar sent this *zsalev*, this living darkness, to harass Arturi and me on the Har-Thelen road. It

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Canjar Zsalev

The Canjar can create effects called *zsalev* (ZHA lef, singular and plural) that resemble more common spells such as *invisible stalker* or *unseen servant*. The manifestation has a tangible presence that can be felt like eyes staring at the back of your head. Once created, a *zsalev* "lives" for one week before fading away. As soon as one comes into being, its creator concentrates on a face and a general direction, whereupon the effect sets off at a movement rate of 36 (A), seeking out the object of the creator's thought. In addition, one basic command may be implanted in it, such as "Bring him back" or "Drive her toward water;" this decree becomes the manifestation's only function. If no command is given, it merely seeks out the target and hovers about him until it "dies," is driven away by any light source of torch brightness or more (returning at next darkness), or is magically dispelled.

A *zsalev* cannot physically attack or be attacked; it can only create a *fear* effect. Anyone within 30 feet of the effect must make a saving throw vs. spell each round, with a +2 bonus on the first attempt, a +1 bonus on the second, no bonus on the third, and so on, decreasing no farther than -5. An affected character runs in the direction the *zsalev*'s creator wishes, or in a random direction if the *zsalev* has no directive.

A *zsalev* can take many forms, and the Dungeon Master should create his own to surprise the players. Van Richten and Arturi were affected by living darkness, but they might have been stalked by a growling cat, a greenish cloud of mist, the sound of monstrous, heavy breathing nearby, or any other unnerving bump in the night.

A *zsalev* is not a spell so much as a spell-like ability, but it requires the Vistana creator to waste the power needed to cast one memorized 3rd-level spell in order to invoke it.

actually sniffed us out and drove us toward them in Valachan. The spell traveled some four hundred miles to find us! As Vistani, the Canjar are capable of working the forge, but they do not share the Kaldresh enthusiasm and talent for it. Nevertheless, they do produce two very special types of finely wrought magical items: moon jewelry and *evil eye* amulets.

Canjar Moon Jewelry

The Canjar do not sell moon jewelry, but they might award it as a prize for service rendered. Each disk's XP value is 1,000; no more than two such items should be introduced into any single adventuring group.

Moon jewelry modifies any saving throw vs. spell in favor of the caster by +1 while the moon is waxing, and by +2 for the three days during which the moon is full. The modification works against the caster by -1 during waning weeks, and by -2 for the night of the new moon. Determine the moon's current phase by consulting a calendar: The real moon's phase indicates the phase in the game. If your adventure specifies the phase of the moon for plot purposes, that should take precedence. Note that some domains, such as Bluetspur and the Nightmare Lands, do not have a moon, and the jewelry does not function in such places.

Obviously, the possession of moon jewelry is a mixed blessing. Worse, the owner cannot put on the bauble one week to enjoy its benefits and remove it later to avoid its drawbacks. Once moon jewelry has affected even a single roll of the dice, it continues to influence the wearer for one month, even if removed.

Just 10% of all moon jewelry conveys power over lycanthropes. Such items perform as a *scroll of protection versus lycanthropes*, usable once per day. A Dungeon Master can build an adventure around a quest to find a moon ring that cures lycanthropy, but there should be only one of these in an entire campaign.

Moon Jewelry

Under almost any light, these bits of enchanted work appear to be little silver disks; each may be mounted as a pendant, ring, or other device. In the dark, or under the moon, their surfaces glow in proportions that perfectly match the phase of that heavenly body. During the first and last weeks of the lunar cycle, moon jewelry glows in a waxing or waning crescent, while at the full it beams circular and nearly bright enough to read by. According to Arturi, such items can enhance spellcasting and even have power over lycanthropy!

Evil Eye Amulets

In Chapter Four of this treatise, I shall discuss the infamous *evil eye*, but here I shall merely point out that the Canjar create amulets which can actually protect one from that fell power. Forged of silver, such a charm is shaped like a human hand in a warding gesture, such as a fist with the index and little fingers extended. When the charm is worn on a chain about the neck, the wearer's actual warding gesture is enhanced, making it possible to repel not only attacks of the *evil eye*, but any assault that is delivered through the eyes.

Among non-Vistani, *evil eye amulets* are very rare. Given the Manusa's disdain for outsiders, and the *giorgio* dismissal of Vistani powers as superstition, this rarity is perhaps expected. Not even Arturi owns an *evil eye amulet*, even though Vistani tend to be more susceptible to the *evil eye* than you or I.

The Zarovan

The last tribe I shall describe is the furthest removed from common mortality. I do not mean to imply they are not human, just that "humanity" is too limited to encompass them. They are like visitors from another world, full of knowledge we can never hope to imagine, possessed of powers we dare not think on.

The Zarovan are said to be named for their connection with Lord Zarovich of Barovia, also known as "the devil Strahd." Though I have not had the

honor of Lord Zarovich's acquaintance, I know enough of him to infer that members of his inner circle must be both terrible and powerful. If the Zarovan are part of that group, then I am fortunate indeed to have spent a few hours in their presence and lived to speak of it.

Canjar Evil Eye Amulets

Evil eye amulets are more rare than moon jewelry, so no more than one is appropriate to any given party unless extraordinary circumstances dictate otherwise. Further, the jewelry is limited to 1d4+2 "charges," one of which is expended each time the item is used, regardless of its success or failure. Note that *evil eye* amulets should not be treated as standard magical items, but as objects with curious and inexplicable powers. For an amulet to have maximum dramatic effect, the Dungeon Master should keep track of its remaining charges so the player cannot completely depend on it.

Furthermore, when a hero receives an *evil eye* amulet, the Dungeon Master rolls percentile dice to determine the exact bonus to "*evil eye* checks" (see Chapter Four).

Evil Eye Amulet Bonus

1d100	Bonus
01-50	+1
51-75	+2
76-90	+3
91-00	+4

If and when an adventurer responds to an attack of the *evil eye* with a warding gesture, the Dungeon Master (not the player) makes a saving throw vs. paralyzation and adds the modifier.

Note that cursed amulets might be given to adventurers as well. Using the above rules and substituting minuses for pluses, a character may become even more susceptible to the *evil eye*. Such objects are usually put into the hands of heroes for specific reasons germane to the adventure, but any disrespect for the Vistani can result in such a "gift."

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At first I called out to the stranger in the foggy shadows of the Barovian woods. The sun had not yet set, after all, and in all my years I had become a match for most twilight dangers. I hoped the person lurking deep in the trees was a Zarovani. Arturi and I entered the infamous "choking fog of Barovia" knowing that once we inhaled the insidious yellowish fumes, only a Vistani's special potions would neutralize the latent poison in our lungs.

Foolishly, Arturi and I left the Old Svalich Road to answer the stranger's invitation. Soon we were lost, then separated. The stranger slipped from cover to cover, so close I could have seized him, yet I was too late. It became apparent that I was not the hunter, but the prey. Darkness dropped like a heavy curtain, stranding me in the dense forest, the movement of unidentified creatures all around me. I struggled through the underbrush, stumbled on a pit, and fell headlong into a cave, only to be handed a cup of hot tea by a waiting Vistana.

"I am Eva," she said quite casually, then turned and walked away as if we had just finished a conversation.

—From the private journal of
Dr. Van Richten

I can only guess at the powers of the Zarovan, for they told me nothing of themselves. Even the Canjar, mysterious as they seemed, confirmed that certain experiences of mine had been the result of their magic. The Zarovan acknowledged nothing. I cannot say why they even allowed me into their presence, except perhaps to reinforce my fears of the Vistani, lest I report to you that the mysterious wanderers were in any way approachable.

I wanted to rise and walk among them, to ask a dozen questions at once, to simply thank them for sheltering me from the darkness outside. Instead, I sat on the

dirt-strewn floor of the cave with a cup of tea in my hand, and I watched mutely. In hindsight, I suspect they somehow prevented me from acting, yet I had no impression then of external control.

Eva sat in a chair, and a fire sprang up from the stone floor before her. The tribe gathered around her and the fire, chanting, singing, and bowing in ritual eloquence. Their words I could not understand, yet emotions and intellectual impressions filled my head with hallucinations.

I looked into the halls of the lords themselves! I saw other worlds, inhabited by both familiar and alien races! A gigantic, flying, reptilian worm that could breathe fire spoke to me like a human! I gazed on city streets built on the inside of a colossal ring! It all seemed so real, I shall never be sure it was not.

I have the oddest feeling that not a single second passed while I was among the Zarovan. Although everything I have described above should have required time to occur, I am positive that my evening among them lasted no longer than the moments it takes to remember it all. One instant I was tumbling down that hole in the Barovian night, and the next I was sitting with Arturi at my kitchen table in Mordentshire, hundreds of miles away, with the same cup of tea in my hand—still full and still hot!

—From the private journal of
Dr. Van Richten

Given my experience with the Zarovan, the best information I can give consists of rumors, most coming from Arturi. My unenlightened observations of my brief visit with them are hardly the rock of fact. The only assurance I can give you is a personal certainty that none of what I shall below ascribe to the Zarovan seems far-fetched to me since I spent that strange evening among them.

The Spirit of All Vistani

Arturi did not like to say so, perhaps because the prospect of this truth is too much to bear, but he explained to me

There are a number of ways a Dungeon Master might incorporate this notion into a campaign. The Zarovan can possess any and all abilities of all other Vistani tribes of every *iasque*. They might know anything that any other Vistani knows. They might have the ability to negate the powers of other Vistani. They might simply appear as any kind of itinerant they choose.

If the Vistani are to remain mysterious and intimidating to adventurers, then a tribe such as the Zarovan is necessary. These "masters" can change the rules for all the tribes, to prevent the heroes from being able to depend on any one thing being true all the time. This is not to say that the Dungeon Master should make a practice of deceiving the characters at every turn; rather, the party must not ever experience the comfort of knowing exactly with whom they deal.

that the Zarovan are believed to the source of all Vistani powers. According to one Boem legend, a band of Vistani stole magic from the darkest gods, weakening the divine beings' powers so that they could not destroy the world. Ironically yet

understandably, other mortals came to fear these folk, and they were no longer welcome anywhere. They became nomads; they shared their suspicious powers with all wanderers, to frighten and punish ungrateful *giorgios* everywhere.

Sometime later, as we walked along the trail and discussed Vistani mythology, Arturi reluctantly explained that one who was fluent in the *patterna* (see Chapter Three) would understand that the story referred subtly to the Zarovan. He did not wish to discuss the matter because he believed that they know when they are talked about, and further, who is talking about them, which made him very uncomfortable.

Portal to the Fantastic

If the places I saw in my reverie are real, it is almost certain that the Zarovan can travel to them, either spiritually or through *mist navigation*. Perhaps they even bring back people from those remote locales; I have many times met people who insist that they came from abroad, yet who knew not how they arrived nor how to return whence they came. Perhaps they were in actuality objects of Vistani

The Dungeon Master decides whether the Zarovan have the capability to part the void between the campaign world and other worlds and planes. If such a feat is possible, the Zarovan can accomplish it.

Unfortunately for adventurers, there is no way they can pay, cajole, or force the Vistani to open that portal. The only way in which the opportunity might arise is if the Zarovan want something of them badly enough to offer passage using *mist navigation* instead of any number of other boons. They do not allow adventurers to treat this ability as a bargaining chip ("Sure, we'll retrieve the *sword of Sentor* from the Shadow Rift, but you have to take us back to Cormyr when we've done it"), nor do they even admit to having the power. The most they do is hint, saying something like, "Fate calls on you to

deliver the *sword of Sentor* before the home fire burns for you once more."

An offer this generous is cheapened if used as the reward for a single adventure. Far better is it to have the Zarovan appear in the midst of an ongoing campaign, predict some obscure event that results in the way home, then disappear again. When the RAVENLOFT campaign nears an end, the Dungeon Master can allow the party to fulfill the prediction either incidentally or as the final mission. If this encounter with the Zarovan is roleplayed with proper drama, the conditions of the prediction that frees them can be used to tease the adventurers for years. For example, if the Zarovan predict, "The home forge lies beyond the ivory sunset," the heroes will be excited every time they see ivory or hear of it.

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machinations, rather than slightly mad, as I first took them to be.

Conclusion

That, to my knowledge, is the extent of the Vistani tribes which live in our realms, although there may be still others of which neither Arturi nor I know anything. Some *doroq* stories suggest that there is a lost tribe of Vistani which went away using *mist navigation* and never came back; presumably they traveled to another world or plane of existence, never to be seen in our domains again. More chilling stories speak of a ghostly tribe that steals lives and commits other acts of evil when the moon is in the proper phase, allowing them to cross over the shadowy border between this world and theirs. By all accounts, these ghostly Vistani are purely wicked, but I suspect that they are nothing more than boogeymen with which the Kaldresh frighten their children.

In any event, it is certain that all Vistani are not alike. Of course there are certain qualities and abilities that are common to all of them: Physically they are swarthy, dark-haired, and brown-eyed almost without exception, which I am sure contributes to generalizations on the part of the uninformed. All tribes practice a bit of magic, as well, and have the power to glimpse the future through various

It is vital for the Dungeon Master to vary the abilities of the many tribes, trade some of them back and forth, and even create other related powers and skills, using Van Richten for inspiration only. Now that many players have the doctor's take on the Vistani, prove to them that neither he nor they know everything.

means. Any tribe can use *mist navigation* to emerge in another domain, hundreds of miles away, as if it were just down the road. None can claim a permanent home without losing an essential part of their identities. And, of course, all Vistani possess the power of the *evil eye*, which confers on them the ability to lay dread curses.

When adventurers and old wives exchange information, these are the traits they ascribe to the Vistani, and few others. However, these are only the most spectacular of their capabilities, and they are the stories which typically frighten *giorgios*. The actuality of these powers are addressed in Chapters Four and Five of this treatise. They do much to secure a reputation, for good or ill, that is attributed to all Vistani. Yet by themselves, these abilities do not reveal who or what the Vistani really are.

Although I have a personal grievance with the Corvara tribe, which stole my son and sold him to a vampire, I must still conclude that the majority of evils attributed to Vistani tribes are simply stuff and nonsense. Certainly there are criminals among them, worthy of a swift rope, and most of them view law and order as concepts that have no direct application to their lives, but the all too common depiction of these familial vagabonds as a collection of derelicts and thieves is misleading.

If there is one thing I have learned in my many years of research and hunting, it is that *misleading information can be fatal*. Perhaps, if I had not viewed the Radanavich caravan with such awe and fear, they would not have been so bold as to take my son, and countless friends and associates of mine would still be alive today.



... Honor, love, obedience, troop of friends,
I must not look to have; but, in their stead,
Curses, not loud but deep...

—William Shakespeare
Macbeth

Each turned his face with a ghastly pang,
And cursed me with his eye.

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge
"Rime of the Ancient Mariner"

CHAPTER FOUR: CURSES AND THE EVIL EYE



The power to lay curses, and the related power of the *evil eye*, fall somewhere between common and salient Vistani abilities. I name them "common" because all Vistani can invoke them, and I call them "salient" as well because they are devastating capabilities. For all the strange and frightening things these people can do, their abilities to curse and to cast the *evil eye* are what makes them so dangerous.

Curse Types

I shall not expend a great deal of ink speaking of curses. Not only is the subject distasteful, but I have found that a great deal of empirical data regarding the nature of these phenomena has already been committed to print.

Just as the bite is integral to the notion of a vampire, the curse is essential to the Vistani. Further, their curses are more calculated, often more complex in their workings, and ironically more natural than those uttered by *giorgios* with hatred in their hearts. The Vistani can invoke curses without the electrifying ingredient of hatred.

A certain consciousness of this ability should pervade any contact with the Vistani. Just as the flash of a fang warns of mortal danger (to extend the vampire analogy), so *giorgios* must

learn to recognize the sparkle of temper in a Vistani's smiling countenance if they know what is good for them. In the interests of the discovery of truth, I have suppressed my inclinations to ignore this subject. Toward this end, I interviewed a few priests who have dealt with Vistani curses, and of course Arturi, my resident expert, regarding the

Van Richten's anxiety over curses is slightly overstated because of his own experiences. The Vistani do not lock eyes with *giorgios* and smile evilly, as if they were saying, "Go ahead. Make my day." On the other hand, the Vistani have a substantially superior chance to invoke curses. First, they earn +25% to their percentile rolls simply for being Vistani. Good Dungeon Masters (and any players running Vistani characters) should make the actual uttering of a curse dramatic, allowing an additional +25% for showmanship. Of course, if a particular curse is a focal plot point, it is perfectly reasonable to assign a 100% chance of the curse taking affect.

Curses uttered during Fulltide gain a +10% chance to take effect.

In general, all the rules concerning curses in *Domains of Dread* (Chapter Twelve) apply to the Vistani. For example, *Dungeon Masters* should make powers checks for Vistani who curse, especially if that character plays an extended role in the campaign. (A failed check can add some interesting spice to an adventure.)

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Vistani curses are categorized by their specific intent, as well as by type and strength—defined in *Domains of Dread*, Chapter Twelve, as *embarrassing, frustrating, troublesome, dangerous, and lethal*. In fact, mixing and matching the intent and strength of curses creates interesting results. Therefore, the relative strength of curses is applied to each of the following curses below in order to help the Dungeon Master invent appropriate and interesting Vistani curses.

nature of this cruel power. Thus I learned that Vistani curses can be loosely categorized by the type of punishment they inflict. This corroborates my comments above, for it makes sense that the Vistani would calculate the effects of their curses rather than simply blither in a fury and let their power take its own form.

The Scar

Most curses uttered by Vistani are not intended to kill or jeopardize the victim's life. They are simply cruel repayment for a perceived injustice, real or imaginary. These hardships take the form of permanent inconveniences, for lack of a better description. They have the effect of leaving a physical, emotional, or psychological scar on the victim, to constantly remind him that he has wronged the Vistani. For example, a warrior's prowess with the sword may weaken, or a mage's ability to enunciate may fail when casting a spell.

These curses do not always affect the victim himself: A *giorgio* blacksmith who undercuts a *Kamii*'s bid for work might suddenly find that every nail he forges becomes brittle, and a sage who scorns the Vistani might discover that ink no longer flows from a quill whenever he attempts to use it. The object of the "scar" is not to cause real harm so much as to interfere with some aspect of the victim's daily life. Certainly it is possible for such curses to take on a deadly aspect—say, for instance, a priest whose holy symbol becomes slippery

whenever he faces an undead creature—but the general intent is not lethal.

The Poisonous Carrot

What is more cruel than to want something with all one's heart, to see that something right before one's eyes, but to know that the mere touch of it is death? When a Vistana feels especially cheated and wants to repay his pain in Vistani-kind, he lays a curse that implants desire in the heart of his enemy, but also the knowledge that to have the desired object is to summon torment or worse. The point of this curse is to make the recipient experience the Vistana's sense of loss, keenly and perpetually. If the Vistana knows of something already dear to the victim, that object often becomes the focus of the curse, doubling the retribution.

Doombringer

How shall I repay the blood of my many comrades who have lost their lives because of my ignorance? What justice can atone for the deaths of so many, who were doomed the moment they

Most Vistani curses laid on adventurers are "Scars," or curses meant to be broken, either as a sidelight of an on-going adventure or as the final goal itself. To tailor a curse to a hero, hinder the character's class or race abilities. Assign penalties to dice rolls in mild situations and revoke the skill or faculty altogether for serious curses (troublesome or worse). A more clever curse focuses on some individual aspect of the blighted character—something comparable to Van Richten's examples of the blacksmith and the sage.

While "scar" curses can lead to the death of a hero in combination with a bad turn of luck, this type of annoyance should not be designed to create permanent problems. As soon as it is broken, a "scar" curse ceases to have an effect.

accepted me as a companion? Is there any hope for me to live with myself?

So many dead; so many taken in ways that have plotted my nightmares for three decades!

—From the private journal of
Dr. Van Richten

The coldness with which a Vistana can deliver a curse is highly unsettling in itself, aside from the prospect of the curse's effects on its hapless victim. One would almost prefer that they scream or babble maliciously rather than hiss deadly words with cool, calculated venom.

At least, that seems to be the case as one thinks about the alternatives. As one who has seen the rage of a Vistana directed on him, I can tell you that a curse laid in fury is even more terrifying. Angry Vistani become like murderous Nature, like a tornado that comes and goes in seconds, changing the life of a tiny mortal forever.



When a Vistana is enraged, he is capable of responding with particular cruelty. His desire is not only to punish his enemy, but to torment him for as long as possible, inspiring guilt and remorse that is far worse than mere agony. In other words, the "doom-bringer" curse does not affect the

An embarrassing example of this curse creates a strange but easily avoidable compulsion. For example, the victim might find candy of any type irresistible (failing a saving throw vs. paralyzation), but eating a single piece results in a debilitating stomachache (-2 to dice rolls) that lasts 1d8 hours.

A frustrating curse focuses on a victim's favorite possession, causing it to malfunction 50% of the time, or to deliver 2d4 points of damage by electrical shock whenever it is used, or something similar.

A troublesome curse might force a hero to irresistibly prefer weapons, magical items, or equipment with which he is not proficient. When in battle the chance arises to heft an inappropriate weapon, the character does—and must use his choice until the encounter ends.

A dangerous curse compels the victim to crave peril. Hence, the Dungeon Master might require a hero who comes on a 10-foot-wide gorge to successfully make a saving throw vs.

paralyzation or resolve to leap across, rather than wait for a more sensible plan to develop.

The lethal curse should focus on whatever the character cherishes most, and pronounce a death sentence upon possessing it. This might separate a paladin from his horse or *holy sword*, or it might forbid the victim from ever leaving the RAVENLOFT world, and so forth.

The "poisonous carrot" curse is most useful when a particular hero has a favorite object. The Dungeon Master can apply any severity of curse to it, making it difficult to use, live with, touch, or even look on. Take care not to ruin the adventurer's attachment to the item, though! Metaphorically speaking, the Dungeon Master should dangle the cursed object over his hero's head (like a carrot in front of a burro) where the hero can see it, but not quite reach it. Remind indignant players that curses can be broken, and they'll want to get back into the game immediately.

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An enraged Vistana is likely to inflict this type of misfortune.

An embarrassing "doombringer" is merely annoying to have around—he is followed by poor weather wherever he goes, for example.

A frustrating curse creates measurable (dice-affecting) troubles for others, but if the victim and all allies are aware of it, they can work around it. Hence, the cursed character might be the walking center of a 25-foot-radius magic-dead zone (his own magic excepted).

A troublesome curse causes people in the victim's vicinity to experience unavoidable but nonlethal difficulties; perhaps everyone with the victim automatically fails all surprise rolls.

A dangerous "doombringer" attracts potentially lethal trouble on a regular basis. Maybe particularly nasty monsters show up once per day if the Dungeon Master rolls 1–3 on 1d10 (check once per hour until it happens).

A lethal curse brings certain death to those around the victim. This is the specific curse leveled at Van Richten by the Vistani long ago.

victim, but everyone around him instead. He becomes a carrier of some mystical disease to which he is immune. Normally, it does not take a long time for the victim to notice a pattern of devastating bad luck. However, I can personally assure that such a curse may be subtle, rendering the discovery of its existence all the more ruinous!

Alienation

Contempt in a Vistana's heart can spawn a sadistic type of curse. The victim slowly takes on the Vistana's image of him, becoming more vile to look on as time marches forward. We all know the story of the thief whose hands turned black after he stole from a caravan, but I have also heard of men slowly turning into dumb animals, and others becoming trees. Some changes are only partial, leaving the victim a

revolting or fearsome visage; other times a complete evolution occurs. In one odd tale, a man's shadow disappeared, even in the brightest light, for lack of which he was burned at the stake by his frightened fellow villagers.

Torture and Terror

For those who commit particularly heinous crimes (including murder, kidnapping, and rape) against the Vistani, there are horrible curses which only a tribe's seer can invoke. What's worse, one need not even be in the same domain, much less in their presence, to be struck down by these black maledictions for which, to my knowledge, there is no cure.

Most infamous of these punishments is the notorious *mishamel* (mee SHAH mall), the body-melt. Casualties of this dread pronouncement begin to sweat

Mishamel Curse

The victim of a *mishamel* experiences profuse perspiration for 1d4 days. For the next 1d4 days, the victim cannot be healed by any means short of a *wish* spell. Next, the victim suffers a cumulative -1 per day penalty to all dice rolls due to mounting pain. Furthermore, the victim must successfully make a *saving throw vs. petrification* or lose 1 point each of Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution per day. When any attribute falls to 0, the character goes into shock and melts away in 1d6 hours. Melted characters are irrevocably destroyed and cannot be brought back even with a *wish*.

The Dungeon Master is encouraged to alter the numbers and even the symptoms of a *mishamel* if adopting it for his campaign. The mechanics given here demonstrate how dice can be applied to the effects of so terrible a curse. At the Dungeon Master's option, *remove curse* can temporarily halt the curse's advance (see Chapter Eight in *Domains of Dread*). However, the real terror lies in the roleplayed aspects of the *mishamel*.

As Van Richten suggests, this type of curse can impose physical changes in the victim. The severity of this curse is just as flexible as that of the other curse types.

An embarrassing curse results in an irritant fairly simply to deal with—the example of the thief with black hands falls into this category, as he can always wear gloves in public.

A frustrating curse is the same as an embarrassing one, except that it physically affects the victim in some minor way: The thief's fingers grow numb as well as black (–10% to all hand-related thief skills).

Continuing the thief's example, a troublesome curse would result in some physical problem that prevents him from using one of his skills altogether. He could develop a hitch in his step that prevents him from Moving Silently, or his remaining skin might turn so white that he can no longer Hide in Shadows.

A dangerous curse causes a deformity that changes the victim's

life: The thief's hands rot away, or turn into the claws of a weasel.

Finally, a lethal curse turns the victim into another object entirely, animate or inanimate.

Allow an adventurer afflicted with this type of curse to change slowly. Let it dawn on him that a curse has taken effect. Make him guess at the nature of the change by revealing only symptoms, one at a time, spread over a generous stretch of time. Do not apply modifiers to any dice rolls at first; eventually do so in such a way that the player has to figure out it is happening, if possible. When the player notices his character's rolls are being altered, that is the cue to announce the first visible change.

It is possible to apply reaction adjustments to this type of curse as well. Assess a cumulative –1 penalty per stage of severity whenever such rolls are made. As a rule of thumb, a reaction adjustment is definitely in order whenever nonplayer character humans and demihumans witness the manifestation of the curse.

profusely, then experience increasing pain, which steadily erodes their abilities to think and act, until they finally go into shock. Their physical bodies are slowly melting into a gooey liquid! It is fortunate they are not conscious the last hours of their lives, for the sight of their own flesh would engender a heart attack.

Other Vistani death sentences are legendary, both literally and figuratively, since I have no personal knowledge of any, nor have I interviewed a reliable source who could bear witness to the events. These include a dissolution of the skeleton which leaves the victim fully alive, yet incapable of retaining anything more than a *baglike form*; an irresistibility to stinging, swarming insects; a full-body case of gangrene; violent hallucinations that actually inflict physical damage; and even a suit of armor that slowly contracted, crushing the wearer bit by tiny bit.

Focus Items

To invoke a lethal curse, a Vistana seer often needs a material component of some sort. Ideally, this is a possession of the victim's such as an

Although Van Richten pronounces these curses "incurable," his insistence contradicts the rule that every curse has an escape clause (see later). Perhaps it is more accurate to say that these curses have no known cure. Therefore, it is up to the Dungeon Master to decide on a fitting one. Since *mishamels* are only laid on those who truly deserve them, likely no one wants to offer a cure. On the other hand, an incurable curse can be an effective way to threaten a character who flouts powers checks. If his act of evil injures the Vistani, even inadvertently, an unrepentant adventurer can experience some particularly horrible retribution.

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article of clothing or lock of hair, but it can be any object which the intended victim has held in the last day or so. Sometimes the seer creates a doll or other image, or she takes an animal's

If a cursing Vistana has an item that belongs to the victim, add +25% to the curse's chance of taking effect. If the item has merely been touched by the target, add only +15% to the roll. A simple representation adds just +5%.

Horrifying curses are wonderful tools to scare heroes, when they are skillfully employed. Most important, the manifestation of the curse must develop slowly. Introduce the symptoms gradually so that it takes a while for the adventurers to figure out exactly what is happening, even if the character is aware that he's been cursed. Once a curse's true nature is detected (horror checks might be advisable), drag out determining the method of breaking the curse (see later) until the symptoms have reached alarming proportions. Then challenge the heroes to achieve their goal by giving them a genuine chance to succeed or fail, depending on how well they play. Strike a careful balance between hope and despair by dangling the cure in plain sight, while keeping it just out of reach.

As dictated in *Domains of Dread*, Chapter Twelve, each curse must contain an escape clause, or it is little more than a death sentence or permanent handicap. Determining exactly what breaks a curse is at least as important as the curse itself, because what breaks the curse often defines the whole (new) direction of the campaign. A cursed character likely ignores all previous objectives until the curse is broken. At the Dungeon Master's option, a clever adventurer might earn a 50% chance to shatter a curse by creating a paradox within which the curse cannot operate. Note that "redemption" in a Vistani curse amounts to righting whatever wrong has been committed, for the Vistani can withdraw their curses at will.

heart and drives spikes through it. This procedure adds power to the curse, and I think it allows the seer to fester in her wrath while she constructs the conduit. She can focus on the object of her hatred with increasing clarity, which helps to drive the curse home.

When the focus item is complete, the Vistana holds it over a fire and pronounces the name of the victim. Then she digs a shallow hole, places the object within, spits on it, and buries it, pronouncing the name once more. As she turns her back on the tiny grave, the curse begins to work.

Breaking a Curse

Apparently the Vistani have the power to withdraw their curses at will. However, they must truly wish to end the torment, and they cannot be threatened or coerced into doing so.

Even if they are not disposed to forgive, I believe that there is often a way to turn a curse in on itself, and thus destroy it. Those who suffer from a curse would do well to examine the exact words (providing they were present when the words were uttered),

for there is a good possibility that some loophole exists. Theoretically, once it becomes impossible for a curse to manifest itself, the hex shatters. Therefore, concentrate on words such as "if, when, until, by, because," and any others that create a conditional phrase. Keep in mind that merely avoiding the behavior that triggers a curse is not the same as making circumstances impossible for the curse to manifest. Rather, the trick is to determine the condition that causes the curse, then alter that condition in such a way that the curse cannot form.

The Evil Eye

The *evil eye* is a gaze attack similar to that of a basilisk or a vampire. Each Vistana can invoke it up to three times per day. For those Dungeon Masters who make powers checks for their nonplayer characters, invoking the *evil eye* prompts a 1% chance of attracting the attention of dark powers, modified by any of the situations defined in *Domains of Dread*, Chapter Seven.

The victim is entitled to make a saving throw vs. paralyzation, with success indicating an avoidance of this minor curse. As Van Richten suggests, conditions can modify the roll of the die, as outlined in the table below. Conditions are not cumulative.

Evil Eye Check Modifiers Table

Modifier	Condition
+1	Victim previously made a successful saving throw against an <i>evil eye</i> invoked by the same Vistana.
-1	Victim previously failed a saving throw against a power invoked by the same Vistana.
-2	Vistana is female.
-3	Vistana is a seer or <i>raunie</i> .
-4 to +4	Victim owns an <i>evil eye</i> amulet.

For example, imagine the words of a curse are "Nevermore shall your sword strike true until the Sea of Sorrows is bereft of water." If the recipient of this curse were to give his sword to a friend, but retain the use of it, he might actually get around the curse, but it would not be broken. But he might break the curse by filling a jar of water from the Sea of Sorrows and letting it evaporate. Or he might try writing the word "true" on a piece of paper, then striking it with a sword.

The Evil Eye

A relatively little-known power of the Vistani is their ability to assault an adversary with the *evil eye*. All Vistani are capable of using the *evil eye*, but females are more able, and the seer and *raunie* are by far the most effective casters.

According to Arturi, the process of invoking the *evil eye* is both simple and difficult. It is the former because the Vistana merely looks into the eyes of his adversary and focuses negative emotions on them. It is the latter because summoning anger and hatred on cue is not always easy to do; indeed, those who do so without effort soon become evil creatures themselves, and in the long run are cast out of the tribe. (It is said that the *evil eye* is the only Vistani power left to a darkling.)

The first time one is struck by the *evil eye*, one's senses are assaulted in a



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way most people never imagined possible. Quite literally, the amazement which accompanies the force of a Vistana's will is overwhelming, and few have the fortitude to resist its effects. Fortunately, the ability is not overtly magical, so the experience of suffering from it can actually gird one against future assaults. It is, in fact, possible to throw off the *evil eye's* effects through sheer force of will, especially if the Vistana fails on the first attempt.

The Vistana can invoke any of the following effects with the *evil eye*.

Paralyzation lasts 1d4+1 rounds, during which time the victim is affected as if caught by a *hold* spell. If the saving throw to avoid the attack fails by more than 4, the victim becomes absolutely rigid for 2 rounds, then experiences violent convulsions that last 3 rounds, inflicting 3d8 points of damage in the process. Following the convulsions, the victim must make a System Shock roll. If it fails, the character dies. If successful, the character falls unconscious and is merely "asleep," easily wakened. A *hold* spell prevents the victim from convulsing (and suffering damage), but the System Shock roll is still required.

Fear, *charm*, and *suggestion* operate exactly as do the spells of the same names, except each effect lasts only 1d4+1 rounds.

Known Effects

There are four known effects of falling under the *evil eye*. The first and most common manifestation is a paralyzing force. The Vistana locks the victim in place like a cobra freezes a bird. Occasionally, the force of the *evil eye* is so powerful that the victim experiences a seizure which he may or may not survive!

The other known applications of the *evil eye* create effects similar to wizard spells, inspiring fear, *charming* the victim, or even planting a hypnotic *suggestion* in his mind. These inducements are not as powerful as their magical counterparts, however. Usually, they do little more than provide the Vistana with a distraction or a few minutes to escape pursuit.

It would also seem that the Vistani have the ability to cast the *evil eye* on animals, objects, monsters—indeed, they can invoke this ability to influence virtually anybody and anything. Such power is fleeting, but they know how to use it strategically, saving it for moments when it serves them best.

The *evil eye* can also be used to curse items. The Vistana only need look on an object to force a saving throw vs. disintegration (*DUNGEON MASTER Guide*, Table 29). If the roll fails, all dice-rolling associated with the affected item suffers a -1 penalty for 1d4+1 rounds. Any magical item used during that period simply fails to function on the first try. If the item is charged, one charge is lost in the attempt to use it.

Virtually any object can be cursed by the *evil eye*, but the Dungeon Master must choose the exact effect. For example, the *evil eye* focused on a pursuer's horse might cause it to stumble and fall, a dish of food might be instantly soured, or the strings of a bard's instrument might suddenly snap. In general, the *evil eye* does not inflict damage, although it might be employed to lead to injury, as in the case of the falling horse.

Vision is the art of seeing things invisible.

—Jonathan Swift
 “Thoughts on Various Subjects”

CHAPTER FIVE: SALIENT ABILITIES AND VULNERABILITIES



In this chapter, I shall speak of even more remarkable abilities than any I have yet described. In cases where I have not been a personal witness to the phenomena, I have depended on the reliability of my source; the reader must trust my judgment of each witness's character. Better still, do not rely on any anecdote I recount here as gospel. I may have misinterpreted phenomena I have looked on myself. Nevertheless, being a little prepared is better than being unprepared altogether.

Prescient Sight

Who does not know that Vistani tell fortunes? Although their *tarokka* cards and *crystal balls* are well-known tools of prognostication, any number of methods and scrying devices exist to explore the future and past: chiromancy (palm reading), astrology, sortilege (casting of lots), haruspication (inspecting the entrails of animals), oneiromancy (dream interpretation), geomancy (interpretations of random patterns in dust), pyromancy (reading flame), even ornithoscopy (observation of birds' flight patterns). I have seen most media invoked at one time or another through the years, although cartomancy—reading the *tarokka*—is by far the most common method.

I have no doubt that *tarokka* cards are the most prevalent because they are so easily carried. Perhaps equally important, however, is the fact they can be imbued with arcane power. Thus they should be more accurate, and

more personal, than most other forms of divination.

I do not believe that any of the physical components themselves are the source of the fortunes told by the Vistani. Whether one tosses bones, counts ripples in a glass of wine, or even spits on a window, the actual power to see is

Fortune-telling

A little research reveals there are dozens of known media for fortune-telling. Cultures around the globe have produced myriad fascinating agents, from the Chinese I Ching to the Native American vision lodge. For a change of venue from the *tarokka* deck, use any of the known types of “-mancy,” or possibly invent something unique to your campaign.

For example, a seer might pluck a hair from the head of each hero, then sprinkle these over a pool of water and examine the way they swirl. Or a Vistani might order an adventurer to prick his finger and let a drop of blood fall into a fire so she can listen to the sound and duration of the hiss. Quick-tongued Dungeon Masters can “spontaneously” interpret by drawing together elements of the physical action (the swirling of hairs, the hiss of burning blood) and elements of the fortune to be told.

Since the players themselves know that fortune-telling is only a dramatic plot device, the idea is to make the reading interesting. Pay attention to tone; do not give in to silliness; and remember to roleplay. Other than that, whatever surprises the players is what serves the adventure best.

A deck of *tarokka* cards was last printed with the RAVENLOFT Campaign Setting boxed set (TSR #1108). Instructions on using them appeared in the *Domains and Denizens* booklet therein.

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internal. All the rest is merely a matter of custom or convenience; a Vistana who looks into a *crystal ball* everyday could just as easily crush a dead leaf and see the future in the powder of its remains. Personal preference seems to be the deciding factor.

As to the origin of prescience in the Vistani, I think there may be some magic involved, but the fact of the matter is that *giorgios* do not understand the nature of time. To most of us, it is a linear, inescapable progression of collective reality. We believe the present moment is the same fleeting segment no matter where one goes in the universe, and we all vehemently insist that we live nowhere else. But the observable Vistani attitude toward time is not the same, and neither is their grasp of it. An esteemed colleague of mine who knows as much of the Vistani as any *giorgio*, a sage-philosopher of Mortigny named Andrianna Cardarelle, responded to this issue in a recent letter:

"Time is purely an arbitrary invention of the mind, providing us with a means to express relationships between memories, experiences, and dreams. The first we call the past, the second the present, and the third the future. All of them are merely perceptions that register in the mind and are recorded, and none is less real than any other. Thus we "look" backward and forward much as we look at the present.

"The Vistani simply possess a slightly more sophisticated perspective of this vision than the rest of us. Even though past, present, and future all exist in the mind, most non-Vistani cannot freely move between the three, mentally or otherwise. The Vistani, however, can."

I know not if this faculty is inborn or learned. If the latter is the case, then all Vistani should have the power to look ahead and back in time. If the former is true, then perhaps some have the sight and others do not. Personally, I believe the ability to tell fortunes is inborn, simply because it appears that only females can become seers. This gender-relatedness indicates that there is some

heritable trait that causes, or perhaps allows, prescient vision.

The Tribal Seer

Indeed, when I asked Arturi if men could read fortunes, he vehemently replied in the negative. "Only a giver of Life may look on the future and past of others without inviting destruction," he explained. "Death stalks those who see through time, seeking to preserve the secrets of the past and future, but Death cannot touch a woman." He went on to explain that all Vistani females are capable of fortune-telling.

There is almost always a tribal seer in every caravan of each *tasque*. Normally it is the eldest female in the group, but one Vatraska caravan I met had a seer who was quite a bit younger than other women in the family, and I have heard reports of similar circumstances elsewhere. In any event, the tribal seer's powers of augury are the most potent, and she is often capable of entering a trancelike state to perform readings, to locate a person or thing, or to act as a medium for spirits. She is equal in status to the *raunie*, though not equal in authority. Rather, she is like a queen's prized counselor, except she is royal herself.

The Legend of the Dukkan

Only partially satisfied with Arturi's explanation of why females alone can tell fortunes, I asked why it might not be remotely possible for a male to be born with the sight—say, once in a century. The idea distressed him, and I asked why.

"The gift of sight is detected in babies by both the *raunie* and the seer," he explained, "and such a male would be immediately put to death, even in a caravan where birth is rare, even though the Vistani cherish their children to a depth no *giorgio* could ever understand."

"But that makes no sense," I said.

"This boy you refer to would grow up to be the *Dukkan*—the one who is hunted by Death—and only by becoming evil could he escape Death.

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The *Dukkar*

Van Richten's reference to the "Great Upheaval of 740" is, of course, the Grand Conjunction (see Chapter One of *Domains of Dread*). Hyskosa was a prescient male Vistana (a *Dukkar*) who appeared in *From the Shadows* (TSR #9375). The Vistani are paranoid about the possibility of a *Dukkar* wandering the domains, since he is a "blind spot" in their amazing vision. Therefore, they are never sure if a *Dukkar* has been born or if fear is creating a specter in their imaginations. After Hyskosa, the next *Dukkar* became the cambion fiend Malocchio Aderre (see the previous section, "Demons," Chapter Five, for details).

If adventurers seek out the services of Vistani, and the Dungeon Master does not have a particular task for them to perform in payment, they can always be asked to investigate the possible existence of a *Dukkar*. This goal can be an excuse to send them to the next phase of their quest, or it might become a side adventure, but the *Dukkar* himself never appears. At best, the heroes might recover evidence that a *Dukkar* exists.

The Evil Eye (TSR #9497), an adventure module about the Vistani, centers on the emergence of a *Dukkar* (Malocchio Aderre). Dungeon Masters looking for an excellent example of a *Dukkar*, as well as how the Vistani deal with him, should consult that adventure.

Therefore, he would be killed before that opportunity arose."

The legend of the *Dukkar* appears in the *doroq* of many tribes. The tale has several forms, but in essence, it tells of a boy who is born with powers of sight, unbeknownst to the Vistani (or outside their jurisdiction, or to a darkling, depending on the teller). Alarmingly, they cannot discover who or where he is until too late, in spite of their most powerful magic and clearest sight. This abomination accrues a variety of nefarious powers in addition to

prescience, then embarks on an astounding array of atrocities for which both gods and *giorgios* blame the Vistani. In the end, the entire Vistani nation is wiped from the face of the land, in various and terrible ways.

The Vistani insist a *Dukkar* has recently walked the domains of our world, and he caused the Great Upheaval of 740, which reshaped our land. Hyskosa, they name him, with a curse and a ward against the *evil eye*. They say Death found and took Hyskosa, but not before he caused great evil. They also claim that he will be back. This prediction seems the greatest, perhaps the only, fear in any Vistani heart.

Furthermore, Arturi whispered to me that a new *Dukkar* has arisen on our world, and that *Dukkar*'s name is none other than Malocchio Aderre of *Invidial*. I have made myself a promise to further investigate this at a future time.

A Key Weakness

Curiously, for all their ability to look into the past and future, the Vistani are apparently incapable of self-evaluation through the medium of prescience. Certainly they can look ahead and behind and see themselves there, but for some reason they cannot focus on those moments in time with the same clarity as they can when reading for others. A less sophisticated mind might speculate that the gods impose this restriction to deprive the Vistani of the power to control their own destiny.

I rather suspect that, as is the case for so many of us, what seems a simple operation when performed on others becomes impossible when we attempt it on ourselves. For example, many people who give wonderful advice are incapable of following it themselves, and there is a well-known adage which proclaims that a doctor who treats himself has a fool for a patient. It is human nature to remain totally blind to ourselves, even when we see others with crystalline clarity.

For the very same reason we seldom can examine ourselves with clear

objectivity, I submit that the Vistani cannot perform any but the most rudimentary auguries for their own information. This is why they so often demand services of *giorgios* who request their help. This is why they cannot control the ebb and flow of time for their own profit. Above all, this weakness may well reflect their refusal to substantially affect time, even if they have the power to do so—since they cannot clearly read the effect of changing history on their own fate, there is no way they will risk disaster by using the powers they possess.

Mist Navigation

I learned the Vistani were not common creatures on the day the Corvara took my son and fled Rivalis all those years ago. I left town on a fast horse that morning, barely an hour behind them, and rode as hard as I could without

killing my mount, yet still I had not caught them by the time the sun went down. That night, I learned they had escaped through fog and mist, and had been beyond my reach almost from the start. My proof of this truth came when I was myself escorted by a Vistana using *mist navigation*. We traveled from the western border of Darkon to the northern border of Barovia in only a few minutes, despite the fact that hundreds of miles lie between those domains as the raven flies! Had I not done so, I would never have caught up with the Radanavich caravan, I would never have had that fateful confrontation with Firdusa Radanavich, and I would have had a very different life.

The power to travel through fog and mist cannot be explained, even by the Vistani. When I asked, "How is it done?" they answered, "How does one fall asleep? How does one wake up? One simply does." Friendlier tribes, like the

Mist Navigation

In the RAVENLOFT world, *mist navigation* is a means of moving characters across large expanses in a matter of minutes or less—and it is the purview of the Dungeon Master alone. *Mist navigation* is, in game terms, a form of extradimensional travel and time travel, but Vistani can do so at will and without limitation. Creating rules that explain *mist navigation* can only restrict a Dungeon Master's ability to employ them when needed, so none are described here.

However, this travel can be a frightening setting for adventure. Once the fog has swallowed the party, strange noises, thumps that slowly come closer and closer, flitting shadows in the gray twilight, and other lurking dangers can drive heroes to distraction. Remember that not all threats are real, and true danger leaps out of the shadows when the heroes think they have avoided it.

There are always mist horrors out there (see the first RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix), but any monster appropriate to the

RAVENLOFT setting can stalk the misty realms. In fact, even creatures inappropriate to a classic horror setting might appear, lending a tone of surrealism to the adventure.

Play games with the adventurers as they travel along. Tell them that they turn around and find the Vistani who were taking them through are gone. Reduce their movement rates to MV 3 as soon as they hear a pack of deranged wolves approaching, then treat all characters—player and nonplayer characters alike—as if they have been double-hasted the moment battle begins. (Everyone quadruples movement and attacks; roll initiative normally.) Reverse the order of initiative after it has been established, either arbitrarily or with the roll of a die. (This drives some players nuts!) Announce that the party seems to be affected by the reverse of *comprehend languages*, just as a group of monsters moves in to attack—make everyone write down all intended actions for each melee round, and allow no table talk between players. In short, do anything that creates a nightmarish feel.

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Kamii, went so far as to explain that a *raunie* wills a fog to rise, and her captain directs the caravan through the blind fog—but on the particulars of how these feats are accomplished, they would not comment.

While a traveler is using *mist navigation*, time and space grow immeasurable, and time perhaps even reverses or advances at a great rate. A trip from Ludendorf in northwestern Lamordia to Arbora in southwestern Nova Vaasa does not necessarily require any more time than an excursion from one side of Forlorn to the other; it is impossible to say which journey lasted longer. I am not implying that both trips become equal in time and distance; I am saying that it is impossible to perceive the difference between them. Eternity and an instant are indistinguishable. The journey does not seem, subjectively, to be very long; little or no time at all passes in the world outside this blanket of blindness.

Unfortunately, the only occurrence that can render time meaningful during *mist navigation* is the appearance of a hostile creature. That misfortune, I am sorry to say, can make a trip seem interminable. It is possible, the Vistani report, to encounter lost monsters in the vapors, creatures made of malevolent fog, madmen too wild and violent to explain how they got there, and horrors unknown. Sometimes the Vistani can control or repel these threats, and sometimes they cannot.

Tracking Magic

Probably because of their kinship with nature, the Vistani are excellent trackers. Certainly the powers of a seer can enhance the ability to find people—and objects as well—but the Vistani also possess a few arcane means to achieve those ends. For example, a few farmers know that a forked stick can be held in both hands and employed to discover the underground presence of water, but a Vistana might use a divining rod to track a man as well. All he needs is a

Vistani naturally possess the Tracking proficiency in the same manner as rangers, similarly improving with experience levels (or Hit Dice). As *mist navigation* allows them to travel unlimited distances, their tracking magic follows the same extradimensional pathways and therefore has unlimited range. If the Vistani want to find someone, they will. Conversely, if they know a party of adventurers is following them, they can easily track its progress and disappear in moments.

Spells and items that protect against detection and location also prevent the Vistani from locating a hero, although they might concentrate on his horse or companions to achieve the same result.

personal possession of his quarry to be found, which he affixes to the pointing end of the stick. Then the Vistana holds the forked arms and lets the stick subtly tug him in the direction of his man.

If the target of the search is farther away, and nothing is available with which to "bait" the rod, the seer sometimes produces a small silver pin and delicately places it in a bowl of water such that it actually rests on the surface of the liquid. She then places her hands on each side of the bowl and concentrates on the person or object she seeks. Slowly, the pin floats to the center of the bowl, swings about, and points in the direction in which the target lies. Then the seer begins to count aloud, and when she hits upon the number of miles between her and the target, the pin sinks. Obviously, this method of tracking requires absolute stillness on the part of the seer and those around her, but it is remarkably accurate, and apparently unlimited in its range as well.

Slowing the Prey

The speed of a Vistani caravan is not great. When there is need to overtake faster prey, or perhaps to outdistance faster hunters, the *raunie* threads a

needle, then pricks her finger, squeezing a drop of her blood onto the point. She then ties the thread to the back of her *vardo* and allows the needle to drag in the dirt behind. Somehow, this slows or hinders the person or persons whom she hopes to evade or catch.



Whether or not the heroes know they are being tracked by Vistani, the Dungeon Master can subtly or overtly impede their progress. For example, after they are reassured that the next village is three hours' ride ahead, tell them it took four hours to reach the destination, but do not explain where they lost the hour. In combat, slow their movement rates by 3, and tell them to add +3 to their initiative rolls; again, do not explain. Both *protection from evil* and its reverse defend a character from this power.

Vista-chiri and Other Minions

Like druids, Vistani have an affinity for the wild animals of the forest. Natural creatures tend to gravitate toward them and follow them as they travel. The Vistani seem to pay these companions

little heed, but Arturi assured me that animal movements are a part of the tapestry of life: When an animal alters its daily habits or disappears, the tribes notice the change immediately, just as a weaver would see a tangle or hole appearing in her fabric. Hence, every creature of the forest is a sentry on the perimeter of the caravan.

In particular, the tiny gray and white birds called *vista-chiri*, which flutter almost invisibly through the treetops, are effective spies. I have seen them swoop down to light on the fingers of

Vista-chiri

An adventurer who actively searches the trees for *vista-chiri* has a 40% chance to spot them if present; rangers and druids enjoy a +10% bonus to the roll, +20% if they have the Animal Lore proficiency and make a successful check. Heroes can roll to spot the birds once per turn of active searching, which slows a character's movement rate by 3. Of course, the birds' presence does not guarantee the proximity of a Vistani troupe.

Vista-chiri and other creatures in the vicinity of a caravan make it nearly impossible to surprise the Vistani. Adventurers have a -6 penalty to do so. Only by casting *commune with nature* can a druid (and only a druid) pass undetected into the Vistani's midst, requiring a normal successful surprise roll.

As Van Richten suggests, a *raunie* can communicate with *vista-chiri* as if she had cast *speak with animals*. The ability is natural, requires no casting time, and does not have a limited duration. The little bird can tell the *raunie* how many intruders there are and whether they have the "smell" of hostility on them, as well as their direction and distance.

Strangers are spotted a quarter mile from the caravan, about a five-minute walk on clear, level ground. The birds need one round to reach the Vistani, plus 1d4 more rounds to locate and communicate with the *raunie*. Whether the Vistani have time to further identify the outsiders through their seer's powers depends on how fast the strangers are moving in comparison to the birds.

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Vistani, and I am told a *raunie* can understand their language. If one is searching for the Vistani, *vista-chiri* in the branches overhead are the first indication that the Vistani are close. Of course, by that time the Vistani have probably been notified of the seeker by the birds.

Powers over Monsters

This land of ours has often been unkind to us. We lock our doors by night and hope nothing comes through the window; we avoid strangers who seem overly friendly; we seek the protection of each other's company when the lights go out; and at times we step boldly forth to confront evil, armed with the silver sword and the holy symbol. Yet this is not the way of the Vistani.

One of the most amazing things about these people is the fact that they live out of doors in spite of the obvious dangers. How is it that they are not torn to shreds by werebeasts, or drained of life by ghosts, or turned into monsters themselves by a vampire? They cannot ward their doors against the encroachment of evil, for most have no door to close, let alone lock!

Certainly they have their magical wards against unintelligent creatures—zombies, malevolent plants, and the like. They even have their own version of holy symbols, although these are natural rather than endowed with divine

potency. But there is something more, something that I cannot pinpoint and that they will not verify. I almost hesitate to say what I believe to be the fact of the matter, for my hypothesis is staggering.

I believe that evil itself fears the Vistani! How do I come to this conclusion? By falling upon the chief maxim of inductive reasoning, put forth by my old friend Alanik Ray: When all other explanations have been ruled out, whatever conclusion remains—however absurd—cannot help but be the truth. The evidence which leads me to my "absurd" belief is as follows:

- They exhibit powers over time and space which no other creature, living or dead, can perform. For example, natural fog and mists seem to obey them; coming when called, leaving when bidden, carrying them by some means to any place they choose. The Vistani merely command it.
- Witness also their prescient sight, and how some of them can even move from one point in time to another with little or no conscious effort. Is this an ability which can be artificially reproduced, even by a lich? What manner of beings are they, really? Sadly, the Vistani will not say.
- The *evil eye* is known and feared even by the most diabolical monsters I have ever met and battled. Witness the following journal entry, taken from the diary of a nosferatu of Forlorn, a creature that I destroyed years ago.

'Twas a pack of goblins what flushed the vagabonds from their fire, throwing rocks from the bowers and naming foul names upon them. I were drawn by their sweet human blood, and were only spying from the shadows—I knew better than to cross them, I did.

Suddenly the vagabonds were rushing through the undergrowth, scattering the gruesome beasties who worship the ghost of Castle Tristenoir as if they were rabbits in the bushes. Then, one of them came upon me in my hiding spot. Before I could flee, she fixed

me solid with her eye, locking me in my place with no more than a look.

In a fright, I snarled at her. That would have put any normal human into a dead run in the opposite direction, but she laughed and turned her back on me. The paralysis left me, but I dared not strike her. My life is misery enough without a curse to dog my steps as well!

—From the private journal of
Nilan McCoumbe

McCoumbe's remarks indicate that not only he, a reasonably intelligent being, was afraid of the Vistani, but so were the thick-skull goblins of Forlorn, which are creatures renowned for their insensitivity to danger. The Vistani, on the other hand, feared neither monster, and apparently had no reason to do so.

So, the Vistani control time and space, and they are not afraid of evil that walks the night. If this is not sufficient reason to wonder at their true nature, then consider the following fact: The Vistani are respected by even the most powerful rulers! Lord Azalin hates them, I know from his own words, yet they come and go through Darkon in spite of his wrath, apparently eluding his horrifying border patrols of blood-sucking golems (called blood hunters) and the dreaded Kargat. Strahd von Zarovich welcomes them in his lands, especially the Zarovan, and it is said that he has actually divulged secrets regarding his domain to Madame Eva, their *raunie*. In land after land, the Vistani conduct their affairs virtually unmolested by the lord's authorities, if any exist.

Make no mistake, you who read these words: Those who rule these domains are powerful men and women, and many are noted for their brutality. Perhaps tyranny is the only way to govern an evil land—what evil fears must also horrify the good, so that all labor under a yoke of terror. Whatever reason, those across the domains who assume the mantle of power almost uniformly wield a scepter of fear.

Yet they do not harass the Vistani.

This forbearance seems incredible. It forces me to a leap of logic perhaps no reader will follow: Could the Vistani be the true rulers of this Land of ours? Mad you might call me, but tot up the evidence for yourself. If it is true, it is ironic in the extreme that they are abused so by the common *giorgio*. Those who have the most to fear in the misty domains wax impudent where powerful lords hesitate to offend.

Static Burn

Considering my long enmity with the Vistani, it would be natural to assume I have had no relationship with them whatsoever. In fact, I have associated with a few persons of Vistani blood over the years. I even established a prolonged correspondence with a *mortu* Vistana named Cyrilla Deschamps, who aided me in terminating a particularly cunning werewolf while she was still of the blood. Our common enemy thrust us together only temporarily, and we quickly parted company when the beast had been dispatched, for each of us felt an acute sense of distaste in the other's presence.

Cyrilla contracted lycanthropy during our mutual foray. Fortunately, the monster we slew was the progenitor of its line. She sought out an abjurist priest, who removed the taint of lycanthropy from her without incident.

Nevertheless, she was ostracized by her tribe, condemned by the *karash*,



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even after she had been cured! By Vistani law, her blood had been tainted, automatically eliminating her from the family tree like a pruned branch.

I was the only *giorgio* Cyrilla knew at all, so she came to me. I situated her with Mrs. Maurina, a funny old neighbor of mine in Mordentshire, who had enough room in her home, and enough charity in her heart, to help someone start a new life.

Shortly after, Cyrilla grew ill. I implored the Vistana to allow me to treat her fever, but she would not tolerate it. She insisted that she only wanted to rest, and sent me away. A few days later, I visited Cyrilla, and sure enough her fever had broken. But there was something different about her, a certain helplessness that had never existed before. Cyrilla was never quite the same person again.

Herein lies the only real weakness of the Vistani, as I have pointed it out: By ceasing to be nomadic, they cease to be Vistani. When they are land-bound, either by force or by choice, they lose their formidable native powers and become *mortu*, comparatively powerless humans.

No Vistana expresses the slightest yearning for a place to call home. In fact, Vistani actually fall sick when they stay too long in one place. They exhibit flulike symptoms and break out in a rash that reddens them from head to toe. Lying down does not help—to the contrary, walking about eventually makes them feel better (which should come as no surprise)—yet they grow listless and ever more sedentary. A fever rages in their heads, and when it finally breaks, they are no longer Vistani. The *tasques* have no name for this illness, as if they would deny its very existence, but I call this condition static burn.

As my anecdote above demonstrates, performing a medical examination is out of the question—a perceived frontal assault on Vistani privacy—so I am unable to determine the physical mechanism of this condition. However, based on my observations as a doctor, I suspect that there is some latent virus in

the Vistani body, which lies dormant as long as they remain active. However, if they fail to generate sufficient body heat, or fail to take in enough oxygen, or fail some other biological function directly related to nomadism, the virus grows. In turn, a dangerous fever inhabits the brain, destroying those parts of it which engender all salient and almost all common powers. Of course, the process could be entirely magical as well, although no mage I have consulted could explain it as such.

All that remains certain is the Vistana—no, the *mortu*—becomes a radically changed person. He must either think like a *giorgio* or go mad, so he loses his unique perspectives on time and space, even his peculiar affinity with the moon. Bitterness often claims him. He becomes a nervous, suspicious creature, demanding solitude on a regular basis.

Some *mortu* grow restless and take to the road, becoming adventurers, secretly hoping that their former selves will return. They do not make friends easily, but they are ruthlessly efficient in combat, and therefore people I would prefer to have on my side.

Static Burn

A Vistana begins to experience static burn after remaining within 1 mile of any point for longer than a week. Exercise or “walking laps” in the area has no effect on this. Regardless of the Vistana’s activities, he falls ill on the eighth day, and 1d6+1 days later, his Vistani powers disappear forever. He becomes *mortu* (see the DUNGEON MASTER Appendix for this section).

When Vistani are arrested or otherwise captured, they quickly tell their captors they “will die” if they are imprisoned. They do not explain what they mean, but threaten to curse their jailers if they “die.” If adventurers are involved in detaining the Vistana, a 1% powers check is in order. If they know about static burn and capture a Vistana, the check is 7%, as this action amounts to torturing a neutral nonplayer character.

*My candle burns at both ends;
It will not last the night;
But, ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—
It gives a lovely light.*

—Edna St. Vincent Millay
“A Few Figs from Thistles”

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION



curiously commingled joy and despair filled my breast when I had finally concluded my observations of the Vistani—joy at the realization that those I had dreaded as my longtime enemies had never really been enemies at all, and despair for all the wasted decades—yes, decades—of bitter anger and resentment.

I have paid an extraordinary price for my hatred, paid for it with the lives of my friends and loved ones. I might have settled the debt at any time these many years, yet I chose to go on hating, resolved to continue feeding the infernal fires of my curse. What a damned fool I have been!

Yes, the Vistani are an alien and potentially dangerous people, but they are not a menace unless one makes himself the same to them. I now believe that I brought dire misfortune on myself, that I embraced my curse rather than pushed it away, and that there is blood on my hands because I dipped them into it with the malice of forethought. Any responsibility the Vistani bore for what I became ended on the day that I decided to chase ghosts in the mists instead of specters in my own past.

The Last Steps

I informed Arturi I had concluded my studies, and he must consider my curse on his tribe null and void, for there was little left to forgive. “I know not if there is a ritual for such things,” I told him, “but I will gladly do whatever you ask of

me, even if it means forfeiting my life.”

“Then arm yourself for a battle to the death,” he replied, drawing a knife from his boot.

I had no intention of resisting his attack. I stood, my arms extended, hands loosely curled, prepared to receive his judgment. He seized my left wrist and shook my hand until the fingers opened. The judgment of the *vishnadd*, I thought. I resolved to receive stoically the pull of his blade across my palm. But he exposed his own palm and opened it as well.

The blood rite! With a sound clap our hands clasped, mine swinging to meet his on impulse. My mind reeled with the sanctity of this gift, and the uncertainty as to what I should do, say, or feel. Arturi sheathed his knife, pulled a pure white scarf from his pocket, and wrapped our bleeding members tightly. A throbbing pulse reached a crescendo in my veins as our crimson essences mingled, pounding in my head, palpating through my body, until it seemed that my blood must spray like a geyser from the wound! Yet the scarf remained unstained.

Arturi’s expression suggested he, too, was affected, yet we exchanged no word. Instead, we stared intently into one another’s eyes while our hearts beat in unison, and we realized that our separate agonies had made us spiritual twins. Our eyes brimmed and spilled over in sympathy, yet we smiled and nodded together.

A single drop of our fused blood fell between us. It hissed as it struck the dirt, like cold water on a hot griddle, and a dense mist billowed up. Still we clung to one another, almost oblivious, until we were lost in a blind fog. It swirled around us like a mob of

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voiceless ghosts, blotting out the surrounding landscape, isolating us in a timeless netherworld.

I know not how long we remained there, for that which I call "time" lost all meaning. I was transfixed, enraptured. For one brief and eternal moment I glimpsed the raw nature of time itself—I was a Vistana, with power to see the past and future as clearly as the present. I comprehended that no distance exists between places or events, that all things lie directly before those who know how to see them. My mind opened like an overripe bud, transporting me into a multiverse of possibilities. I became infinitesimal and infinite at the same time! My description is esoteric in the extreme, yet I must insist it was as real to me as I am to you.

Suddenly, I was back in my own "giorgio" state of time, for it dawned on me that some interval had passed. I inhaled deeply and stretched my eyelids wide, glancing around me as my wits returned. Slowly the mists thinned and blew away. Arturi unwrapped the scarf that bound us together and let go of my hand. I looked at my palm, smeared with red, and marveled, for the cut of the knife was healed, leaving only a bright purple scar.

When the mists had completely dissipated, I surveyed the scene. To the west, the sun burned orange on the horizon, giving up its luster to the spreading cloak of dusk. To the east,

the smooth, windward face of a ragged-peaked range of mountains gleamed crimson in the last vestiges of daylight.

I turned to look behind me, and a thrill of fear washed through my body. The two of us now stood in a small, wooded hollow, among the broken remains of an old Vistani caravan. Three *vardos* listed over rotted axles, their rounded roofs having fallen in long ago. Once-bright coats of red and yellow paint sloughed off the spongy wood below. Stained-glass windows lay in tiny shards on the ground, or clung hopelessly to weather-worn sills, caked with filth.

"Do you remember this place?" asked Arturi.

I nodded. "We're in Barovia. This is your family's encampment, where it all began."

"Where it all began," echoed the outcast. "And where it now will end." Solemnly he asked, "Rudolph Van Richten, do you forgive my people the wrongs they have done you?" His face held both terror and apprehension.

"With all my heart!" I cried. "And am I forgiven for my crimes against the Corvara and the Radanavich family?"

"Beyond all question!"

We shook hands, then embraced, and for all the world I felt a cloud on my soul lift and dissipate. "Is it done, Arturi? Is it over?"

"There remains one last thing to do."

"What? What do we do?"

Arturi gazed at the old encampment, as if he could see it years ago—a merry fire and a raven-haired girl gamboling to a spirited violin; a throng of Radanaviches clapping and singing, unmindful of approaching doom.

"Burn it," he finally said. "Burn it to ashes."

Briefly, Arturi cocked his head and closed his eyes. "The dead are coming," he said. "We must hold them off until we are done."

The woods rustled with approaching footsteps. Though the curse was all but over, still dark was swiftly falling, and we two stood unprotected by walls or locks. It did not occur to me then to question my companion's continuing



susceptibility, when I knew in my bones the shadow was lifted.

Quickly Arturi struck a spark while I gathered dry scrub to pack beneath the *vardos'* frames. A zombie broke free of the forest and strode toward Arturi, but I intercepted and crushed it to the ground with a heavy stick. The Vistana puffed at a nest of brittle leaves and yellow grass, until it burst into flame. Another corpse shuffled into view; I struck it down, to find yet another on its heels. On a slat of oak bark, Arturi lifted his tiny fire to the wagons, and touched it to the brush. The scrub readily ignited. Soon, the *vardos* blazed fiercely, and inky plumes of soot streaked the evening sky.

Throughout the night we held our ground with raging flames behind us, desperately fending off zombies, ghouls, unliving animals of all breeds, and even a ghost. Time dissolved into an endless stream of rotted assailants which piled at our feet as we struck them down. Sparks drifted over and caught on the desiccated flesh, augmenting the bonfire and helping to shield our flanks, but surrounding us with blistering fire. I thought surely we would be immolated ourselves. I know not whence came my strength to keep fighting, yet it was there, beyond reason and hope.

"Go back!" I shouted as dawn reached over the Balinok Mountains and began to push away the darkness. "There is nothing here for you anymore! Go back!"

To my astonishment, the undead abruptly halted their advance, turned, and shuffled back to the cover of the deep forest beyond! Had I had that power all the long night? Did I at last turn back the undead I had summoned so long ago? My mind was too numb to contemplate the possibility.

Arturi and I collapsed to the ground in exhaustion and lay there, silent but for our gasping breath. Behind us, the *vardos* fell into gray, smoldering ashes. Somewhere nearby, a mourning dove began to coo heartily, encouraging the rising sun, filling my spirit with such lightness that I thought I, too, could take wing. Arturi's eyes and mine met, and we both began to laugh like children on



a midsummer's romp. We roared until the woods filled with our glee.

At last a contemplative silence came over us, and I think we both dozed in the warm morning sun. At length we arose and ate a bit of jerked beef which I carried in my pack, along with some wild raspberries from the nearby brush and cold, fresh water from a stream that flowed to us out of the mountains. No thoughts of hunting the dead entered my mind, and no concerns for further investigation tainted my reverie. For the first time since I could remember, I felt content to simply be.

"I shall go home to Mordentshire, write up my notes on the Vistani, and take a long vacation," I said to my dear friend. "Perhaps the time has come to return to Rivalis, my true home town."

"If that is your wish," said Arturi, strangely melancholy. "I wish you well and all peace."

"And you may return to the Corvara!"

"No. I will never go back."

"What! Why not?"

Arturi's eyes saddened once more and he shook his head slowly. "I am no longer Corvara. I am not even sure that I am Vistana anymore. It has been too long, and too much has passed." He looked at me and asked, "Is it not the same with you?"

"I—" A desperate desire arose in me to convince him that we could both leave our pasts behind, yet I knew



immediately that he was right. "Then you must come home with me, Arturi," I said at last. "We shall concoct and sell herbal remedies as partners and friends. We shall live as carefree bachelors. We shall forge a new future for ourselves to replace the past."

The Vistana smiled softly. "By now you should know that the past does not lie behind us. It is part of what we are, part of what we will always be. I am the Outcast, and it is my fate to wander this world."

"Come now, Arturi! Our curse is broken. Is there nothing good that can come of that?"

"We are what we are, and that is not such a bad thing, is it?" He stood up and dusted himself off. "This land is filled with evil, yet there is much goodness in it, and it is beautiful. I do not think that I would care to settle down, even though the dead have stopped chasing me. Perhaps I am still Vistana after all."

"As true a Vistana as there ever was!" I assured him, rising to my own feet and clapping him on the back. "Proud and defiant, clear-eyed and wise."

"Goodbye, Rudolph Van Richten, *giogoto* and my friend."

"Goodbye, Arturi Radanavich."

With that, I turned to the north, seeking the old Svalich Road and the way to Mordentshire, and Arturi turned

to the south. I have not seen him since that day.

A Final Farewell

My notes for this *Guide to the Vistani* are now transcribed and committed to a local scribe, who will make several copies for me and my scholarly associates. I cannot say that this is my finest work, but it is certainly the most important, for in its conclusion I find that I may finally put down my pen and let it rest.

There remains so much evil across the domains, so much work for men and women of a heroic bent to complete. I wish I could say with the slightest conviction that I have made a difference with my work and publications, but only time—whatever that is—will tell. However history judges me, I think my part in its making is done. Surely there might be further adventures for me, as nothing remains forever buried in the past here in our world, yet I am certain that my role as a leader of the crusade is finished. And, I must hasten to add, I am grateful for that!

Sometimes the temptation to again take up the mallet and stake inflames my spirit, bids me to rise with the full moon and ride into the night—the old trumpet of glory still calls to me. Yet I must resist. There is only so much that one man can accomplish, and I dare say I have done more than most.

Tonight, I shall sit by the fire until it winks out, with a snifter in one hand and a novel in the other. Then I shall retire to my bed and sleep in peace. I hope to dream of my beloved Ingrid and Erasmus, and of all the wonderful friends I have known throughout the years. In the morning I will rise and open my door to admit sweet breezes and sunshine. I will sit by my window and drink tea, and perhaps welcome a friend or two. And I hope, gentle reader, that you will do the same.

—Dr. Rudolph Van Richten
Mordentshire, Mordent
King's Calendar 742

Glossary of Vistani Terms

Blood rite: A mingling of blood, spiritually joining two people. A giorgio invited to complete the blood rite becomes a giogoto when the ritual is over.

Bourdad: A dry, red berry wine, imbibed on solemn occasions. (The Vistani do not often drink intoxicating beverages.)

Braxat: A common Vistani poison that slowly immolates its imbiber.

Captain: The male leader of a caravan.

Doroq: The ritualistic telling of legends and stories around the campfire.

Dukkar, The: A Vistani abomination in the form of a male seer, who is prophesied to bring doom on all Vistani *tasques*.

Dya-yahg: The command to break camp, loosely meaning "leave the fire."

Endari-vitir: A Vistani farewell, literally meaning "all paths converge."

Etherol: A common Vistani poison that slowly traps the imbiber in an ethereal state.

Fulltide: The three days during which the moon is full.

Giogoto: A person who is not a member of a Vistani tribe, but who is considered a friend or ally of that tribe (including other Vistani as well as *giorgios*).

Giorgio: A non-Vistani person.

Karash: A state of banishment from the tribe. The *karash* is brought on Vistani who have offended their caravan or tribal laws, but are not cursed in the process. It is not as dire as *shalach-ti*.

Kir-yahg: The command to set up camp, literally meaning "make fire."

Koorah: An exclamation of agreement, literally meaning "utterly true."

Lunadi: A Vistani way of saying "it shall be done," literally meaning "by the moon." The Vistani often say "*lunadi*" instead of "okay."

Lunaset: A ritual that begins at midnight on the third and last night of the full moon. All Vistani leave the circle of their campfire and perform secret rituals until dawn.

Mishamel: A dreadful Vistani curse that causes the victim to slowly melt into a pool of viscous liquid.

Mortu: One who is no longer considered a Vistana. A person who willfully leaves a tribe is considered *mortu*. Usually, the Vistana loses all special native powers.

Paatern: A very subtle, prearranged signal between two Vistani.

Patterna: The Vistani dialect, made of words borrowed from many languages.

Porda: A natural curative that either heals or nauseates the imbiber.

Prastona: A Vistani girl who dances the *prastonata*.

Prastonata: The traditional evening dance around the campfire.

Raunie: The female leader of a caravan.

Shalach-ti: A state of banishment from the tribe, usually for some heinous crime.

The offending Vistana is ritually, and permanently, cast into the darkness.

Tasque: A nation of Vistani, which is made of several tribes, which are in turn divided into caravans or families.

Tralaks: Written symbols conveying messages to fellow tribal caravans.

Vardo: A round-topped, horse-drawn wagon used by the Vistani.

Vishnadd: Justice. Literally meaning "dark blade," the *vishnadd* is an obsidian knife that is a central fixture in the Vistani system of justice. The word is sometimes uttered when vengeance has been exacted.

Vistana: The singular form of Vistani.

Zsalev: A quasi-magical, intangible essence that hunts a victim, then hovers nearby, radiating a *fear* effect.



Many AD&D game players have expressed an interest in roleplaying Vistani heroes. Responding to this proposition has been difficult for two reasons. First, there has been, until the release of this supplement, little or no cultural information on which to base the class. While the Gypsy stereotype of the movies is easy enough to imitate, most of the Vistani mystique has been intentionally undefined to keep the race strange and frightening. Second, many existing Vistani powers (previous to the release of this supplement) must remain outside the players' purview. To allow an adventurer to read fortunes could only cause headaches for the Dungeon Master, and no player character should ever use *mist navigation!*

Nevertheless, the interest in Vistani heroes is genuine, and it may be that these people have been left in the shadows too long. Now the RAVENLOFT campaign's nomads can be as three-dimensional as any of the good doctor's past subjects of study. Based on the information presented in the previous pages, it should be relatively easy to roleplay one of these characters. In spite of their wondrous powers, the Vistani are human beings, so allowing a player to run one of them is only a matter of limiting their "native abilities" to an extent that retains the flavor of the race, but does not unbalance the game—this appendix aims to accomplish that goal.

Domains of Dread introduced the half-Vistani as a race, rather than as a kit as presented here, and also produced the gypsy, a rogue subclass. That race and subclass are based on the original kit, described here, which can be used to generate *mortu* Vistani heroes.

Vistani Character Background

No hero can be a full-blooded Vistani, living in a caravan with a family. He might either possess mixed Vistani parentage, or he might be *mortu*, a

full-blooded Vistana who has abandoned the tribe and settled down long enough for static burn to have come and gone. The choice is the player's, although a Dungeon Master rules whether either type can exist in his individual campaign. Optionally, the hero might be a wayfarer from some other campaign setting who has been mysteriously endowed with some Vistani traits. The Rhennee from the GREYHAWK campaign are similar in some ways to the Vistani, and the Dungeon Master is free to rule that an actual connection exists between these peoples and possibly other Gypsylike folk in other AD&D campaigns.

Whatever the Vistani kit, roleplaying is emphasized over game mechanics. A player who cannot or will not play the part detracts from the mystique of the Vistani, and should therefore choose another character.

If a player wishes to generate a character who is related to a specific tribe, he should normally be allowed to do so. However, the Dungeon Master may choose to employ a percentile roll to determine the tribal affiliation of a Vistani hero:

Vistani Tribes for Heroes

1d100	Tribe
01-40	Kamii
41-60	Equaar
61-80	Vatraska
81-90	Naiat
91-97	Corvara
98-99	Canjar
00	Zarovan

Public Image

Remember that the Vistani are neither well liked nor trusted among *giorgios*. There is a base 75% chance that any Vistani character is treated as a suspected criminal by non-Vistani, and if the *giorgios* have suffered any sort of unexplained trouble recently, the chance increases to 90%. Different peoples have varying levels of xenophobia that might lead them to

fear a Vistani hero, so a Dungeon Master can adjust this number for individual circumstances. In general, all *giorgios* regard Vistani with suspicion, and many seek to make scapegoats of them when problems occur, unless it is perfectly clear that the Vistani were not involved. Furthermore, a Vistani hero frequently brings retribution on the entire party (under the rubric that those who associate with thieves are themselves thieves), which can lead to more trouble than the rest of the adventurers are willing to risk.

Among other Vistani, the hero has a chance to be treated as a *giogoto*. The likelihood is 80% if the hero is related to the tribe he contacts, 60% if his blood is part of the *tasque*, and 25% otherwise. Recall that the Manusa do not differentiate between *giorgios* and *giogotos*, although they would certainly rather deal with another Vistani than a *giorgio* if they must make contact at all.

Alignment

Mortu Vistani heroes must be at least partially neutral in alignment (neutral good, neutral evil, or true neutral). Nonplayer character Vistani are almost always true neutral. Half-Vistani can be of any alignment.

Race

All Vistani are human, so only human heroes can take these kits. At the Dungeon Master's option, half-elves may also use Vistani kits (the human parent was a Vistani). Half-Vistani of human descent are represented by the race in *Domains of Dread*.

Vistani Universal Abilities

All Vistani kits confer the following abilities on the hero:

- Vistani characters have the ability to identify plants, animals, and pure water with perfect accuracy, as do druids.

- Those who take the Fire-building proficiency do not suffer penalties for igniting a flame in high winds, rainy conditions, or when using damp fuel. No proficiency check is required to start a fire.
- Vistani adventurers have a rough grasp of the *patterna*. They still must make an Intelligence check to translate the language, but they suffer only a 5% chance of misinterpreting the words.
- *Mortu* Vistani can find and interpret *paaterns* on a roll of 1–4 on 1d6.
- All Vistani heroes may take the Astrology proficiency, regardless of class. Wizards expend only one proficiency slot in doing so.

Vistani Universal Drawbacks

Having Vistani blood also has its downside. First, a side effect of static burn is that it reduces the Intelligence score of all *mortu* Vistani by 2 points. Half-Vistani are not affected by static burn, and they gain a +1 bonus to Intelligence and Wisdom scores, with a penalty of –2 to Charisma from their outcast status.

Second, these characters' relatively passive heritage precludes them from weapon specialization and extraordinary Strength, even if they are warriors. Third, wizards of all types are limited to the 10th level of experience, as *giorgio* prejudice has prevented them from receiving the highest quality training over the years. In fact, if the optional "pay-for-training" rules are used, Vistani heroes pay double the normal amount required to train as characters of any other class because they must, in effect, bribe *giorgio* masters to teach them their craft. Male Vistani specialist wizards can only become conjurers, enchanters, or illusionists; female Vistani can also become diviners. Vistani cannot be elementalists, and only half-Vistani can become arcanists.

Perhaps the worst drawback faced by adventurers with Vistani blood is moon madness. Their link to that

heavenly body is still so strong that they grow restless when it is full. Sleep eludes them, and they cannot regain lost hit points through resting during this time. All saving throws are at a -2 penalty until the Vistana rests for eight undisturbed hours. There is a 1% chance (rolled once, at the beginning of the period) they feel compelled to sneak off while their comrades are not watching and run under the stars. A simple word of restraint is sufficient to stop them, but they must make every effort to slip away. The Dungeon Master and player should make this check privately, and the character never admits he has been taken by the urge—no Vistana would ever willingly consent to physical restraints, in spite of the dangers.

During the three days of the full moon, a Vistani adventurer must make a madness check each day (officially at midnight). If he fails the check, the character is subject to the effects of madness as detailed in Chapter Six of *Domains of Dread*. The effects last until the next madness check, at which time a successful roll negates the condition completely (while a failure perpetuates the madness for another 24 hours). After the third day of the full moon, all madness passes.

Dungeon Masters can use the normal calendar to determine when the moon is full if they like, but the best way to incorporate this mechanic into the game is to keep track of game time and roll for madness every 30 days. If he desires, the Dungeon Master can rule that each domain "has its own moon." In this case, whenever the party enters a new domain, roll 1d20+1d10 to determine how many days pass before this moon next waxes full.

Roleplaying this condition is worthy of bonus experience points. Heroes who act quirkily during the three days of the moon should be rewarded for their efforts.

Vistani Tribal Abilities

The following text briefly describes the most likely temperament of each kit type, based on the tribe from which the hero draws his roots. However, the player is not constrained to conform to the description; it is merely a general guideline, intended to enhance roleplaying, which is the primary attraction behind generating a Vistani hero, after all. Each roleplaying introduction is followed by a short list of abilities peculiar to the kit. Dungeon Masters always have the option to allow players to mix and match the skills, as well as the authority to tone down any that unbalance the game.

Kamii

As a Kaldreshite, a Kamii hero is likely to be quiet and not confrontational. He does not offer an opinion unless it is asked for, and he would rather avoid combat if at all possible. Even so, he is more likely to be a warrior than any other class. He's quick with his hands, too, so he makes a good rogue as well. Kamii heroes cannot be any type of spellcaster.

A Kamii automatically possesses the Blacksmithing proficiency without expending any proficiency slots. He can identify metals and their origin within the current campaign. Furthermore, he can instantly identify any metalwork of Vistani make, and he has a 25% chance to detect whether it is cursed.

Equaar

Equaarians are the druids of the Vistani people, so heroes of this stock are quite comfortable around natural animals, especially horses. They are also excellent trackers. Like all Kaldresh, they are hard workers, but not overly aggressive. Equaar heroes can be any class (except paladin, of course), but they tend toward rangers, druids, and thieves.

An Equaarian automatically possesses the Animal Lore and

Land-based Riding proficiencies without expending any slots, and he can take the Tracking proficiency by expending only one slot.

Vatraska

These people are efficient healers, but they are not known for their compassion. Well-informed herbalists, they know much about curing illnesses and healing wounds, but they are not governed by an overwhelming desire to help. Rather, they act like cold professionals, often seeming condescending toward those they assist. In spite of their healing powers, they are rarely priests, and those who do subscribe to that class are usually druids.

A Vatraskan hero automatically has the Herbalist proficiency, regardless of class, and priests can take the Healing proficiency by expending only one slot. A Vatraskan can identify poisons as well as a druid can identify plants. Furthermore, at the Dungeon Master's option, a Vatraskan hero can prepare an antidote for any natural poison (which he can identify if a sample is available). However, the recipient of the antidote must make a successful saving throw vs. poison or die. (In essence, the antidote provides a reroll to heroes who fail a saving throw vs. poison.)

At the Dungeon Master's option, a hero of this tribe can gather, over the course of 1d6+1 days, the ingredients for two doses of a sleeping-draught poison. The preparation can be a powder or a liquid. It is tasteless and odorless, but it might taint the color of water slightly. The recipient must make a saving throw vs. poison; if the roll fails, he falls asleep for 1d4 rounds. The sleep is normal, and the victim may be easily awakened. Due to the natural ingredients in this concoction, it remains usable for just one week.

Naiat

Characters related to this tribe are bound to be more flamboyant than the next fellow. They like to dress well, eat

well, captivate the opposite sex, and generally become the center of attention wherever they go. If they are *mortu*, chances are they left the tribe because they wanted to pursue fame and fortune in the *giorgio* world. Hence, the gypsy (from *Domains of Dread*) and bard are natural classes for this character. However, a Naiat character may be of any class except paladin or druid.

Heroes of this tribal affiliation automatically enjoy the Singing and Dancing proficiencies, and they are entitled to adopt the Musical Instrument proficiency regardless of class. They also add a +1 bonus to encounter reactions due to their outgoing attitudes (+2 if they roleplay the situation by doing the talking and attempting to be friendly). Finally, a Naiat character has a natural affinity for the violin, so he can influence the reactions of nonplayer characters and inspire allies with that instrument as a bard, regardless of class (if the character has taken the Musical Instrument proficiency).

Corvara

Heroes of this tribe are a bit more mercenary than other Vistani. They tend to wonder "what's in it for them" whenever they approach a new situation. They are loyal allies, but they do not forge alliances easily. Normally, a Corvaran must gain a full experience level in the company of others before he fully becomes a part of the group. Until then, he's along for the profits and must frequently be convinced to act as a team player. A Corvaran is almost always a thief, but he can be a fighter or wizard. No other classes are open to him.

Heroes of this bloodline automatically possess the Set Snares proficiency, regardless of class, as they have been on the paranoid side all their lives and wish to protect themselves. In fact, they are likely to exasperate fellow party members with

their constant fears of (and possibly checks for) traps and ambushes.

Thief characters gain a +10% bonus to Open Locks rolls.

Canjar

Characters of this tribe are forever standoffish, no matter how long they associate with a group of adventurers. They are fascinated by magic, and are therefore always wizards. Canjar are quite selfish with their magic, refusing to trade spells with anybody, but they like to be admired and appreciated for their powers, so they make every effort to appear useful and puissant among their companions.

A Canjar hero has a valuable ability: He can leave one 1st- and one 2nd-level spell each "unmemorized" when he finishes resting (and studying). If he later wishes to cast a spell he has not memorized, he can expend an open slot and cast any spell of the same level as if he'd memorized it, as long as its text is among the spellbooks he has with him. However, it costs one round to pull out his grimoire, look up the spell he wants, and read it over, after which time it instantly springs into his mind. In effect, the character is saying, "I had a feeling I'd need that spell."

On the next round, the spell can be cast normally. Note that once a spell is read from a Canjar's grimoire, it occupies the "blank" spot in its level—a wizard cannot look up a spell, decide not to cast it, and look up another later, even if the first was not actually cast.

Zarovan

Only one hero of Zarovan blood may travel with any single adventuring party. These characters are the ultimate loners. They spend long periods staring into empty space, and they never grow close to anyone. If they have a sense of humor, they do not show it, and if they have a sense

of loyalty, it is deliberately unspoken. They remain silent unless the matter is extremely urgent. Zarovan heroes are not team players, but neither do they betray their companions. Rather, they do things for their own reasons, and they stay with a group of heroes because it fits some larger purpose, the nature of which they refuse to share. Like the Canjar, the Zarovan are always wizards.

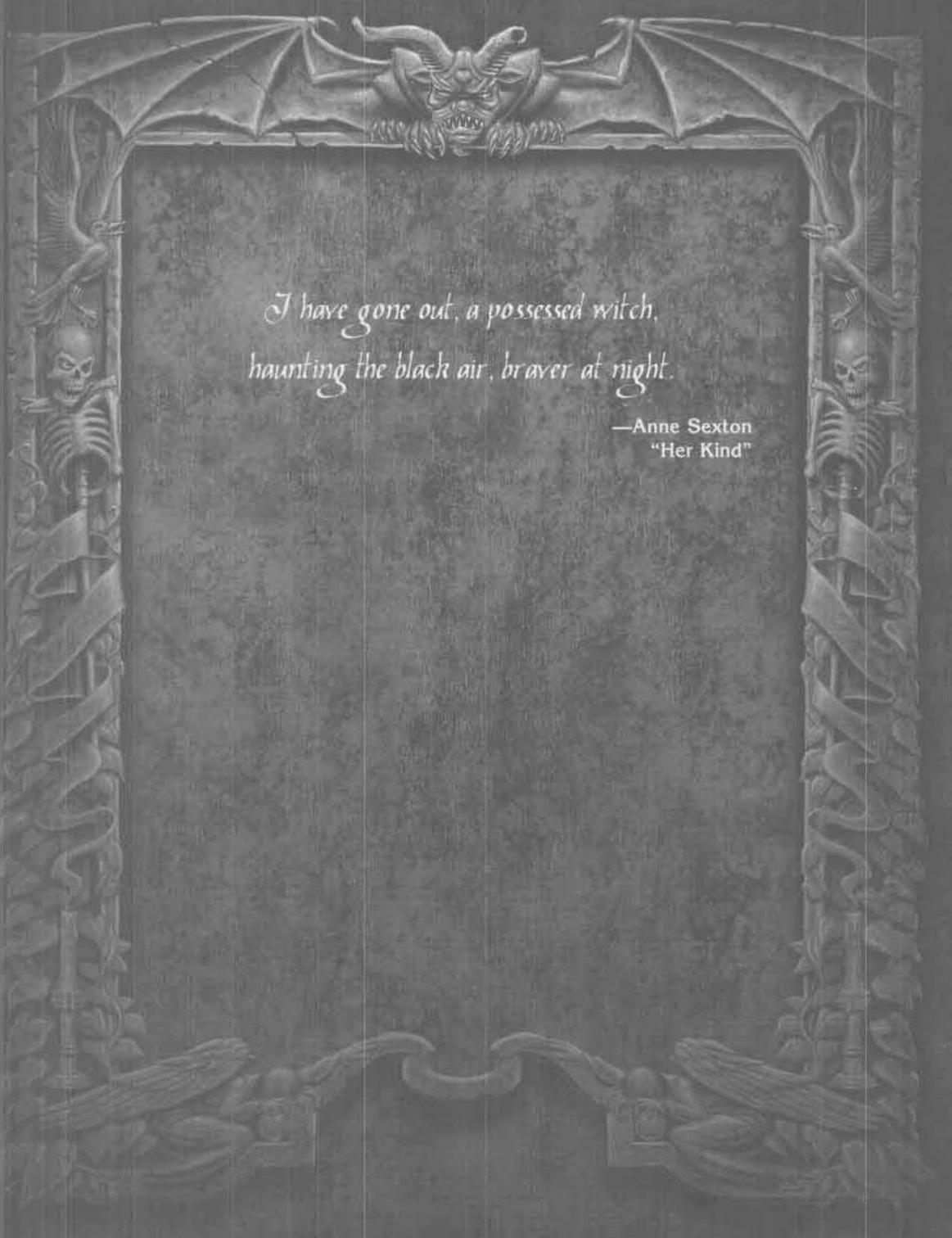
Zarovan heroes have a unique condition: They are often unsure of *when* they are. Time is out of focus, and they are constantly slipping in and out of reality. This is reflected in combat after initiative is rolled. The Zarovani character selects 2d10, rolls them, and adds them together. The result is matched on the table below.

Zarovan Hero Time Movement

2d10	Result
2	-8 to opponent's attack roll; doubled actions (very fast)
3	-4 to opponent's attack roll
4-5	-2 to opponent's attack roll
6-8	-1 to opponent's attack roll
9-13	No penalties or bonuses (normal)
14-16	+1 to opponent's attack roll
17-18	+2 to opponent's attack roll
19	+4 to opponent's attack roll
20	+8 on opponent's attack roll; no actions at all (very slow)

A Zarovan hero who scores low on the 2d10 roll is moving very fast in time because of the stress of combat. The hero has no control over this, and no magical spell or device can affect this roll. If moving fast enough in time, the hero can make two complete rounds of actions in one round, including attacks, movement, spellcasting, or psionics use. A hero who scores high on the 2d10 roll, however, is moving more slowly through time because of the stress of combat, and is thus easier to hit and might possibly make no motion at all during the round!

Witches



*I have gone out, a possessed witch,
haunting the black air, braver at night.*

—Anne Sexton
“Her Kind”

SECTION, THE THIRD:

As the night went on the curse grew stronger and darker, as though the witch that had anciently laid it upon that house were forcing it down on it with both hands, mass upon mass of it out of dark and dangerous air....

—Lord Dunsay
“The Curse of the Witch”

INTRODUCTION



uring my travels through the many domains of our shadow-haunted world, I have encountered many people and cultures. I have heard prayers to gods in many different languages, and I have learned that allies in the fight against darkness are found almost everywhere.

The origin of this text is twofold, and I was provided much of the insights within its pages by two very different women—one whose entire existence is devoted to spreading hate and chaos, and one whose life revolves around helping others and combating the first.

The process that led to the writing of this text started five years ago. I had been grievously wounded in battle against one of the ancient dead, and a magical rotting disease was claiming what health I had left. More dead than alive, I reached the Hospice of Healing Hands in southern Valachan. There, I spent the next few months being nursed back to health under the gentle ministrations of the priestesses of Hala who operate it.

Unlike what some ranking members of the Church of Ezra will have you believe, there is nothing evil or unwholesome about those who serve the goddess Hala. They are pious folk who are devoted to easing pain and suffering in our land. We can use more of their kind, I believe. However, I did learn that at least one of the common accusations that adherents of Ezra frequently level at those who serve Hala is true: The Church of Hala does have a secret face, although the secrecy is forced on it by the zealotry of Ezra's followers.

While recovering at the hospice, I became very good friends with Sisterarena, a likable and intelligent woman whose knowledge of the supernatural evils that plague our lands surprised me. We spent many evenings in conversation, and she displayed a knowledge of liches and ancient dead that equaled my own. Eventually, I insisted that she reveal where she had come by such knowledge.

“My family is devoted to the battle against evil, just as you are, Dr. Van Richten,” she said. “For generations, we have been maintaining a record of that struggle, a struggle that has mostly been conducted in secret. I am the latest Keeper of the Archives, so I am most familiar with them.”

Needless to say, I was intrigued. She received permission from the head of the hospice to allow me to enter their archives. Here, I found not only cures for a great many maladies, but chronicles of battles against liches and vampires that spanned generations. Most of the battles, however, were against creatures to which I had devoted little thought: annis, greenhags, and sea hags. I knew these evil, magical monsters were a menace, but I was unaware of how great that menace was until I read the annals. They described the war that Sisterarena's family had quietly waged against their foul breed for centuries, starting in lands far away from the domains that she calls home and continuing to this very day. This record of bravery and scholarship was vast, for her forebears were meticulous in recording their observations and experiences while battling hags. From their notes, I realized that hags might be a far greater problem than I had imagined. I had viewed them as

isolated oddities, not the kind of pervasive, tenacious and organized evil that they were now shown to be.

Aside from a clearer image of hags, I became aware of something else while reading Marena's family history and records. It became clear to me that while they all served the Church of Hala, they also seemed to be part of another group, one that they assumed the reader knew and thus was referred to only obliquely. It seemed to be a form of magical society, but one into which they were born or married, and one that was divided between the sexes, with males and females practicing *different kinds of magic*.

I asked Marena about this, because I had certainly never observed such division in the Church of Hala. She then brought me into the presence of the hospice's High Priest. In his study were copies of all my books, and he said that as a fellow champion of good, he permitted me to learn a special secret shared by many at the hospice. Sister Marena then revealed that she and many other of the priestesses there were, in fact, "witches," and the three priests present were "warlocks."

I put quotes around the terms, for they are how they themselves refer to each other, even though they have *little in common with the typical* malign visions that such terms conjure up. No, the witches and warlocks that Marena is part of are actually a rare group of humans. Where wizards gain their power through hard study, and priests gain their magic through devotion to their gods, witches and warlocks like Marena are born to harness their unique brand of magic. They must be taught how to wield their power, but they are truly a breed apart from most other magic-users in our domains.

I continued my study of hags and other creatures in the hospice's archives while I recuperated. Marena and her fellow witches also honored me by granting me insight into their culture and ways. I was about to return

to my home in Mordentshire, content in the fact that I had found another ally in my fight as well as another source of academic information, when an elf wizard named Fiori arrived at the hospice. She was engaged in a battle against a greenhag, and I joined her endeavor.

From there, I resolved to do a more complete study of these *evil creatures*, with an eye toward publishing another guide. I traveled to Tepest, a land reputed to be home to several hags and hag coveys (unions of three hags that have bonded in order to wreck more havoc than they can individually), but it was in northern Nova Vaasa that I gained most of my insight. It was there that I was confronted with a greenhag, who lured me to her with her ability to mask her true form in a more pleasing illusion. Semine, the greenhag's name, said that through divinatory magic she had watched my battle against the Valachan covey. "I was impressed with you, Van Richten," she told me. "I suspected that your writings were little more than a collection of tall tales, but I underestimated you. Now that you have seen firsthand the evil that my kind represents, you will undoubtedly want to take up arms against us—and write one of your books, yes?"

I have not lately been one to shy away from the face of evil. I boldly told her that she had described exactly what I intended. Her response surprised me.





"Good," she said. "I will tell you all I know about my kind. You can verify the truth of what I tell you with your little friends of the Healing Hands coven."

Thus, I spent a very educational week in the company of Semine. By the time we parted company, Semine had filled in several blanks that the archives at the Healing Hands had left in my knowledge, and she had given me great insight into the psychology of hagkind. I made it clear to her that if we met again, we should consider each other enemies. Despite her helpfulness, she was still evil. In fact, she admitted that the very act of her helping me proved she was evil. "I am helping you destroy my own kind, Van Richten," she said with a cackle. "I consider the time we've spent together and the acts you are going to perform my crowning achievements. You see, I have as much contempt for my kind as I do for you and yours. I take delight in helping you kill us, and I'll take delight if my miserable sisters or I manage to kill you instead."

Semine's attitude is not untypical of hagkind in general, except for her hatred for her own kind. (From where that odd attitude stems, I cannot say.) This destructive bent is why hags must be stopped. If we do not, they may eventually kill us all.

About this Book

Loyal readers will notice that this book is somewhat different from my other works, as all of its pages are not devoted to hags. In fact, only half of this volume deals with those creatures. The other half describes the witches and warlocks who dwell at the Hospice of Healing Hands, as well as other "hedge magicians" who reside in remote corners of our domains. I felt it important to provide you, my readers, with the ability to distinguish these obscure and secretive spellcasters—most of whom are harmless and may even share your goals and desires to rid our land of evil—from hags. It is all too easy for an overzealous hunter to make just such a mistake, going from hunter to murderer. I do not want to be responsible for such mistakes.

As mentioned above, the witches and warlocks who follow the teachings of Hala and who serve in her Church are a secretive lot. They are also staunch allies in the fight against the supernatural menaces that plague our land, even if some covens have certain philosophical outlooks with which I disagree. Therefore, I have taken care not to reveal any information that would intrude too heavily on their privacy. What you will find within these pages is aimed toward helping you tell a hag covey from a witches' coven, and giving you enough information to understand that witches and warlocks can be important allies in our fight.

Compilers' Note: At the time of Dr. Van Richten's disappearance, this text had not been submitted to his publisher. He was honoring an arrangement he had with one of his sources. In fact, I believe the book was still very much a work in progress at the time of his retirement in 742. Laurie and I decided to present the material as we found it, with only the occasional comment on our part.

—GFW

"The youth and beauty that she retains are illusions. If you could see Sephora as she really is, you would recoil in revulsion, cured of your perilous love. You would see her æunthinkably old, and hideous with infamies."

—Clark Ashton Smith
"The Enchantress of Sylaire"

CHAPTER ONE: HAGS AND THEIR KIND



nyone who has survived an encounter with a hag probably asked the same questions as Brother Seth of the Order of Healing

Hands did in a personal letter to me: "Where did these foul mockeries of women who term themselves hags first come from? Can anyone but the gods truly say? And why did not the gods slay their Evil breed as it lay in the cradle of Creation? By Hala the Caregiver, I cannot fathom which god would be so vengeful or mad so as to visit this plague upon us!"

This first chapter serves as a primer to the three most common types of hags—the annis, greenhag, and sea hag, as well as touching briefly on the legendary night hag and undead spectral hags.

Even those of us who have spent much of our lives destroying villainous creatures such as vampires find ourselves revolted by the carnage a hag may leave in her wake, or stunned into silence when we begin to realize just how unnatural these monstrous crones are.

Hags pose a danger as great as vampires and werebeasts. However, they are far more difficult to hunt, and the would-be hunter must be twice as diligent in researching the foe before striking. Why? Hags are insidious creatures who can hide among humanity so effectively that in many cases it is easy to assume that a woman who may just be an innocent eccentric is actually a hag.

As you will find in this chapter, hags go through at least two distinct life

stages, with an event that they refer to as the Change separating the stages. In almost every way, hags who are early in their lives, before the Change, are indistinguishable from human females. They are a type of humanoid impersonator who for the first part of their lives live among humans, nearly always completely unaware themselves of their true nature. As they enter what for human beings is the latter half of their lives, they shed their human appearance during the Change and then stand revealed as annis, greenhags, or sea hags.

As will become clear, a woman who is strong-minded and independent, who has chosen to pursue what many might view as a masculine career, or who is a tragic victim of circumstance and unable to bear children, may be mistaken as an "immature" hag by overzealous adventurers who fail to back up their conclusions with careful research and intelligent deductions.

In my lifetime, I have met many a woman who was barren or who was more comfortable wielding a sword than a knitting needle. The majority of them have been brave and completely mortal souls, even the ones who would oppose me in my tasks and research. I do not want my words to be used by foolish people who fault young women for leading a more independent lifestyle than many consider socially appropriate. The evil of hags is difficult enough to contain and recognize without those who would battle it being blinded by cultural prejudice.

So, as in my other books, I once again urge those readers who feel inclined to take up arms against the creatures of darkness to *do so with great care*. In the case of hags, I offer this admonition not only for the safety

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of adventurers but in order to protect innocents from harm.

A Question of Origin

More so than for any other creature I have thus far attempted to study, the origin of the hag is a perplexing question. With vampires, the answer seems to be that the roots lie in a parasitic infection transferred by their bite, or a divine curse. Ghosts arise through an unusual strength of will on the part of dying beings. Typical werebeasts are either the result of what some of my colleagues refer to as "evolution"—a natural trait that develops in a species so that it can survive and flourish—or through a magical parasitic infection that has become so prevalent in the population that it is considered natural. Mummies and other ancient dead grow most often from fervent religious beliefs and the blessing (or curse) of one of more gods. Liches and the creations commonly (and somewhat inaccurately) referred to as "golems" are the product of deep and unhealthy obsessions with power or objects of desire.

With hags, it is far more difficult to form a theory of origin that has any validity. Unlike vampires, liches, mummies, and golems, hags are living beings. Unlike werebeasts, hags do not represent a species, but instead propagate themselves by mating with human males. (There are also magical means through which hags can breed, but those are rare.) How can a species with exclusively female characteristics exist for long with no male counterpart?

Through my research, I have settled on two theories, either of which seems equally likely to me. One is favored by the hags themselves and may be more myth than truth, while the other is based on the known existence of other rare species that do not seem to have two sexes.

Divine Influence

Semine, the greenhag who assisted greatly in the creation of this book, told me the "creation story" that she claims

many hags themselves believe. She said she first heard it from the hag who helped her understand her nature following the Change, and she has heard it from other hags since. Semine also claimed to be familiar with at least one hag covey that retells the tale to one another every full moon.

Long ago, there lived a woman whose name was Lurren. Her entire life was devoted to her husband and her children. She raised her three sons and worked the family farm, even as her husband spent his days at the local tavern, getting intoxicated with his crude friends.

One day, her husband returned from town with a young woman of beauty so radiant it made Lurren's heart ache to look on her. Lurren had been beautiful once, but the hard life she had led for her husband robbed her of that beauty. She was all too aware of this, as was her husband.

"Begone, you hideous crone," he told her. "I have a new wife, a young wife. You I cast out, for you have become too old and too ugly."

Lurren begged her husband to reconsider. When he would not, she turned to her three sons and begged them to help her. They refused.

"You have grown old and ugly, Mother," they said. "Father's new wife will serve us as well as you have—even better, in fact, because she is pleasing to the eye while you are not."

And so Lurren was driven from her home. She wandered through the dark and wild forests until her strength gave out. As she lay in a forest grove, she cried out to the heavens for the power to avenge herself against those who had used her and thrown her away for something as superficial as physical appearance. She prayed for the strength to avenge not only herself but every other woman who had ever been so slighted.

Lurren's cries were heard, and the goddess Hala responded to her pain. As Hala is wont to do, she eased Lurren's pain and gave her the means to avenge

herself, blessing her with all the abilities that hags display today.

With her newfound power, Lurren enslaved the evil creatures of the forest, forcing them to serve her as she had served her ungrateful family. Then she set about exacting her revenge.

Lurren returned to her home and masked her withered visage in an illusion so beautiful that she caused her husband and sons to drive out the girl who had become his new wife. Lurren secretly captured the girl and held her captive in the nearby forest. She then slew her husband and devoured him.

Lurren's oldest son, a mighty warrior, thought that his father had abandoned them, and so he took Lurren to be his wife, seduced by her great beauty. As they shared their bed on their wedding night, she revealed her true form and slew and devoured him. She had become pregnant with her son's child, but used magical powers granted to her by Hala to transfer the child to the girl she held prisoner in the woods. That girl then gave birth to the first annis, the offspring of Lurren and her first son.

The second son, a skilled farmer and woodsman, believed that his older brother had likewise run off. After waiting a year—supposedly to let Lurren mourn—he wed her, seduced by her great beauty. As they shared their bed on their wedding night, she revealed her true form and slew and devoured him. She had become pregnant with her son's child, but used magical powers granted to her by Hala to transfer the child to the girl she held prisoner in the woods. That girl then gave birth to the first greenhag, the offspring of Lurren and her second son.

The third son, a consummate fisherman, would have grown suspicious, but Lurren was smarter than he. She cloaked herself in yet another alluring female form and tricked her youngest son into believing his brother and his wife had both run off. She spent a year using her illusionary beauty to seduce him into performing acts of unspeakable evil, and when he was no better than the beasts she had

enslaved in the forest, she shared his bed, revealed her true form, and devoured him. She had become pregnant with her son's child, but used magical powers granted to her by Hala to transfer the child to the girl she held prisoner in the woods. That girl then gave birth to the first sea hag, the offspring of Lurren and her third son.

With her revenge complete, Lurren left the forest in the company of her three daughters, intending to bring doom to all men who let greed and lust guide their lives, and all who could be deceived by beauty that is only skin deep. Lurren left the young woman who had first stolen her husband with the evil forest creatures, letting them do with her as they wished.

Semine added that there is a further legend among hags that Lurren still walks the mist-swathed hills of our world, and if a hag successfully recognizes her as the first of their kind, Lurren will grant the hag powers almost as great as her own.

I am sure this tale is appealing to hags, as it casts them in the role of avengers carrying on the just revenge of a woman scorned. My belief, however, is that this is nothing but a fanciful myth. It has no basis in fact, but instead seems more like the creation tales that so many races tell about themselves. Further, the prominent role the tale assigns to the goddess Hala in the creation of hags is an element that the adherents of Hala (who became my friends while I worked on this book) find deeply offensive. This tale is not the primary source of hatred between witches and hags, but it is still a factor.

When pressed, Semine admitted that she does not believe the tale is literal truth. Yet she nonetheless feels there is some truth to it, as elements of the story are echoed in a tale that is told both by the elves and the ogres of Sithicus, a land south of Valachan and Invidia. She was the first to tell me the tale called "The Ogress Lurrhein," although I have since also had it related

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to me by Mason of Har-Thelen, a Sithican elf. There are several similarities between the Sithican myth and Semine's tale, most prominently between Lurren and Lurrhein, and the fact that the gods in both are blamed for the origin of hags.

A long time ago, during a time elves know as the Age of Dreams, ogres ruled the world. They built a civilization that only the elves have been able to equal in its glory, but, as all evil beings will, they became lazy and complacent. Their great civilization began to crumble, and the other beings—the elves, the gnomes, the humans—that they had oppressed for so long were starting to rise up in struggles for freedom.

Many ogres saw their civilization was starting to fail, but few were willing to do anything about it. In this environment of sloth, a powerful ogre sorceress named Lurrhein began to spread her belief that the ogres had accomplished too much. It was the will of the gods, Lurrhein believed, that the ogres should abandon any effort to improve their lot in life. Many ogres started to follow Lurrhein's doctrine, and soon no ogres were willing to attempt to work for a future for their kind.

This angered the gods of evil. Even ogres who had been working on plans that would have brought the race another thousand years of prosperity fell sway to her. In the end, Lurrhein hastened the fall of the ogres. To punish her, the gods scarred her face and twisted her body, turning her into the first annis.

Lurrhein was horrified. She was cast out of the fairest of ogre cities, Kernen, because of her ugliness. She wandered from ogre city to ogre city, hoping to find an ogre mage powerful enough to lift the curse from her body. No such mage existed, and soon she was banished from every ogre city town and village on the continent.

Lurrhein gradually lost her mind. Initially, her madness was such that she attacked and killed every creature she

came upon. However, her loneliness wore on her, and she took to keeping one or two of her victims alive. Soon these beings, humanoid most foul, joined in her madness. The children of the unions between Lurrhein and her "companions" were always other hags; she never bore any sons, and none of her descendants have, either. The annis arose from unions with ogres, the greenhags from hobgoblins, and the sea hags from koalinths.

The similarities between the two tales should be apparent to all readers: A female of some humanoid species was turned into the first hag by a powerful entity. Other hags sprang from her unions with unfortunate souls, in a fashion similar to the way hags procreate to this very day. Are these similarities mere coincidences?

There is the possibility that an actual historical event formed the basis for both tales. The elves of Sithicus are an insular people, with a culture and language that resembles no others in the world that I am familiar with. It is unlikely that hags (despite the elven legend) seem to spring exclusively from unions between hags, and that humans could have ancient ties to Sithicus, unless the characters from Semine's tale were the civilized ogres from the elven tale, rather than being the humans that we assume them to be. Alas, the evershifting mists of time have long since hidden any event that may have been the source for these two similar tales.

The Fairy Races

A type of being many consider to be legend, yet which is surprisingly common in the forests and waterways of Tepest and Darkon, is the one some call "the Fay," also known as fairies. Is it possible that hags are actually a form of fairy?

There is much we do not know about these rare and reclusive beings, but there are two important traits that

Van Richten may not be entirely accurate in his assumption here. Hags are usually considered to be an ogre subspecies in the AD&D rules. Their exact nature is clouded in mystery, and they possess powers that outstrip even ogre mages.

scholars use to place beings in the fairy category.

First, many fairy species exist only as males or females, reproducing either through magical rites or by mating with elves, humans, or goblinoids. The resulting child is always a fairy and is always of the same sex of the fairy parent. Hags always produce female offspring.

Second, virtually all fairy species have the ability to either alter their true shape or to render themselves invisible. Are these abilities really so different from the hags' ability to cloak themselves in illusion and hide their hideous forms from the unwary?

It seems far more reasonable a theory that hags are one of the little-researched species of fairies. This would place them in a category shared by dryads, sirines, and nymphs, making them a species of female beings who propagate themselves by mating with males belonging to other species. I recognize that the limited amount of research that has been done into the nature of the fay makes it exceedingly difficult to add or eliminate specific beings from this genus. Still, my examination of the hags has brought me to the conclusion that hags are, indeed, one of the many different fairy species. My guess is that they hate the vast majority of other fairy creatures, most of whom possess unnatural beauty.

Birth and Infancy

Hags are born from living females—one of the few natural things can be said about them. According both to Semine and the scholars of the Hospice of Healing Hands, virtually no

hag raises her own child. Instead, she switches her child for a newborn human baby immediately after birth. There are also reports of a foul ritual that some hags can perform that transfers an unborn baby from a hag's womb to the womb of a human woman who is roughly as far along in her pregnancy as the hag is in hers. The woman's actual child is destroyed in the process; the infant hag takes its place. In both instances, the hags are like cuckoos, leaving their children to be raised by, and eventually destroy, others. (I will revisit the topic of infant hags later, as procreation is a very important part of the hag life cycle.)

No matter how the infant hag comes to be raised by its surrogate parents, she is always a beautiful, healthy, and strong baby. She appears to be the kind of baby parents pray to the gods for, but her fair appearance hides a soul that is twisted and evil from the moment of birth.

Van Richten lives in a world where the vast majority of the population is human, and in his world, hags place their babies with human mothers exclusively. In most AD&D settings, however, a hag can leave her infant with any humanoid creature from halfling to ogre, as per the child's biological father. The baby is always female and always appears to be of the same species as her father. Although the following text treats immature hags as being human in appearance, they can, in theory, be from any humanoid stock.

AD&D game hags were inspired by a combination of wicked witches from eastern European and German fairy tales, and Irish fairy lore. If you like the idea of hags as fairy creatures, then acquire copies of the adventure *Servants of Darkness* (TSR # 9541) and the adventure/accessory *The Shadow Rift* (TSR #1163), as they involve a hag covey and provide a fresh look at fairy creatures and their use in game campaigns.

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Any person reading this who hopes to have a family is probably asking the question, How can we prevent hags from committing this evil deed? This is a very important question to ask, and one that may well be part of the foundation for defeating hags. It will be addressed in Chapters Four and Five.

Early Life

For roughly the first four decades of their lives, hags appear like normal girls and young women. Though marvelous at birth, they tend to become unpleasant children as they age. Those of low intelligence are bullies and overly violent, while those who are smarter tend to terrorize other children when no adults are around, and vent their aggression by torturing small animals in secret. As they grow into womanhood, they develop what some would consider personalities defined by low moral character, although many of them manage to lead normal lives. Some even take husbands.

Young hags, regardless of subspecies, appear to be barren; without fail, they do not seem capable of bearing young until after the Change. For hags who are made aware of their true nature early in life, this is no problem, although they might use their barrenness as a way to evoke sympathy from those around them. Further information is now presented on each of the three hag types.

Annis: Physically, annis (the same word is used in singular and plural form) are powerfully muscled, almost appearing masculine in that respect, but their feminine nature is nonetheless evident. Should they be born of normal human mothers, their hair and complexion tend to be slightly darker than that of their supposed parents.

The young annis gravitates toward the life of an adventurer, warrior, mercenary, or other occupation that permits her to travel extensively and engage in violent pursuits. Above all, annis enjoy physical confrontations. Annis born into cultures where such

activities are frowned on will often leave their homes at a young age, or become murderers or rogues, living at the edge of society. (Of course, there are many who would always characterize adventurers as murderers and rogues, regardless of their disposition or nature.)

Young annis rarely remain part of a single adventuring band for more than a year or two, but instead stay constantly on the move. Unlike many warriors or adventurers, the immature annis does not quest for justice, right wrongs, or even accumulate treasure; all she is motivated by is the promise of conflict. She will accept her fair share of any treasure gained in raids, but she will never remain to reap the benefits of the peace she has brought to a region. Instead, she moves on, in search of an even deadlier, bloodier conflict in which to take part. Particularly cunning immature annis may even orchestrate events to bring two domains to war so that they can sate a lust for blood and violence. As annis grow older, this lust only grows stronger, and only more violent atrocities will satisfy it.

Greenhags: Physically, young greenhags appear to be the ideals of feminine beauty given flesh and form. They are slender, delicately built creatures with fine singing voices. They are beauties about which poetry is written and paintings are made. Without fail, young greenhags are desired by men and envied by women; their dark hearts, however, cause them to use their beauty to break hearts and ruin lives. Unlike annis, there is no general skin or hair coloration that can be noted before the Change. They do tend to have pale green eyes.

Young greenhags often gravitate to the theatre where they earn well-deserved reputations as great singers, dancers, or actresses—sometimes excelling in all three areas! They are exceedingly vain and self-absorbed creatures who live equally for the joy that performing brings them and for the adoration of the crowds. They are also renowned for having many lovers at one time and for tiring of them rapidly. The

richer the lovers, or the more passionate and physical the relationships, the longer their interest holds. However, greenhags are also intensely jealous, and they are willing to go to great lengths to ruin someone they fear might present a competition for the limelight. This extends to paramours more flighty than they are.

However, as any artist or performer will tell you, success in a creative field is just as much about dedication and drive as it is about talent. While all young greenhags have beauty and talent for the performing arts, not all have the drive; such greenhags either end up working in brothels or retreating from civilization, almost as if they feel the call of the wilderness even before the Change is upon them. These greenhags feel as though the world at large has denied them their rightful place in it, and their black hearts fill with a desire to make the world pay. Those who are prostitutes invariably kill their customers or fellow harlots. Young greenhags in the wilderness will start their murderous habits early, often waylaying travelers who are drawn to them, often through wild tales that locals tell about them, casting them as reclusive wise women or witches. (In some rare cases, immature hags will indeed be skilled herbalists or hedge magicians, but more often they are simply cutthroats who will use their wiles to put victims off guard, then slit their throats.) In some extreme cases, the beauty and grace of these flawless female specimens causes them to be mistaken for dryads or nymphs.

Sea hags: Immature sea hags are somewhat plain in physical appearance, not homely but not as stunning in appearance as are annis or greenhags. They are strong, healthy women of the type a matchmaker would describe as "ideal for childbearing." This often makes the years of a young sea hag's life a time of frustration and heartbreak, because they are never able to provide the children that they and their husbands want.

Hags with Class Abilities

All hags are born with the alignments attributed to them in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome. For annis, their alignment manifests itself in their lust for violence; for greenhags, in their hedonistic tendencies and desire for attention and adoration; for sea hags, in their petty nature and vicious, slanderous ways.

The majority of hags spend their lives as zero-level beings, conforming to the description provided in the *DUNGEON MASTER Guide*. However, the following guidelines can be used by Dungeon Masters who wish to use immature hags with class abilities. The percentages represent the portion of all classed hags of that type whose classes are from the particular group, and the numbers in parentheses are the highest level the hags can achieve in those classes. (The level limits are imposed both for game balance purposes and to keep classed hags in line with the Hit Dice possessed by the weakest of their kind once they have passed through the Change.)

Hag Class Abilities Table

	Annis	Greenhag	Sea Hag
Warrior	85% (5)	6% (2)	30% (1)
Wizard	2% (3)	10% (6)	30% (2)
Priest	3% (5)	5% (2)	20% (1)
Rogue	10% (5)	79% (4)	12% (2)
Psionicist	—	—	8% (2)

Classed hags are more formidable than those who were zero level, as they retain their class abilities even after the Change. Some things even improve, such as attacks and saving throws. Immature hags cannot be dual-classed—a limit imposed to preserve game balance and avoid complications in play.

Annis warriors are invariably specialized in at least one melee or missile weapon. Greenhag wizards are usually enchanters or arcanists (the latter a specialist wizard described in *Domains of Dread*), while sea hags are usually diviners or elementalists

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specializing either in earth or water magic (the latter a specialist wizard found either in *Domains of Dread* or *Tome of Magic*).

Dungeon Masters may choose to lift these level limits if they have an idea for a nonplayer character who is actually an immature hag. Such a character might be a unique annis who was a 12th-level warrior before the Change. When the Change comes upon her, she would then be a far tougher hag than even the mightiest of her sisters. In general, however, it is advised that the Dungeon Master keep these level limits in mind.

Sea hags are the most domestically oriented of all hags before the Change, tending to live and work in small villages. They are often married and appear for the most part to be happy in domestic life, with the exception of their apparent infertility. Still, their evil nature is often evident early on, as they are frequently numbered among the most vicious of gossips in the community. They take the slightest hint of impropriety or sloth in neighbors and acquaintances as fuel for their poison tongues, railing about these often nonexistent failings with an innate skill that can ruin reputations beyond repair. Further, if the developing sea hag is married to a kindhearted husband who steps in and attempts to curb her vicious ways, he may find his own reputation in peril, as she may well start rumors about him, too.

As the years wear on, the less intelligent sea hags may find themselves outcasts from their communities even before the Change approaches. Others, however, successfully cause themselves to be viewed as moral paragons, despite the fact that their vicious tongues destroy more reputations of righteous folk than they expose incidents of true corruption.

The Change

As hags enter their fourth decade of life, their true nature starts to exert itself. Hags refer to this period as the Change.

The Change turns all types of hags from attractive female specimens into hideous, monstrous mockeries of the fair sex. Each type of immature hag displays traits that show what kind of hag she will become.

If a hag is encountered during her Change, she may prove fairly easy to defeat; this is particularly true of greenhags and sea hags, few of whom will have mastered any of the martial arts during their lives up to that point. In all likelihood, she will have discovered few (if any) of her abilities before another hag appears to instruct her.

Again, I must stress the need for those who find themselves in a mind to hunt hags that they must be absolutely sure that they are indeed facing such a creature and not just a poor woman who has chosen to live alone in the wilderness for whatever reason. Careful, covert observation over an extended period of time is imperative if one is to avoid turning from monster slayer into base murderer. I will explain the proper ways to identify and hunt a hag later in this volume. At this point, I am continuing to explain the life stages of hags so that you can more fully understand them and their viewpoints, for the warrior who knows his enemy is more likely to be victorious than the one to whom they are strangers.

In the early stages of the Change, the process affects all three types of hags in a similar fashion. Later, however, their individual racial characteristics assert themselves in far stronger ways than they did during their earlier lives.

First, each hag grows physically more powerful. Even before any other signs of the Change manifest themselves, the hag's muscles grow stronger, giving her a strength that one would think impossible for her frame. This is particularly true of the greenhag, who is, almost without fail, delicate and frail in appearance. I am sure that more than one man has found himself torn limb from limb by an enraged hag in the early stages of the Change, perhaps to her surprise as much as his.

Although no change is visible to the naked eye initially, anyone who feels a hag's muscles finds them solid as rock. Even hags who have not been physically fit up to this point in their lives suddenly seem as muscular as the mightiest champion.

Heroes who wish to root out the menace of hags may use this increase in strength as a way to spot members of this foul race, particularly sea hags. As they are often found in domestic and agricultural roles, a sea hag undergoing the Change may suddenly be seen lifting far heavier bundles of laundry than her frame should permit, or flinging bales of hay into wagons without effort. Before you jump to conclusions, make sure there is not another explanation for the apparent increase in the woman's strength; she might secretly be an alchemist who has created a potion to boost her physical capabilities, or possess a magical item granting her great physical powers.

Another warning sign of a hag undergoing the Change is a sudden withdrawal from human contact. Within a week or two of the sudden increase in strength, the changing hags feel an irresistible urge to leave humanity behind. In some cases, they will already have done so. Annis abandon whatever adventuring band they may be part of, greenhags disappear from successful careers (although, as I mention later, they will already have shown some signs of erratic behavior), while sea hags leave behind husband and duties. The hags typically make their new home in deserted wildernesses where

they complete the Change, shedding their human appearance and transforming into forms that more accurately reflect their dark hearts. I have found evidence that *not all hags leave civilization behind*, but those who do not appear to be unusual cases.

As each hag shows certain personality traits before the Change, so do hags have different psychological and emotional reactions to the Change.

Annis: These creatures are the ones whose Change usually begins without anyone taking particular notice. Since they spend their youth as wandering adventurers, they tend to have no roots, and no one notices when they withdraw from even the slight contact they had with general society. Further, even before the Change many annis tend to exist in desolate and sparsely inhabited regions, as these are environments that *breed monsters against whom they can continue to sate the battle lust that churns at the core of their dark souls.*

Out of the three primary types of hags, I have perhaps the best insight into how the annis feel about the Change, or at least how one particular annis felt. Years ago, I came into conflict with an annis, quite by accident. *I was on the trail of a particularly bloodthirsty werewolf who had been plaguing isolated villages in southern Richemulot. We never managed to actually lay eyes on the beast, so cunning was she; when she learned we were sniffing for her scent, she placed a false trail that led us to the annis. Many of my fellows were slain and I myself was gravely injured. We were not prepared for the sheer physical might of an annis, and our specially prepared weapons were not as effective against her as they would have been against the werewolf we thought we would confront. Still, our search of her hovel revealed a diary that granted me an insight into the Change that I might not otherwise have gained—and, in fact, gave me the ability to converse with Semine on the topic when that opportunity presented itself. Relevant excerpts from the diary are included later within these pages.*

All hags start to change physically when they are 40+2d4 years of age. By the time a hag reaches her 50th birthday, the Change is complete, and she has completely lost the physical beauty she enjoyed earlier in life.

Regardless of type, the Strength score of hags increases to 18/00 as soon as the Change begins. This brings them in line with the hags described in the MONSTROUS MANUAL tome.

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Annis delight in the early stages of the Change. As implied above, they are very proud of their fighting skills and their physical prowess in general (including their increased height), so as the immature hag who has no knowledge of her true nature approaches the time of her Change, age must begin to weigh heavily on her mind. When she finds herself growing physically more powerful, it must be a source of euphoria and elation. This was certainly the case for Balihnda, the annis I fought in Richemulot. However, as the annis's monstrous features assert themselves, her elation swiftly comes to an end. Immature annis are concerned with their physical appearance, and when that starts to change in ways they would never have been able to predict, their increased strength suddenly does not seem like such a gift from providence after all.

With each passing day, my strength seems to increase! For the last several years, I have feared that I would soon have to hang up my sword, and when I noticed a certain rough quality begin to appear on my skin, I feared that age had finally started to catch up with me. There are after all not many warriors who manage to survive past their 40th year, and there are even fewer who continue to wield the sword.

But age does not appear to be slowing me down. Instead, it seems to be making me stronger! Yesterday, the baron asked us to disperse the peasants who have been camping outside the curtain wall in the hopes of seeing the return of their daughters. I commanded my fellow Swords to allow me to deal with them alone, hoping that when a single woman—and an “old” one at that!—in the lord's employ could dispatch the likes of them, then they would never have any hope of standing against him. Although Dehrikk feared for my safety, he agreed to allow me to attempt the action. He said he would send in the rest of the mercenaries as soon as he felt I was being overwhelmed.

Those pathetic farmers never had a chance. When they attempted to challenge me, I chopped their ringleader in half with a single blow. He screamed briefly before he expired. Eleven others died by my blade, before the courage of the rest faltered and their will to survive took over, and they fled back to their village.

I have never felt so alive and strong before in my life. I defeated a dozen men without even breaking a sweat. There is no longer any question in my mind. I am not going to settle down into a life of easy comfort like some warrior who is over the hill. I will leave Castle Skyrania as soon as my contract is up. I still have many more years ahead of me during which I can grow my legend and my fortune!

—From the personal journal of
Balihnda the annis

An annis typically completes her Change within weeks of her 50th birthday. At that time, she have completed her physical transformation, and she now appears as she will for the rest of her life. Her skin has darkened into a deep black or midnight blue, as determined by the complexion possessed before the Change. Darker-skinned annis become solid black, while the rest become a dark blue color. Their hands mutate into weapons more effective than swords, their fingers growing into talons that can punch through armor. Their teeth elongate into fangs and turn a glossy black, with hair and nails turning a similar color. Their eyes turn a dull yellow and seem to glow softly in the dark. The powers enjoyed by annis who have completed the Change are described later, combining to make them surprisingly fearsome opponents. One should never engage annis in melee combat if this can possibly be avoided!

Greenhags: The Change of greenhags is perhaps the most visible of all and quite possibly the most traumatic on a personal level. For many greenhags, their physical appearance is the single most important thing in their lives; they admire

their own beauty as much as those around them do, and as they approach their later years, they worry about losing those looks to the ravages of time.

Some immature greenhags will begin to retreat from the public limelight they have so enjoyed at the first sign of wrinkles on their perfect skin—well before the Change actually starts—while others will seek magical means to preserve their exceptional looks. When the Change starts manifesting itself, the apparent acceleration creates a great shock.

The earliest sign that a greenhag is going through the Change is actually not changes in her appearance but rather complaints about headaches, sleeplessness, and blurred vision. Greenhags have senses that are far superior to those of normal persons, but these senses are at first unfocused.

Although greenhags will have been temperamental their whole lives, their fits of temper and pique become particularly dangerous to those around them. Those who have climbed to the top of the performing arts or who have lived as kept women may accidentally beat servants or understudies to death with their increased strength. Those who are living as prostitutes may use their great strength as an opportunity to vent their hatred of society by going on killing sprees. These events may give observant hunters an opportunity to identify a greenhag who is in the early stages of the Change.

If a famous performer or socialite commits a murder, she will most assuredly be able to rely on powerful friends to avoid justice and possibly even to have the scandal minimized. Those who wish to hunt hags and other cunning creatures of darkness, however, must have enough allies in all layers of society that they will hear of the foul crime. If she is truly in the process of the Change, she will shortly withdraw completely from public life, and she will suddenly seem to age very rapidly. Within a few months, she will go from being a ravishing beauty to a withered crone, and she will undoubtedly flee

whatever city she has called home.

Less fortunate hags, those who have spent their early lives in prostitution or other degrading occupations, will also eventually answer the call of isolation where they can complete the Change. Before they do, they will undoubtedly kill several clients and associates. Such a hag may be more dangerous to hunt than the affluent hag described above; where she lacked ambition early in life, a hag may suddenly may display great cunning as the Change starts in her.

Several years ago, my friend Alanik Ray, the great detective, traveled to Chateaufaux at the request of a woman who operated a brothel in that city. Some of her clients had been slain in a most brutal fashion, as had one of her prostitutes. In the course of his investigation, he discovered that a number of other streetwalkers had been slain as well. He eventually tracked the killer, who claimed five more lives before Ray could deal final justice to her. By Arthur Sedgwick's written account and from Ray's verbal description of the confrontation when I interviewed him about the matter, I am certain that the monstrous female who was responsible for the killings was actually a greenhag.

Without warning, a monstrous creature leapt from the alley onto the couple. The thing seemed to be an old woman dressed in a tattered gown that revealed more of her curiously wrinkled and creased flesh than it hid. Her hair was a great tangle of dark strands. Her arms were like tree limbs, and her hands appeared like splintered ends of snapped branches.

In an act of strength certainly beyond her seemingly frail form, perhaps beyond any human, she shoved one of her clawed hands through the chest of the prostitute Ray and I had been following, and the other hand through the man who had just propositioned her. As we watched in horror, the monster bent her taloned fingers and dug them into the backs of her still-twitching victims, lifting them above her

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head so that their blood rained down on her. She let out a mad laugh, as if she had just fled an asylum.

Her laughter only deepened my terror, but it startled Alanik Ray into action. "Sedgwick!" he shouted. "Your pistol! Slay the monster!"

With that, Ray's snaplock roared, sending its deadly lead ball directly at the creature's heart. She staggered as it hit, then turned to look on us, a startled expression on her twisted features. But—gods above!—she did not fall!

My paralysis of fear finally broken, I raised my pistol to fire as well. At that moment, however, the monster threw her victims at Ray and me. My comrade was struck squarely by one of the bodies, and I barely managed to duck aside. The monster fled down the alley. I ran forward and fired my pistol at her, but missed. She turned a corner and was gone.

"Do not let her get away!" Ray shouted as he struggled to his feet, fully splashed with gore. I gave chase, but when I turned the corner where she had been moments before, all I could see were the citizens of Chateaufaux starting to appear in their doorways and windows, curious to see what all the noise and shouting had been about. She had seemingly vanished into thin air!

Ray appeared at my side and cursed in his native language. "How did we lose her? How—" He paused, then pointed down at the street. In the light thrown by

lanterns and candles held by the curious, I saw bloody footprints lead from the alley to a doorway where a young woman stood in a dressing gown, blinking sleepily at us. Ray drew his sword. "We have you, monster!" he cried.

The shape of the young woman wavered and changed as Ray strode toward her. Abruptly she stood revealed as the cackling, gore-soaked old woman we had confronted in the alley!

"The game is over!" Ray shouted boldly as the citizens of the town fled screaming from the battle to come. "No more innocent lives will be taken by your claws!"

—Arthur Sedgwick
The Casebook of Alanik Ray

While the wanton brutality of this creature would be bad enough on its own, it also serves to illustrate that not all hags retreat into the wilderness. A far more disturbing element to this tale, however, is the apparent command this hag had over her ability to hide her form in illusion, even before the Change was complete. Another anomaly appears to be the lack of a tutor. According to Semine, hags do not usually master their more subtle abilities unless other hags tutor them in their use, yet Ray uncovered no evidence of a second hag being active in Chateaufaux, nor did I find any during my follow-up investigation while working on this book. This is noteworthy because it might indicate that rare hags may well discover their powers on their own, making them immune to certain methods of detection that I will divulge later in this text.

Greenhags typically complete their Change as they enter their fifth decade of life. By that time they have, like the annis, gained the appearance that will be with them for the rest of their lives. Their smooth skin becomes as wrinkled and hard as tree bark and turns a sickly green color. Their delicate fingers mutate into gnarly talons sharper than even the most finely honed blade. Hags who were fair-haired before the Change see their locks assume an olive-green color, while



those who had dark tresses end up with hair of the darkest black. Their eyes range in color from amber to orange, and they glow even brighter than those of the annis. She does not grow in height or physical bulk as the annis, but retains the build she had in life. Her body does not become withered and bent like the annis and the sea hag, but she is nonetheless hideous to look upon.

Although those who have studied hags before me arrived at the conclusion that the annis is the most powerful of the hags, I believe that conclusion to be in error. I think those who have gone before me were judging the annis on her size (7-8 feet tall) and her skill in battle. It is my opinion that the greenhag is the most deadly of the hag types, and once you have read the section dealing with mature hags, I am certain that you will agree.

In addition to the abilities mentioned above, the greenhags develop a number of other powers as a result of the Change. Many of these are described in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome, but they are elaborated on and added to later in these pages.

Sea hags: These are without question at once the most monstrous and most pitiable of the hags. Not only are their early lives typically ones of frustration and disappointment, but the Change turns them into creatures so alien that they can no longer even live on land.

To spot a sea hag who is in the process of the Change, one should look for a woman who suffers from an incurable rash, and who has been growing old before her time. As sea hags usually spend their early years in close-knit communities, travelers passing through may hear of such cases in the course of investigating a matter entirely unrelated to hags. Once again, as I have stressed before, hag hunters should take care to verify that a woman displaying these symptoms is indeed a hag and not some poor unfortunate who is suffering from an illness that is merely beyond the ability of the healer to address.

As with the other hags, the Change in a sea hag starts some time in her fourth decade of life. While she enjoys an increase in strength, her appearance degrades more rapidly than that of other hags, causing them to seem to age decades within the space of three or four years. Those who see the Changing hag occasionally will notice tremendous differences in her appearance from one time to the next. Her body grows withered and bent, and incurable rashes seem to break out across her skin. She also finds it increasingly difficult to breathe and starts to find herself increasingly parched.

As if her shortness of breath, rashes, and unquenchable thirst were not enough, she soon finds the company of others intolerable, even those few she may have loved before the change. Eventually, the sea hag is drawn to a desolate region that either features shallow warm seas or vegetation-choked lakes. Here she finds a way to alleviate the discomfort that has been plaguing her, by plunging into the waters. Semine told me of a sea hag who attempted to commit suicide and thusly discovered the effects the Change were having on her; rather than drowning, she found that she could breathe water as easily as she once could breathe air.

While the Change all but strips hags of their human nature, none of the others become as alien as the sea hag. After the Change, a sea hag's native environment is the water. Semine even claimed that sea hags grow weak and eventually die if kept from water, much in the same way sirines do. Although I have no evidence of this, I also see no reason to doubt the claim.

As the Change is completed, typically in her fifth decade of life, a sea hag becomes so hideous that even the merest glimpse of her true form may cause the heart of the stoutest warrior to stop beating from fright. Some may believe such accounts are mere exaggerations, as some scholars of the unnatural have classified sea hags as the weakest and least dangerous of hags. My research and personal experience has shown otherwise, however.

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Roughly a decade ago, I was searching for a fabled body of water that is alternatively named the Sea of Saragossa or Saragoss. I had joined in an effort to track a vessel called the *Sea Tramp*, so named by a dying man who had washed ashore below the steep cliffs of Mordent. He claimed the ship was crewed entirely by werebeasts who had murdered everyone aboard his own ship for a chart that led to the Sea of Saragossa. This mysterious sea was located somewhere beyond the fog banks that eternally cover much of the Sea of Sorrows.

Although the dying man attempted to replicate his charts, the captain of our vessel was confident that we were sailing blind as we entered the mists. For days we kept what we believed to be a straight course—and eventually the fog parted to reveal the rocky coast of an island. Moments after our ship emerged, several voluptuous mermaids pulled themselves from the vegetation-choked water to watch us as they lounged on the rocks in the warm sun. The captain had dealt with merfolk off the coast of the distant land of Vechor and believed them to be a generally harmless race. He drew the ship near. In response to the friendly beckoning of the mermaids, the crewmen let their guard down and clustered along the starboard side of the ship to gaze on exotic females and to express their appreciation for what they saw. Then the mermaids suddenly revealed themselves for what they were: sea hags who had cloaked their true, hideous appearances behind alluring images!

In all my years I have never seen such a hideous sight. I was so filled with horror and revulsion that even as I reeled backward I fainted. When I came to, three sailors were desperately trying to fend off a hag; the rest of the crew lay senseless or dead on the deck, and three other sea hags were in the process of devouring the fallen. I slew one with a surprise attack from behind, then joined the remaining sailors in fighting off the rest of the foul beasts. The very sight of them was so repulsive that it seemed to drain our strength. I

thank the gods that those monsters did not have the fighting prowess of an annis or even a greenhag. Surely, we would have been slain if they did.

After driving off the remaining sea hags, we discovered that fully half the crew had died of fright when the visions of mermaids were replaced with the hideous sight of hags. The captain and our navigator were both among the dead, and we decided that our hope of finding the Sea of Saragossa had died with them. Once enough sailors had recovered from their faints—it took some of them as much as three days to recover!—we turned our ship around and headed back toward the familiar waters of the Sea of Sorrows. The hideous visages of sea hags

The sea hags Van Richten encountered were using their *change self* ability to lure the ship close so they could attack it; this is a standard ability that all sea hags develop as a result of the Change. Van Richten and the crew were affected partially by the sheer impact that the sea hag's hideousness has on humans and partially by special powers that are described in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome and ones that are only possessed by the most powerful of sea hags. All these abilities are described in the section titled "Mature Hags."

cannot accurately be described in any language that I am familiar with. While they are indeed the weakest physically of the hags, they do not need physical might when their warts, bony protrusions, and patches of slimy green scales dot their sickly yellow skin. Long hair like seaweed hangs limply from their heads, covering their withered bodies. Their eyes appear hellishly red, with irises and pupils that seem as though they are windows into the deepest, darkest abyss. While sea hags develop superhuman strength like other hags, the Change does not grant them the formidable natural weapons that their more powerful

cousins possess. From what Semine told me and I myself witnessed during the attack in Saragossa, however, sea hags become quite adept with knives and daggers to compensate for their relative defenselessness.

Surviving the Change

As any student of human nature knows, we are basically social creatures. While we certainly value privacy, we also crave the company of others. As an example, the mental state of men and women who spend long periods in isolation invariably deteriorates. In fact, this seems to be trait of humanoids in general, as the only race I can think of who seems to thrive on isolation are the sirines, who may indeed be some sort of elemental creature rather than the natural beings many scholars believe them to be. All others, even werebeasts and other cunning shapeshifters, seem to require at least minimal contact with their kind.

How is it then that hags, despite their inhuman natures, appear to have many of the basic psychological traits and needs of humans, yet can bear the Change? Immature hags are vain creatures for whom personal beauty is vital; it is in many cases the sole reason an immature greenhag has for living. Further, with the exception of annis, I would venture that few immature hags ever learn any of the kind of skills they need to survive in the wilderness habitats they adopt. How can they survive in isolation, cut off from humanity both by urges they do not quite understand and by the bizarre mutations that ravage their bodies? How do these women, who are not skilled at surviving in the wilderness, struggle on while their will to live is being sapped by depression over the strange developments in their lives?

When I sought to answer those questions, I was put in mind of butterflies and other creatures who begin life in one form but are transformed into beings so different one would never realize they were even of the same race unless one had witnessed the transformation. My

operating theory was that the knowledge of what the hag truly was and what powers she wielded was imbedded somewhere in the hag's makeup, much like the butterfly's ability to fly. It was not something that she needed to be taught, but rather an inborn knowledge and understanding that emerged as the hag passed through the Change; there was no mention of such knowledge suddenly coming to Balihnda the annis, but I assumed that we had come upon her at a point in her Change before this knowledge emerged from her subconscious.

When I brought this puzzle up with Semine and explained my thoughts to her, she informed me I was about as wrong as I could be. She agreed there was some value to thinking of the Change as a kind of pupal stage, although I must admit that Semine's description of it as a second puberty is far more accurate. Then, she stated in no uncertain terms that hags must either be taught or somehow accidentally discover the new abilities they develop. Some are obviously easier for the hag to notice—such as her enhanced senses and increased strength—but her ability to create illusions is something far less easy to stumble on.

The truth would never have occurred to me. It serves as another example of the lesson I learned while researching the plague that is the werebeast: When



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dealing with intelligent beings, the best way to gain an understanding of their psychology, life cycle, and social relationships is to simply ask questions of one of them. Such a course is, of course, exceedingly risky, and it is an opportunity that presents itself more as fortuitous happenstance than by design. In both cases where I had the opportunity to gain insight directly from members of a race that preys on humanity, a creature came forth on its own accord, and we arrived at a temporary truce. I suppose the information might also have been gained if I had trapped one or more of the beasts, but I would have considered the information more suspect than that gleaned from a being who still has its freedom. After all, humans will say just about anything if they think it means they will continue to live, so there is no reason to believe werebeasts, hags, red widows, and other living creatures of the night are any different.

Hags going through the Change are invariably sought out by one or more older hags who have already mastered some or all of their abilities. Through means that are not clearly understood even by the hags themselves, other hags can sense when one of their number is undergoing the Change. They tutor their "sister" in the use of the initial powers that result from the Change, the primary among these being an ability that allows the hag to cloak herself in the illusion of her former attractive appearance. They also tell her of other powers she may develop as she grows older.

The tutors educate the changing hag in the proper way to conduct her new life, working to heighten the sense that she is no longer part of humanity and that she should hate the rest of the world for it. Semine said that the hag who came to tutor her used her own illusion-casting powers to hunt—she viewed humanity as nothing more than a source of food, and she had a ravenous appetite. Semine said that she joined her tutor in several gory meals, but that she does not make a habit of

slaying random travelers to use as meals. "I only treat those as meat who treat me as such," she said, which brought to the fore her personal notion that her murderous activities were somehow furthering a greater good. (I return to this reasoning later.)

Semine's tutor stayed with her for six months, long enough for her to help Semine adjust to the enhanced senses that all greenhags gain during the Change. She taught her to take advantage of her illusion of beauty, and the basics of a language that hags use to communicate among themselves. Then the two of them realized that they could not stand each other's company. "If she had not left when she did," Semine said, "one of us would surely have killed the other."

I was fascinated by the way the mature hag appeared to tutor Semine in her time of need. I mentioned that the situation echoed one described in the diary of an annis that had come into my possession; she, too, had a tutor who appeared to help her through the Change and show her the basics of her new abilities. I had once read a text that speculated that twins share a psychic bond—that their spirits are somehow linked—and I ventured the opinion that perhaps hags shared a similar bond with their offspring. Perhaps, I said, the hag who revealed herself to the fledgling was her real mother. Semine dismissed this theory immediately, explaining that she had herself felt the inexplicable draw to seek out a sea hag going through the Change. Clearly, she was no mother of a sea hag. In fact, she seemed quite offended by the suggestion, so I chose not to press the issue further with her. As she reminded me several times during our tense time together, she could kill me as easily as she drew breath.

I later consulted with Sister Marena on the matter, and she told me of the "Weave." As she explained it, in a gross oversimplification of the philosophy involved, the Weave is a collection of magical energy strands. They combine to form all realities real and imagined.

Marena speculated perhaps the Change in hags affected the Weave as an insect or a human finger might affect a spider's web; when the web is touched, it trembles with vibrations and the spider, if alert, is drawn to their source.

The analogy is not entirely accurate, but if the basic premise is true—that the Change can be sensed somehow due to its impact on a mystical field that permeates everything—then others might be able to use supernatural means to hone in on hags in metamorphosis. I cannot count the number of times an ally skilled in the arcane arts has turned what may have been a disastrous defeat into victory through the use of divinatory magic. I have seen undead creatures attempt to pass themselves off as living, and I have witnessed both Vistani and other diviners foretell the future with unerring accuracy, and find objects that were lost to all knowledge and sight save that provided by their magic. It might be possible to do the same with hags. None of the experts I consulted in this matter believed such a thing was possible at the present time. However, mages are constantly developing new and creative ways to apply their magic. Perhaps, on reading these words, one of them will decide to take up the challenge of developing a spell that can sense hags undergoing the Change.

Certainly, it should be clear to all who read this that a hag who does not fully understand her nature or completely control her powers cannot effectively hide herself or control her powers. If a hag can be reached before she masters her ability to hide her true form in illusion, it is immeasurably more easy to identify and destroy her. I go into more detail about this in Chapter Five.

In further discussion of the hags' ability to cloak their hideous visages in the illusion of something fairer, Semine said it is the power she uses most frequently. In fact, she felt that all hags use that ability more than any others they possess. She said, however, that they regard it at once as a cherished gift

and a hated curse, as it allows them to temporarily reclaim something of their former lives, but it is fleeting and somewhat unreliable. The hag is never certain exactly how long she will be able to maintain the illusion. She can count on it for only about 20 minutes.

In some ways, this ability to cloak themselves in illusion probably makes them even more bitter and hateful toward humanity. Men run in fear when the hag appears in her natural form, but they may well be filled with lust for the illusion. As Semine explained it, she had always known that men cared little for what she was like at her heart—her body was all they wanted—but until the Change, she had harbored hope that she would eventually meet the one man who would love her instead of lust for her. That her beauty had become nothing but an illusion now drove the point home even stronger, she felt, and she claimed she was doing the world a service by slaying those men who were inflamed with desire by her illusion. "What of their wives or betrothed?" she

When a hag goes through her Change, 1d3 other hags within 100 miles of her location will sense it and be drawn to her location. The hags are usually annis (70%) although occasional greenhags (20%) and even more rarely sea hags (5%) may show up. There is a 5% chance that no hag will come to educate the fledgling as to her true nature.

The older hag spends 2d4 months with the fledgling, instructing her in the use of her developing powers and preparing her for the new existence she will lead.

The hag language that Van Richten refers to is a tongue that is an offshoot of the language of ogres. It appears to have originated with the annis, and scholars within various AD&D game worlds refer to it as "annis." All hags have adopted it. A character who understands the ogre language can roll an Intelligence check with a -3 penalty to understand what two hags are saying to each other.

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asked. "How can they betray them so easily? And, if they can secretly betray those they claim to love, might they not betray their nation or sovereign, bringing doom to thousands of people for personal gain or glory?"

Needless to say, I found questionable Semine's assertion that she was somehow working toward a greater good by slaughtering these men. She was the one who presented them with temptation, thus causing their low character to become a factor where it might not have otherwise. She admitted that she did indeed flaunt herself at them, but defended herself by saying that she did not force them to take advantage of the opportunity. "Yet, I never go hungry," she concluded with a grin.

While I cannot say whether this is a general trait for hags or not, Semine was blind to her own evil ways, a trait that I found to be the case with many werebeasts as well.

Maturity

Once a hag reaches the age of fifty, she has completed the Change and settles into a monstrous life that will last for centuries. Much of the information in this chapter is based on my conversation with Semine, the records of Sister Marena's convent, and the notes of other hag hunters. My personal experiences with hags has been limited

to but a few hunts, as these creatures are thankfully rare in our lands. The section discusses both the psychology and the powers of mature hags.

Appearances, Abilities, and Powers

As hags are quite rare, my personal experience with these monster is not as wide as that with werebeasts and the undead. Much as I did when I delved into the dark secrets of liches and demons, I found myself relying extensively on the experiences of others and the stores of knowledge collected in universities and other places of learning.

I believe the information in the following sections is accurate, and the sources from which I drew it are the finest anywhere, with the possible exception of the knowledge I gained from Semine. Still, every assertion she uttered was carefully checked against as many sources as I could find, as well as measured by what personal experience I have had facing hags in combat. As with earlier portions of this chapter, the description of hags here is divided up by the various hag types. Some of it has already been touched on earlier. If something is repeated here, it is because I view it as critical to keep in mind when confronting these hags.

One thing that can be said about hags is that they come by their arrogance honestly. Almost without fail, hags continue to learn about their capabilities as they grow older. While

Early in the Change, all hags develop the spell-like ability to *change self* three times per day. This ability function like the 1st-level wizard spell by the same name, except that the hag can use it to cloak herself in an illusion of how she appeared before the Change. (This is, however, the only exception to the limitation on not being able to copy specific individuals.)

The duration of the hag's *change self* ability functions as though cast by an 8th-level spellcaster (2d6+16 rounds).

undoubtedly some of their powers originate from a natural process that takes place in their bodies as they age, the majority of powers grow out of a mastery of inborn magical talents that manifest after the Change. As arrogant as they become, hags never seem to stop testing the limits of their powers as they grow older. They also continue to improve their abilities in physical combat, although this mostly applies to annis and greenhags.

One thing all hags continue to delve into throughout their lives, and in some cases even beyond the end of their lives, is magical arts of the darkest kind.

Annis: As mentioned previously, immature annis without fail gravitate to the life of a warrior or adventurer. After the Change, they continue to be the fiercest of the hags when it comes to combat, and the wise adventurer should never face an annis in melee if it can be avoided. Despite the fact that many annis might well be swordswomen of legendary stature before the Change, they frequently abandon all weapons afterward. They develop a perverse love for the feeling of flesh and tendons being ripped apart by their taloned fingers, and they want to be as close to their victims as possible so as to more fully enjoy the smell of free-flowing blood with their enhanced senses. More so than any other of the hags, the annis revels in her increased strength and senses.

The annis's skin hardens during the change, making her shockingly difficult to injure with weapons, enchanted or not. By all accounts, this hardening continues as the hags age. Their skin also continues to darken. Semine's rule of thumb is as follows, "The darker the skin, the tougher the annis."

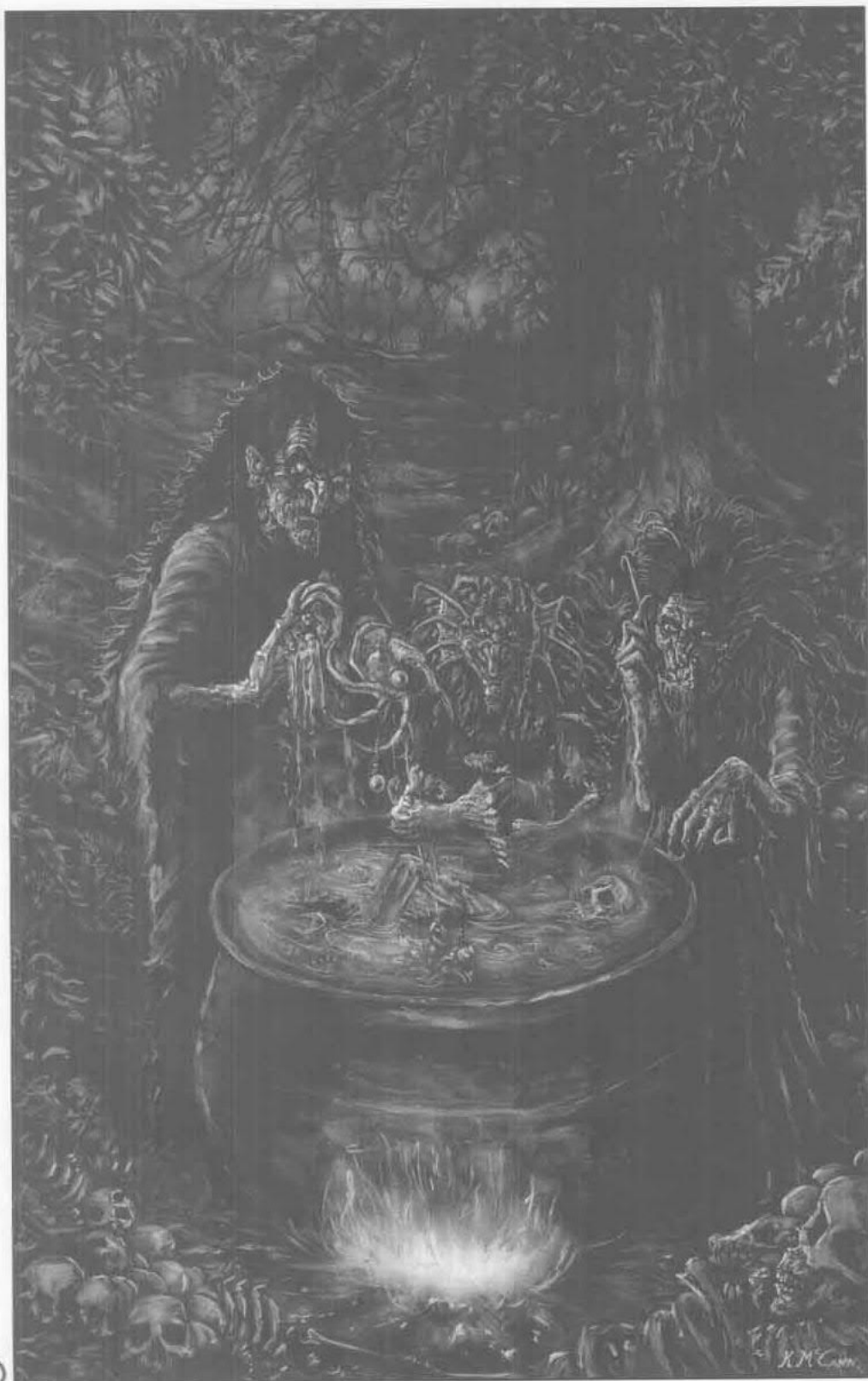
Annis are also resistant to offensive magical spells. The elf wizard I mentioned earlier, Fiori, stood with me one day in battle against an annis. She fired off a volley of darts of pure magic during the first moments of battle. Rather than bursting painfully against the creature's skin, the magical darts instead merely winked away as if they had never been summoned into existence. Fiori cursed

mightily, as was her wont when things did not go her way, but later she admitted that she should not have been so shocked; many powerful evil creatures are surrounded by an aura of what she called "null magic."

Although her terminology is not quite what others might use, her observation is accurate. In earlier works, I discussed how undead creatures are immune to all manner of magic that affects the minds of mortals, and I demonstrated how vampires develop an immunity to all magical spells as they grow older. Annis appear to possess a similar immunity. Semine augmented my own experience with anecdotal evidence of the annis's resistance to magic, and the collective experiences of witches and warlocks that are recorded in the *Hospice of the Healing Hands* further confirmed it. It is my estimation that annis possess a resistance to magic roughly equal to that of vampires, and that it becomes greater as each annis ages. The resistance also seems to increase at roughly the same pace as the vampire's, with the oldest of annis being able to ignore roughly one-quarter to one-third of magical attacks launched against them. One positive note here is that annis do not appear to have the complete immunity to certain spells that vampires do.

As easy as it might be to draw a parallel between the annis's resistance to magic and that possessed by vampires—as I just did for the sake of comparison—I want to make it clear that I do not believe they originate from the same source. Current prevailing theories hold that undead draw their resistance to magical effects from the same source they draw the very energy that allows them to maintain their existences—the much rumored Negative Material Plane. As Negative Material Plane energy is unlikely to be anything but harmful to living beings, I find it hard to imagine that hags could possibly enjoy a connection to the Negative Material Plane. For all their monstrosity, they are undeniably very much alive. It is my opinion that

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the partial immunities to certain magic enjoyed by both types of creatures is merely coincidence. However, I also have to admit that there is further evidence to support the notion that hags might well somehow be connected to the Negative Material Plane, despite its theoretical impossibility. I will touch on this evidence later in this chapter, when I discuss the bizarre spectral hags.

Certain other widely available texts on unnatural beings tend to categorize annis as the most fearsome of hags. Their savagery in combat and lack of subtlety makes this an understandable conclusion for some to reach. However, research has led me to a different conclusion.

Greenhags: These monsters are clever manipulators who act in both subtle and overt ways to spread strife and chaos. They cloak themselves in illusion for as long as possible, and they manipulate their enemies into achieving the goals that the hags wished to reach all along, or into destroying each other.

Although greenhags achieve neither the height or bulk of annis, they develop a strength so fantastic that one would not think their slender, bent frames could possibly contain it. Their hands are reshaped into talons that are so gnarled they are barely recognizable as hands. Their skin develops a greenish tint and becomes as tough and coarse as the bark of an oak tree. Although not as durable as the skin of the annis, a greenhag's hide is nonetheless able to withstand blows that would pierce the body or shatter the bones of a normal person. Her senses of vision, smell, and hearing increase to the point where it is virtually impossible to catch her unawares, even if a would-be attacker planned to launch arrows or spells at her from a distance.

Like annis, greenhags have an innate resistance to magical attacks, one that seems to grow stronger as they grow older. Based on the anecdotal evidence I have been able to gather and the personal observation of the greenhag Semine, I believe that young greenhags have a resistance to

magic weaker than that of annis, but it grows stronger as the centuries pass and eventually outstrips that of annis. I estimate that fully one-half of all spells cast against the most powerful of greenhags fail. In other words, if someone is seeking to battle a greenhag, it would be inadvisable to assume that combat magic will be the key to victory.

Sea hags: While these creatures develop the massive strength of annis and greenhags, they remain almost as frail as they were before the Change, developing no natural armor or weaponry. Instead, they must rely on their intellects and dedicate themselves to becoming experts with weapons. The relative physical weakness of sea hags makes them perhaps the easiest to face in melee combat. However, they are exceedingly difficult to approach. Their true visages are so hideous that they may literally paralyze a person with fright, and perhaps even cause the onlooker to die! Further, there is no getting use to the true appearances of sea hags, even if one manages to survive an encounter with one. Each one seems to be more hideous than the one that came before.

Sea hags possess other defenses, too. Even more potent than their hideous appearance is their ability to shrug off most spells that might be cast at them. The records at the Hospice of the Healing Hands indicate that even the weakest of sea hags displays a resistance to magic that rivals that of the strongest annis, and the elders among these water-dwelling crones are immune to virtually all spells that may be cast at them. Further, they have an innate ability to breathe water, so if they realize they are facing a superior foe, they can always flee into the water. Few of their opponents will be able to pursue them to the bottom of the sea, so they can typically hide there in safety—and from there either dispatch minions or use magic to strike at their foes.

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Advanced Rules for Hags

These rules are provided to allow Dungeon Masters to customize hags according to the needs of the campaign and the levels of the heroes involved. The format in which these rules are presented will be familiar to many readers, as the life spans of these creatures are sorted into age categories (six for the annis and sea hag, twelve for the longer-lived greenhag). Dungeon Masters can either roll randomly on the tables here or purposefully construct hags of the appropriate power levels for the heroes against which they are pitted. Mechanics for randomly generating the ages of hags is included.

Annis

Annis gain one additional ability for each century of life, gaining their first ability at the 50-year mark. Annis have a maximum life span of $500+1d100$ years. They remain relatively healthy and active until greatly aged, when they suddenly undergo a sharp decline and die within weeks.

Annis are physically powerful creatures, with Strength scores of 18/00. They gain all the damage and attack bonuses that are standard for creatures who possess exceptional Strength.

Annis have infravision to a 60-foot range, and their superior senses of

hearing and smell cause opponents to take a -2 penalty to surprise rolls against them.

Their skin is iron hard, so edged weapons cause 1 point less per die of damage when striking them. Conversely, blunt weapons (including morning stars) cause 1 point more per die of damage against annis. Their skin becomes harder as they age, hence the progressively better Armor Class.

An annis rarely carries weapons, relying instead on her steel-hard, talonlike fingernails and razor-sharp teeth to tear opponents to shreds. In melee, an annis tends to close and grapple. She makes three attacks per round, and if all three hit in the same round, the annis has successfully grappled her opponent. In the following rounds, all attacks are automatic hits unless the opponent is the stronger, the annis is slain, or the victim uses magical means to escape. Otherwise, the annis continues to hold her victim in her grasp, delivering automatic damage with her raking talons and ripping fangs until the victim is slain.

To determine the basic statistics of an annis, the Dungeon Master should roll 2d4 and compare the result to the following table, which can also be used by Dungeon Masters to gauge how common hags are within certain age ranges.

Annis Age Table

2d4	Category	Age Range	Hit Dice	Armor Class	Magic Resistance
2	I	50-149	5+5	2	0%
3	II	150-249	6+6	1	10%
4-5	III	250-349	7+7	0	20%
6	IV	350-449	7+7	0	25%
7	V	450-549	8+8	-1	30%
8	VI	550+	8+8	-2	35%

Special Powers by Age: All spell-like powers, whether specially defined by age or gained at random, work as if they were cast by an 8th-level caster. If the effect is similar to a spell of a level requiring a higher-level caster,

the power works at the minimum level required to cast it. The spell-like powers can each be used three times a day, and they are cumulative; the annis keeps each ability gained as she ages.

- Age 50: *Change self*
 Age 150: *Fog cloud*
 Age 250: Random Ability (see
 Random Ability Table)
 Age 350: *Protection from normal
 missiles*
 Age 450: *Cloudkill*
 Age 550: Random Ability (see
 Random Ability Table)

Random Ability Table (roll 2d12)

- 2: *Invisibility*, three times per day
 3: *Magic missile*, three times per day
 4: *Bind*, three times per day
 5: *Darkness 15[fm] radius*, three
 times per day
 6: *Charm person*, three times per day
 7: *Death ray*, three times per day
 8: *Suggestion*, twice per day
 9: *Delude*, twice per day
 10: *Melf's minute meteors*, once
 per day
 11: *Fireball*, once per day
 12: *Power word, blind*, once per day
 13: *Power word, kill*, once per day
 14: *Power word, stun*, once per day
 15: *Curse or remove curse*, once
 per day
 16: *Summon swarm*, once per day
 17: *Dispel magic*, twice per day
 18: *Fly*, twice per day
 19: *Ray of enfeeblement*, three times
 per day
 20: No additional power
 21: *Invisible stalker*, three times
 per day
 22: *Forget*, three times per day
 23-24: *Irritation*, three times per day

Greenhags

The greenhag gains one additional ability for each century of life, gaining the first ability at the 50-year mark. A greenhag has a maximum life span of $1,000+2d100$ years. An aged greenhag dies swiftly, as does an annis. While a young greenhag is generally weaker than an annis, as she gets older she actually becomes far more powerful than her wicked cousin.

Greenhags have infravision to a 90-foot range and superior senses of hearing and smell, causing opponents

to take a -2 penalty to surprise rolls against them.

Greenhags are natural mimics; even before their true nature manifests itself, they are highly talented at imitating the voices of others and the sounds of animals. They typically spend their youths as proficient actresses and singers. Once they undergo the Change, their skills at mimicking enable them to imitate the voice of any mature or immature male or female human, demihuman, or humanoid. They are also able to mimic most animals perfectly.

Throughout their lives, greenhags are graceful creatures who possess an uncanny ability to move quietly in virtually any surrounding. Once their true nature asserts itself, this talent is heightened. In a forest or swamp, this movement and the greenhags' coloration impose a -5 penalty on opponents' surprise rolls. In other surroundings, the penalty is -2.

Rock-hard talons grow from the long, slender fingers of greenhags. Although more delicate in appearance than either annis or sea hags, greenhags nonetheless have Strengths of 18/00, and they receive a +3 bonus to hit and a +6 bonus to damage when they slash their opponents.

The skin of greenhags appears weathered and is hard and rough like the bark of trees. As they age, their skin becomes even tougher, hence their progressively better Armor Class.

A bruja (a type of hag that is good-aligned, described in the *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix III*) follows the same general progression as the greenhag. Her magic resistance is 10% less than the greenhag's, and her Armor Class is always 1 worse than the greenhag's (thus, a 260-year-old bruja has a magic resistance of 5% and AC 0).

To determine the basic statistics of a greenhag, the Dungeon Master should roll 2d8 and refer to the following table.

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Greenhag Age Category Table

2d4	Category	Age Range	Hit Dice	Armor Class	Magic Resistance
2	I	50-149	6	1	0%
3	II	150-249	7	0	5%
4	III	250-349	8	-1	15%
5-6	IV	350-449	9	-2	25%
7-8	V	450-549	9	-2	35%
9-10	VI	550-649	9	-2	40%
11	VII	650-749	10	-2	45%
12	VIII	750-849	10	-3	45%
13	IX	850-949	10+1	-3	45%
14	X	950-1,049	10+1	-3	50%
15	XI	1,050-1,149	10+1	-4	50%
16	XII	1,150+	10+1	-4	55%

Special Powers by Age: All spell-like powers work as if cast by an 8th-level caster. If the effect is similar to a spell of a level that requires a higher-level caster, the power works at the minimum level required to cast it. They can each be used three times a day. The powers are cumulative; the greenhag keeps each ability gained as she ages. The Random Ability Table is given in the section on the annis.

Age 50: *Change self, pass without trace*

Age 150: *Audible glamor, dancing lights*

Age 250: *Invisibility, water breathing*

Age 350: *Speak with monsters, weakness*

Age 450: Use Random Ability Table

Age 550: Use Random Ability Table

Age 650: *Speak with animals*

Age 750: *Creeping doom*

Age 850: *Hold person, transport via plant*

Age 950: *Spike growth, transmute water to dust*

Age 1,050: *Monster summoning IV*

Age 1,150: Use Random Ability Table

Sea Hags

The sea hag gains her first special ability at the age of 50, with each additional one following for each 150 years of life. Sea hags have a maximum life span of 800+1d40 years, remaining active until they undergo a sharp decline in health and

die within weeks. Sea hags never reach the level of power of annis or greenhags, but they make up for that with cunning.

Like other hags, sea hags are physically powerful, with Strength scores of 18/00. They gain all the damage and attack bonuses standard for creatures who possess exceptional Strength.

The true appearance of a sea hag is so ghastly that anyone who gazes on her true visage will grow weak from fright unless a saving throw vs. spell is rolled. (Additionally, if the campaign is using the rules from *Domains of Dread*, players who fail to roleplay the experience of the character properly may have to make a fear check the first time they encounter a sea hag.) Beings who fail their saving throws lose half their Strength scores (round fractions down) for 1d6 turns.

Worse still, three times a day sea hags can focus their hatred for beauty into a gaze attack similar to—but far more powerful than—the *evil eye* of the Vistani. The gaze targets one creature of the sea hag's choosing within 30 feet. To negate any ill effect from this baleful glance, the target must roll a saving throw vs. poison. If the saving throw is failed, the victim either dies immediately from fright (25% chance) or is paralyzed with fright for three days (75% chance).

Sea hags always use their deadly glance as their primary form of attack. They will melee only if they are supported by powerful minions, or if they have the advantage of numbers or surprise. Unlike other hags, sea hags use daggers in

combat, receiving a +3 attack bonus and +6 to damage rolls.

To determine the basic statistics of a sea hag, the Dungeon Master should roll 2d4 and compare the result to the following table.

Sea Hag Age Category Table

2d4	Category	Age Range	Hit Dice	Armor Class	Magic Resistance
2	I	50-199	2	9	10%
3	II	200-349	3	8	30%
4	III	350-499	3	7	40%
5-6	IV	500-649	3	6	50%
7	V	650-799	4	5	75%
8	VI	800+	4	4	80%

All spell-like powers work as if they were cast by an 8th-level caster. If the effect is similar to a spell of a level that requires a higher-level caster, the power works at the minimum level required to cast it. They can each be used three times a day, and they are cumulative; the hag keeps each ability gained as she ages. The Random

Ability Table is given in the section on the annis.

Age 50: *Change self*

Age 200: *Water breathing*

Age 350: Use Random Ability Table

Age 500: Use Random Ability Table

Age 650: *Fog cloud*

Age 800: Use Random Ability Table

Psychology and Habits

In past creature studies, I have been able to draw neat parallels between the psychology of the creatures and their biological or "necrological" development stages. Unfortunately, such parallels seem to be as difficult to draw with hags as they are with human beings. Just like humans mature mentally at different rates, so do hags. Behavior and abilities do not always match up, and those who would hunt these foul creatures should remain ever aware that each hag is an individual.

Inherent Viciousness

Hags are cruel and spite-filled beings at their core. Annis enjoy visiting death and destruction on their surroundings, greenhags are vain and self-centered creatures who cannot stand other persons getting attention, and sea hags go out of their way to ruin the lives of

others through gossip. After the Change, a deep resentment is added to their already unpleasant nature. Hags, particularly greenhags, have long life spans, and as they age their hatred of the world around them grows stronger.

It does not matter to the hag that her transformation was dictated by her race, nor do her abilities to hide her hideousness do anything to lessen her resentment. She has the appearance of a monster, and she throws herself into the role of monster with relish. A hag attempts to subsist on a diet composed entirely of sentient beings. There is no physiological need for this diet—it is adopted out of pure viciousness.

For their first few centuries, hags are content by themselves, stewing in their resentment and hatred of other living things while they vent their anger and unnatural urges on hapless travelers who venture too close to their hidden

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wilderness lairs. The majority of hags exist in solitude once their tutors depart. A rare young hag might be invited to join a covey immediately, but will even more rarely accept. Such hags are exceptionally vile and probably engaged in evil acts even *before* the Change came on them.

Annis and greenhags tend to select fairly desolate areas in which to live and rarely have an impact on their vicinity, except for their desire to trap and consume intelligent beings. Sea hags, however, are highly obsessive in their desire to obliterate beauty. They do their utmost to destroy wildlife, plants, and anything else they find aesthetically "pleasing" within several miles of their lair, making the presence of sea hags fairly obvious for those who wish to hunt or avoid them. In all cases, as hags age, their homes become easier to find, as they soon cease any attempt to conceal the remains of their victims but instead allow them to litter the glens or coves they inhabit. (I discuss ways to identify whether a region serves as a home to hags in depth in Chapter Five.)

Superiority Complex

Regardless of type, hags spend much of their time constructing elaborate traps around their lairs. They occupy their minds for weeks on end concocting the perfect ruse to lure victims into them. Sometimes they venture into nearby communities and spread false rumors about wise women, generous druids, or friendly dryads or sirines living in the area they call home. As years pass and adventurers and locals continue to be drawn in by their lures and fall victim to their traps, the hags start to view themselves as more intelligent and cunning than others. They come to believe that although their appearance may be hideous and twisted, their minds are far superior to all others.

As they age, this viewpoint is reinforced by the fact that they develop an ever-growing suite of supernatural powers. As the hag discovers she has more natural abilities than she first believed, she is both distracted from her

pastime of trapping the unwary (as she explores her newfound powers) and further convinced of her superiority. This swiftly evolves into an arrogance unmatched by few creatures I have studied. Even the mighty lich recognizes that someone out there may be its better. The hag, however, eventually becomes incapable of even conceiving of such a possibility. The wise and well-prepared hunter can take advantage of this conceit, as I will show in Chapter Five.

Minions

As hags grow more arrogant, they develop a corresponding contempt for the abilities and achievements of all races save their own. The only achievement that hags live for themselves is the spreading of suffering and the destruction of life and beauty. Eventually, they reach a point where they are no longer content to merely humiliate and murder their victims. They want to have someone admire their "works." They also feel a growing need to extend dominion over the territory around their immediate homes. To sate these desires, hags need minions. Annis and greenhags almost always gather minions around themselves at some point. Sea hags seem to do so only rarely, although it is not entirely unheard of.

In the records I studied in the Hospice of the Healing Hands, I learned that in certain faraway lands, hags recruit various evil humanoids to serve as their guards and agents. Several such beings appear in our lands, but only rarely. George Weathermay, my good friend and ally in the fight against darkness, once came into conflict with a greenhag in the heavily forested region where the Gundar River flows into the Lake of Red Tears. She had recruited a number of disaffected members of the nearby goblin clans. Then, she went on to extract tribute from nearby logging communities, even demanding that young women should be offered up to her in sacrifice. This foul beast and her servants rarely killed the poor maidens,

instead returning them to their villages with their faces and bodies horribly scarred. It was this practice that caused Weathermay to go after the monsters with a vengeance.

Rumors of hags abound in Tepest, and supposedly the creatures there rely mostly on goblins and evil fairies for their minions. Given the superstitious nature of the people in Tepest, I have to say that it is uncertain whether hags even dwell in forests there beyond Semine. Hunters may wish to investigate, but they must take every precaution to be sure they are truly on the trail of a hag. There is no reliable information to be had from any residents of Tepest, as they are the very archetypes of superstitious and simple country folk.

It stands to reason that hags who have reached the stage in their lives where they require minions will move their homes and lairs to a region where minions are in abundance. Semine certainly felt that this would be the most reasonable thing to do, although she pointed out that some hags may want to further illustrate their power and superiority by forcing communities of evil beings to move to the hags' homes instead. A sudden migration of humanoids or increased humanoid aggression toward surrounding communities may be a sign that a hag has forced the creatures into roles as servants. The same is true if there is a sudden increase or decrease in banditry in a particular region; hags sometimes force evil humans into servitude, particularly when the hags dwell near civilized territories where goblins and other such night spawn have been driven off.

Each hag type has different preferred minions. While it is by no means an absolute method of determining which kind of hag is active in a given area, would-be hunters can use reports of certain types of monsters as potential warning signs. For example, if a tribe of goblins suddenly appears where few humanoids have been active before, it might be a sign that a hag has moved in, bringing her minions with her. The goblins could be either the hag's minions or a clan displaced by those

minions and forced to take a new home and hunting grounds. Capturing one of these creatures would offer valuable information. The choice of minions seems to be tied to the general personality of the hag types. Such a relationship is not surprising. They are, after all, intelligent beings, and like all intelligent beings they gravitate to beings of like mindsets and interests. Even hags who force minions into servitude must be able to stand the nature and habits of their helpers.

Annis in faraway countries are said to rely heavily on evil breeds of giants and ogres as their servants. The reader probably is already aware that such humanoid titans are in short supply in our domains, so it is not unheard of for hags to turn to evil treants or large groups of lesser humanoids such as goblins and hobgoblins. Annis choose their minions for their physical strength. They care little about their minions' intelligence, instead selecting minions who can inflict the greatest amount of carnage in the shortest amount of time. Annis rule their minions by fear, through threats of death and destruction.

The only exception to this seems to be a little-known race of feline shapeshifters known as the paka, who, according to records at the Hospice of the Healing Hands, have some sort of relationship with the annis and supposedly offer their services to any annis who asks for them. Known as "cat people" to the Vistani, the paka are an ancient and sinister race that dwells in insolated villages in the most distant corners of our realm, and it is not uncommon to find annis living near them. The paka are generally pleasing to the eye in either human or hybrid (humanoid cat) forms, so what common ground has brought paka and annis together remains a mystery.

Compilers' Note: I once had the misfortune of traveling with a small band of paka. I met them on the road, and they invited me into their midst, ostensibly so we might have strength in numbers. When we camped that night,

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they assumed their true visages and attacked me. Thankfully, I had been on my guard, and was also quite lucky during the ensuing battle, or I would certainly have died.

It was difficult to convince the one surviving paka to talk to me, but once I had treated her wounds (keeping her bound), she opened up to me a little. She had been certain that I was going to slaughter her in cold blood, and she was left somewhat rattled when I did not. The paka are apparently raised to fear and hate those who are not of their own kind. Apparently, they believe that some gross injustice was committed against their breed in the distant past, and they are now dedicated to avenging themselves upon the world. What this injustice was the paka would not tell me—part of me suspects she did not even know—but she was quite vehement in her insistence that we humans were all going to get what was coming to us. I suspect that the annis and the paka have found their common ground in their shared hatred of the world around them and their desire to spread pain and suffering.

An interesting note about the paka, however, is that the one I spared and subsequently nursed back to health promised me that my kindness would not go unrewarded should our paths cross again. Although consumed with some bizarre need for revenge, the paka do not appear to be without gratitude when kindness and mercy is shown to them.

—LWF

Greenhags rely on evil forest creatures for their minions, or else lead large hordes of bandits or humanoids. While greenhags are attracted to minions with great battle prowess and potential for spreading chaos and destruction, they tend to look for intelligence and the ability to take the initiative as well. Greenhags are as hateful as their annis and sea hag cousins, but they are still quite vain at their core. They want to be surrounded by minions capable of

appreciating the brilliance of their schemes and traps. Greenhags mostly secure their minions by promising them wealth and the protection of their great powers. Since greenhags are capable of delivering on both (with the wealth primarily coming from attacks on travelers and nearby communities), such minions usually serve out of a sense of loyalty as well as fear of the greenhags' rage.

Sea hags once again seem to be the most pathetic of the breed when it comes to their choice of minions. They employ undead beings that are barely aware of their own existence, such as zombies. Such unnatural monstrosities do nothing to sate the sea hags' need to be acknowledged for their superior intellect, which probably makes these hags grow even more spiteful toward the world. If they must answer the need to have someone recognize their brilliance, sea hags probably turn to evil water-dwelling creatures such as sahuagin and reavers. (Some readers will scoff at my mention of those last creatures. I am aware that they are widely considered myths and wild tales told by sailors and fishermen to scare the cabin boys and passengers onboard their vessels, but believe me that reavers indeed exist. Someday, I might turn my attention to the dangers that exist beneath the placid surfaces of the lakes and seas of our world.)

Compilers' Note: My sister and I have in our possession a wide variety of research conducted by Dr. Van Richten that did not make it into any of his guides. There exists among these papers and notes a substantial body of material on reavers, bowlyns, sea spawn, and other water-dwelling creatures terrible and fantastic. Perhaps we will be able to complete Dr. Van Richten's research into them and publish them for the world to see. For now such materials remain disorganized. They will require considerable editing before making any public appearance.

—GWF

In all cases, a hag who has gathered minions makes them dwell no more than a quarter-mile from her home. In most cases, a greenhag actually dwells among her minions, keeping a close eye on them. Occasionally, if adventurers are

sighted, she passes herself off as a maiden who has been captured by the evil humanoids. She reveals her true nature and attacks her would-be rescuers before they have the opportunity to do serious harm to her followers.

Hag Minions

As hags gather minions, small villages of assorted monstrous inhabitants tend to spring up near the lairs. Even in cases where these creatures might be enemies, they tend to get along out of respect and fear for their evil mistress. The following table can be used to randomly generate the minions of individual hags. Dungeon Masters should feel free to replace any of the creatures listed with ones that seem more appropriate to their personal campaigns.

Not all hags have minions. When preparing an adventure or staging an encounter, the Dungeon Master should decide whether the hag that is to appear has minions. Assume a 25% chance that a hag has gathered minions.

The following sections describe those specific minions and can be used to build detailed encounters with hags, as well as providing ways to call a party's attention to hag activity in an area. As Van Richten mentions, changes in behavior or migration patterns of local monsters may be evidence of a hag gathering minions around her. The monster activities can foreshadow a much greater menace when the Dungeon Master plans adventures and encounters carefully.

Annis

Annis tend to draw their minions from the ranks of ogre communities and evil giants. However, within the confines of the RAVENLOFT setting, the annis appear to have formed some sort of alliance with the paka. Laurie Weathermay-Foxgrove's speculation is correct: Hags and the cat people have found common ground in their hatred for the world.

Annis may also have formed alliances with rare doppelgangers. In

the Demiplane of Dread campaign, at least one annis is known to have either formed an alliance with or forced into servitude a renegade doppelganger clan from the domain of Paridon. Driven out by their brethren for deeds so foul that even doppelgangers could not countenance them, these doppelgangers and their annis leader now roam the land, posing as Vistani and murdering those they manage to lull into a false sense of security.

As mentioned above, annis tend to rule their minions through force and fear, so they are not the most loyal of minions. If heroes can show that they pose a greater threat to the future well-being of the minions than their annis mistress does, the minions may well try save their own lives by helping the heroes defeat the hag. (The exception to this are the paka. If serving an annis, they remain loyal to the death.)

To randomly determine an annis's minions, make two separate 1d12 rolls on the following table. The resulting creatures work together for their annis leader. The minions should be used in whatever way seems to make the best use of their particular talents to aid the annis.

Annis Minions Table

1d12	Result
1-2	3d6 paka*
3-4	3d6 hobgoblins
5	3d4 doppelgangers
6-8	2d10 ogres
9-10	1d4 fomorian giants
11	1d4 ettins
12	1d2 hill giants

* See RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix III, or use 3d6 hobgoblins.

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Greenhags

Greenhags prefer to dwell in isolated forest glens, and they tend to rely on evil humanoids, forest creatures, bandits, and outcasts for minions. Greenhags are vain creatures, and they want minions who admire them rather than serve them out of fear. Therefore, greenhags lure minions with the promise of wealth and shared power. Particularly insightful greenhags play off the prejudices of their minions in order to make them even more loyal. She makes them believe that she shares their causes. However, in truth the greenhag has as much contempt for those who serve her as she does for her enemies.

To randomly determine a greenhag's minions, make three separate 1d12 rolls on the following table. The resulting creatures make up the hag's minions and will attempt to work together despite their differences. A greenhag is usually even more clever in deploying her forces than an annis, and creativity on the part of the Dungeon Master is encouraged.

Greenhag Minions Table

1d12	Result
1-3	1d2 ettercaps
4-5	3d6 1st-level fighters (bandits) led by a darkling*
6-7	3d6 hobgoblins
8-9	1d10+2 ogres
10-11	1d10+2 7-HD evil treants**
12	1d2 unseelie nymphs***

* See the first *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix*, or use a 2nd-level wizard.

** See the first *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix*, or use 2d4 fomorian giants.

*** See *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Annual, Volume Four (TSR #2173)*, or use one sirine.

Sea Hags

Sea hags rely almost exclusively on undead creatures as minions. Some draw comfort from the fact that they can watch the appearance of the undead creatures *degrade and grow* more hideous as time passes, just as the sea hags' appearance did during the Change. What few living minions they recruit are usually quite monstrous, and these creatures are typically forced into servitude through the use of terror tactics or (rarely) offers for the opportunity to spread carnage.

In the Demiplane of Dread campaign, a sea hag dwells in the coastal caves on Darkon's Sea of Sorrows coast; she is closely allied with a nearby tribe of reavers. Whether sea hags share a relationship with the reavers similar to that shared between the paka and the annis is unknown, since no one has yet been able to communicate effectively with the bizarre and violent reptilian humanoids.

A single 1d12 roll is made on the following table for a sea hag's minions. These minions are *only loosely allied* with or controlled by the sea hag, doing their own raiding as well as that which the sea hag commands.

Sea Hag Minions Table

1d12	Result
1-7	1d6+2 sea zombies
8-9	1d8+2 sahuagin
10-11	2d6 reavers*
12	1d6 scrags (aquatic trolls)

* See the first *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix*. (If not available, replace with 3d6 sahuagin.)

Once a hag has reached this stage in her psychological development and has secured power over her minions, she moves in one of two directions. She either seeks to band together with other hags in what they refer to as a

"covey"—a pooling of magical resources and abilities that allows the hags to weave spells more powerful and destructive than any one of them could hope to do alone—or she succumbs to an almost irresistible urge to bear

offspring. The former decision is strictly related to the hag's free will, while the latter is almost assuredly driven by the natural instinct in all species, no matter how unnatural, to perpetuate themselves.

Hag coveys are treated in detail in the next chapter; they pose far too great a threat to be treated as part of this general survey of the hags. Further, many adventurers may mistake a hag covey for a witches' coven, an error to be avoided at all costs. As will be explained later in this section, witches and warlocks of all stripes—from the staunchest supporter of goodness to the vilest practitioners of destructive magic—are the committed enemies of all types of hags.

Procreation

For hags, the urge to procreate is both physical and psychological. Semine told me that when she first felt the urge to have a child, it was almost as strong as her urge to leave civilization behind when she was entering the Change. Semine also said that the notion of bearing a child was an appealing one, because she suspected it would be a creature just like herself, and that this daughter would continue to wreak havoc on the world long after Semine herself was gone. Semine said that this urge comes over greenhags once a century after the age of 400. She has borne two daughters herself.

Considering the bizarre nature of hags as a species, I do not find it surprising that they would have a biological compulsion to bear young; if they did not, their foul race would have died out long ago. Of the three hag types, the greenhag seems to be the one most concerned with long-range planning; this was true of Semine, who hoped her daughter would carry on her legacy of destroying other hags. What parents have not thought of their child as a small piece of immortality, the one lasting effect they will have on the world once they have passed from it? I know I would occasionally dream about how my own son Erasmus would someday

follow in my footsteps and become an even greater medical man than myself, wishing for him an education at the finest university in Darkon. It is not surprising to me that hags might view their offspring as the way to carry forward their evil agendas into eternity.

There does not appear to be any particular differences from one hag type to the other when it comes to procreation, except for a single horrendous ability reportedly possessed by certain annis: the ability to magically transfer their unborn child into the womb of a pregnant human female. No evidence exists to prove this vile idea, but it should be kept in mind.

It should be noted that younger hags who join coveys often manage to suppress the urge to bear children when it comes over them. Once a covey is formed, the hags become too jealous of any child that one of their number bears for the infant to survive, unless they can somehow arrive at an agreement which leads to all three of them bearing children at the same time. However, there might be those hags who never feel the need to join a covey because they continue to have a child every few years. This allows them to increase their ability to spread chaos and pain by the very act of procreation, first by the suffering they undoubtedly visit on the

The rumored ability of certain hags to transfer their unborn children into the wombs of human women is exactly that: a rumor, albeit a nasty one that has made the rounds in many a domain. Though Dr. Van Richten makes much of this concept, and Semine the greenhag toys with him on this point later, it is still untrue—not that some peasants will believe otherwise. An interesting encounter might be set up with a hermit woman (perhaps a witch) who was cast out of her village as a child, because her behavior led her mother and others to believe she was a "changeling," an infant hag exchanged at or before birth for an actual human infant.

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poor unfortunate who fathers their children, and second by foisting yet another hag on the unsuspecting peoples of our domains.

Admittedly, *hag procreation is more a topic of morbid scholarly interest than of any particular use in combating hags. There are few things about the way hags procreate that make them vulnerable to those who would destroy them.* As mentioned earlier, immature hags are indistinguishable from unpleasant humans, so is there is little that can be used to identify hags before the Change. At best, a hunter might use the uncertain lineage of a suspect female to see whether she may be in the early stages of the Change, but otherwise this information is of little value.

Conception

As there is no male counterpart to hags, they must be impregnated by males of other species. Evidence indicates that hags can only mate with humans or half-elves. According to Semine and the documents from the Hospice of the Healing Hands, the most common method used by hags to secure mates is to lure an unsuspecting traveler into her embrace using her ability to take on a pleasing appearance. Particularly powerful and sadistic hags may use certain abilities that they develop later in their lives in order to cloud the minds of men and lure them to their arms without even cloaking their form.

According to Semine, the hag knows the moment she is with child. Once she has been impregnated, she slays the

Van Richten and other scholars of his world are incorrect in their conclusion that hags can only mate with elves and half-elves. Any male of humanoid stock who is no smaller than a halfling but no larger than an ogre is a suitable biological father for a hag child. The world of the RAVENLOFT setting, however, is dominated primarily by humans, so hags originating from different stock are extremely rare.

father, much as a black widow spider does with her mate. One exception to this general rule was brought to me by my friend Dr. Gregorian Illhousen, a pioneer in the treatment of insanity and brain fevers. He wrote to me of a case where a young man appears to have been driven insane by being lured into mating with a hag. The shock of having his lover suddenly transform from an elf maiden into a hideous crone left him with a psychotic hatred of all elven women. The experience was driving him to become a murderer. Sadly, Dr. Illhousen was not able to heal the young man's mind. A few months after he escaped from the Clinic for the Mentally Distressed in Nova Vaasa, he killed two women and was stoned to death by angry citizens of the elven community of Nevuchar Springs. *I cannot help but wonder if the hag spared his life because she knew this would be the result of her mistreatment.*

Gestation and Birth

According to Semine and the records at the Hospice of the Healing Hands, the gestation period for an infant hag is roughly nine months, identical with that of a human infant. Shortly after the child is born, most hags perform the switch described at the beginning of this chapter, although a few may take steps that are a little more elaborate than that.

Sister Marena gave me a chilling account of an annis taking revenge on the leader of a witches' coven. The witch, named Suzeen, had successfully destroyed a hag covey, but the annis had escaped death through unknown means. The annis became pregnant, then left her infant daughter as a foundling to be raised by the unknowing coven. Suzeen's coven was destroyed when the adult daughter (now a witch) went through the Change, then later returned to her true mother to share her full knowledge of the coven's secrets. A single member of the coven escaped, and her written account is what Sister Marena showed me.

I once asked Semine if there was any truth to the old tale that hags could transfer a fetus from their womb and into the womb of another. The greenhag refused to give me a straight answer. With a vicious smile, she said, "It does sound rather fantastic—but so does the notion of a wizard instantly transporting himself halfway around the world with but a single word, or displacing a person's soul with his own. If it is true, then human mothers have a convenient excuse when their daughters do not turn out the way they would have liked. 'A hag switched her at birth!' they can say. No, my dear doctor, I do not think I will satisfy your curiosity on that matter. Let the mothers of our land keep their comforting thoughts—or are we letting them keep their fears that the child they carry may not truly be theirs? That the children they nurse are really monsters in disguise?" Semine then laughed in a way that gives me chills even now.

Despite their biological need to bear young, most hags do not appear to have much of a maternal instinct. Most hags abandon their children soon after birth, usually switching them with normal infants, as mentioned previously. The mother then typically never sees her child again, nor does she give it a second thought. Thus does this evil girl-monster grow up ignorant of her true nature until the Change comes on her and a hag eventually arrives to tutor her. This invariably causes the new hag to develop a hateful outlook. By abandoning the child to suffer the bizarre ravages of the Change, the hag ends up nurturing the attitude that is a defining quality of her race.

While I believe firmly that it is possible for a creature to be born evil—werebeasts and hags are ample proof of that—I also cannot help but wonder if a hag would be less monstrous in spirit if she was properly prepared for the Change by a mother who understood what was coming. This thought may have some relation to reality, however slight. In the archives of the Hospice of Healing Hands, I found the tale of a hag who supposedly wanders our domains

Unknown to anyone but hags and perhaps a few very trusted minions, when hags become pregnant, they enter a state of near hibernation, being active only for a few hours a day just before sunrise. If they are forced into activity during any other period, they receive a -4 penalty to all attack rolls and there is a 25% chance that any spell-like abilities will fail if used.

Typically, pregnant hags retreat even farther from inhabited areas during this time, anis finding remote mountain caves, greenhags vanishing into overgrown swamps, and sea hags remaining on the bottom of their shallows. Still, a few rare hags trust their minions enough to be around them when in their more vulnerable state, and these hags remain fairly active, continuing to prey on early-morning travelers until their pregnant state inhibits movement.

Once the hag gives birth, one of two events typically happens: She either kills her child, consuming it in a fit of hunger as she emerges from her stupor, or she starts the process of finding a human mother with whom to place it. Once a suitable mother has been located, the hag uses her various abilities to steal into the poor woman's home and switch the newborn hag for the human infant (who is disposed of later). Hag babies always appear fully human, and it is not until the Change occurs that they seem at all unusual. A baby suspected of being switched in this way is called a changeling. Switching babies in this manner has led to the rumor that hags exchange unborn infants with pregnant women.

and endeavors to counteract the evil undertaken by her foul cousins. According to the tale, this hag was the granddaughter of a greenhag who did not want to visit on her daughter the mental anguish that she had suffered during the Change. The greenhag raised her daughter personally, and this

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daughter in turn raised her own daughter. This third hag eventually left her home and soon encountered some of her diabolical cousins. She was appalled by their savage, destructive ways and swore that she and all her descendants would oppose them wherever she might encounter them.

Whether there is any truth to this tale, I cannot say. Semine comes to mind immediately, but she is evil to the core despite her hatred of her own kind. I have been unable to determine this tale's exact point of origin, as the supposed land of origin of this "good" hag is the distant domain of Nidala (or Nidalia, as the domain is referred to in widely read, yet shoddily researched, texts penned by the late Sir Stefan Mills of Ludendorf). The author of the account in the archives is anonymous. It is likely that the account is merely a bard's tale, as it shares several similarities to the creations of such spinners of "legends." The fact that the "good" hag is from a faraway land and the recorder had not himself met the hag but had instead been told by a "coven brother" might be evidence of its falsehood.

My experiences tell me that hags are evil, and their daughters are born evil. They are monsters, and even if there are one or two aberrations among them, I believe it is an unacceptable risk for those who fight hags to assume that any of their number might be of good heart.

Compilers' Note: Gennifer and I attempted to track down the source of the legend of the "good" hags, but we were no more successful than Dr. Van Richten. We did, however, come upon another variant of the story, told to us by a reclusive Vistana who dwells deep in the forests of Tepest. According to her version, the three "good" hags were all part of a covey that turned its magical powers to the task of predicting the future and using this knowledge to grow in power. Eventually, the members of the covey attracted the attention of powers greater and darker than they, and these powers cursed

them by showing them the future none of us can escape: the moment of our death. This terrible and inescapable foreknowledge drove the three hags apart and filled them with a disconsolate compassion for all things mortal. They now work to ease pain and suffering where they can, moving through the domains cloaked by their shapechanging abilities.

I am tempted to dismiss these tales as flights of fantasy, but, as my experience with the paka showed me, it is very difficult to be accurate when painting all creatures of a given race with the same brush. Nonetheless, personal experience has also shown that is indeed safer to assume that nonhumans and strangers encountered are intent on causing harm until proof to the contrary has been evidenced. Even then, it is better to always be on one's guard.

—LWF

Van Richten and the Weathermay Twins are unknowingly commenting on creatures known as bruja. These haglike beings are indeed traveling secretly throughout the domains of the game world (and possibly other worlds), working in small ways to counteract evil and ease suffering wherever they find it. Van Richten's description of their appearance is correct, as is the legend that they are all cursed with the foreknowledge of their own deaths.

A full description of bruja is provided in the *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix III*, but Dungeon Masters without access to it should consider their basic abilities to be those of greenhags. Although they are neither sadistic nor bent on destruction, bruja share the tendency toward arrogance of other hags. This sometimes endangers their disguises, as they may be prone to impulsive displays of powers when faced with cocky characters. They are, generally speaking, kindhearted and gentle beings who want to keep their true natures concealed. Bruja are without fail chaotic good in alignment.

Astute readers may have noticed that so far I have made references to hags bearing only daughters. Some may be wondering if hags ever give birth to male children, as I did when Semine was explaining the ways of her kind. I assumed that the lack of male counterparts to hags was a manifestation of some sort of hag culture, and that hags murder any male infants to whom they give birth, as many parents in faraway lands are rumored to do with female children (considered by culture to be a burden rather than a boon). When I asked Semine, however, she told me that she had been told that hags only birthed other hags, and that she herself had not given birth to any males.

As there are no records of any hags giving birth to males—not even legends—I can only assume that Semine was told the truth by her tutor. As I mentioned above, this may well be a sign that hags are actually part of a general class of beings that scholars have yet to research adequately or even identify.

Hags can reproduce only by mating with human, demihuman, or humanoid males, and the resulting child is always female and always a hag.

Night Hags: The Final Stage?

It is known that hags go through at least one distinct change in their life, shedding the appearance of normalcy in favor of vast power. However, there is a distinct possibility that they go through a Second Change, coming so late in life that few hags survive it. This Second Change, if it indeed occurs, elevates the annis, greenhag, or sea hag to the status of what in fairy tales is called a *night hag*.

In the archives of the Hospice of the Healing Hands, I found a brief mention of the night hag in what appeared to be someone's attempt to create a magical ward against it, which is reproduced following this paragraph. Experts in arcane matters assure me

that the document does not even rise to the point of being the earliest developmental stage of a workable spell, being purely superstition and bunk.

Begone, You Hag Who Lurks in Dreams

Who Drains Our Life through Cries and Screams

Gods Bless This Ward to Keep Me Whole

And Keep the Night Hag from My Soul

Sprinkle the sleeping area with the dust of ground rose petals and dried spider carcasses. Hang one strand of hair given freely from the head of a woman of pure heart and strong devotion to the gods over the doors and windows leading to the sleeping area. Speak the incantation before nightfall and pray with great dedication to whatever god you give sacrifice to on holy days. You will then be safe from night hags and other demons from the Abyss Beyond who wish to prey upon your spirit.

—Anon., from the archives of the Hospice of the Healing Hands

Sister Marena was uncertain exactly what night hags are, as the only reference she has ever seen to them is in that brief, bizarre document. Semine dismissed them as legend, but admitted that among her foul cousins, there are stories of hags with personal power that puts hag covets to shame, having the ability to stride from one world to the next as easily as other hags step from one room of their huts to another. Marena and Semine both dismissed such creatures as the products of rampant imaginations. Nonetheless, I have come to fear that night hags may indeed be very, very real.

I recently inherited the personal library of Aimon Davidovich, a fellow researcher into the macabre. The many tomes and scrolls were being delivered to my home in Mordentshire as I was putting the finishing touches on an early draft of this book. One evening, I

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perused a volume at random, and imagine my shock when in one of the very first chapters I saw a reference to night hags! The book bore no title, but it dealt with creatures who supposedly used human souls as currency in a faraway land, possibly even an entirely different world. Night hags serve as a *form of moneychangers in this land*, taking souls gathered by others and transforming them back into the physical forms of large bloated worms. These hags are also attributed with the ability to stride between worlds as they please, often collecting souls of their own. The text provides a range of disgusting descriptions of what the *creatures that dwell in this place* then do with these worms.

The text also provides a graphic description of two night hags battling over a batch of souls. If the author is at all accurate in his writings, night hags possess physical strength equal to that of annis, greenhags, and sea hags. They also have the ability to cast *magical spells*; the author described the two hags attempting to harm one another with magic. They fired volleys of what sounds like the spell known as *magic missile* at one another before closing to claw at one another with their talonlike hands. Yet, they also have the ability to cancel these spells, as the author also describes how one hag was *unaffected* by the spell, yet the other shrunk back in pain. Finally, the night hags are described as appearing like withered crones, with stringy black hair and skin the color of a fresh bruise, with claws and fangs, and eyes that glow like hot coals.

If not for the scrap of paper in the Healing Hands archive and Semine's tale of the legends that exist among hags of their more powerful cousins, I would write off the account in Aimon's papers as a work of fiction with true hags serving as its flimsy basis in reality. However, other papers in Aimon's library make references to creatures who cross many different worlds with ease, and even this "Abyss" that is mentioned in the false incantation.

I suspect that if certain hags live long enough, they go through a Second Change that transforms them into night hags. In this new state, they gain the ability to freely travel to other worlds, perhaps even into the realms of the afterlife, where they gather the souls of the dead.

In my travels, I have occasionally met men and women who claimed to be from worlds other than the one we call home. I know there are scholars who dispute the existence of realities beyond this one, but my personal experience says otherwise. Several of these "visitors" from other places were as sane as you, my reader, and there was no reason to doubt their stories of having been drawn to our land through incomprehensible magical means.

What are the powers of night hags? I can only speculate. They appear to have the ability to cast wizard spells, and they seem to feed off the nightmares of their victims. I can find no more information on them. I include this brief treatment of them only to alert others to their existence. Perhaps other scholars will be able to uncover more.

Compilers' Note: Alanik Ray, a onetime associate of Dr. Van Richten, told Laurie and me of a death that occurred while he was chief constable of Martira Bay in Darkon. A sailor had been found horribly mutilated and out of his mind in a little-visited section of the waterfront. His dying words indicated that he and a friend had been lured to the isolated spot by a particularly beautiful "lady of the night" who shockingly transformed into a hideous crone with blue-black skin and fiery eyes. Mr. Ray investigated the incident, but could find no sign of the missing sailor or the creature who had apparently abducted him. Ray's investigation was cut short, however, when the disappearance of Lord Azalin resulted in an upheaval in city government that cost him his job and left him an unwanted presence.

Could this being have been one of these night hags? Laurie and I made a

brief visit to Martira Bay and conducted our own investigation. We found no evidence of a creature, but residents of Martira Bay's waterfront did regale us with stories of similar disappearances. The only one of these that appeared related to what we were investigating was the disappearance of Hans Brodspicer. Hans was a dockworker who had nightmares about a creature he called Styrix, shortly after he demonstratively rebuked the advances of a prostitute by telling her that he was devoted to his wife. Within days of first reporting these nightmares, he began to grow ill. He vanished without a trace shortly after that. After spending a few days attempting to identify the prostitute

whose propositions he had refused, or even someone who knew who she might have been, we gave up the search. The similarities between Mr. Ray's case and the strange disappearance of Hans Brodspicer are marked. The occurrence of nightmares might also be a symptom of night hag activity, if anything at all can be read into the "incantation" that Dr. Van Richten found in the Healing Hands hospice.

Regardless, this mystery in Martira Bay bears more investigating. Alanik Ray and Laurie have discussed returning to Martira Bay once spring arrives. If this comes to pass, we shall undoubtedly learn if Styrix is real or not, for nothing remains hidden once the great detective turns his mind to unveiling it.

—GWF

Dr. Van Richten's conclusion that night hags are a more evolved state of hag is inaccurate. These creatures are, in fact, natives of the most evil Lower Planes. They rarely venture to the Prime Material Plane, and they would never voluntarily enter the RAVENLOFT setting. Among educated Outer Planes beings (such as the night hags), it is thought of as a "realm of imprisonment." Planewalkers go in, but they do not come out.

Gennifer speculates that Hans Brodspicer fell victim to a night hag. One of these foul creatures may have become trapped within the confines of the RAVENLOFT setting. The night hag, Styrix, lairs on the outskirts of Martira Bay, prowling that city's Waterfront District. Her victims feed her ravenous hunger for the flesh of sentient beings, and she uses their souls to power a magical device she has created. Called the *Rift Spanner*, the device is intended to transport her across the dimensions, from the campaign world back to her home on the Lower Planes.

Styrix, her night hag abilities, and the *Rift Spanner* are described in the *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix II* (TSR #2139), while generic night hags, their native environment, and overall goals are described in the *PLANESCAPE MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix*.

Spectral Hags: The Undead

In most cases, death marks the end of a being's evil, even for a powerful creature such as a hag. Still, it is not unheard of for people of great strength of will to cling to this existence even beyond the end of their natural lives, especially if they die in a particularly emotional state or with the feeling that they have left a critical task unfinished. Hags are no different.

In their long battle against hags, the witches of Sister Marena's coven have faced several hags who returned from the dead to avenge their slayings. Sister Marena herself only narrowly escaped a confrontation with one. Although I have myself not faced one of these beings in combat, I believe I have enough reliable accounts of them to accurately describe the nature of these beings. They display the qualities of many other ghosts and phantoms that haunt our land, a topic that I treated in great length in my *Guide to Ghosts* [found in Van Richten's *Monster Hunter's Compendium*, Volume Two—GWF].

The annis held me firmly against the wall, her talons cutting into my arms as

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she ignored my feeble kicks to her torso. She cackled and said, "As ended the mother, so ends the daughter. As the day draws to an end, so does the proud history of the Benarden witches come to a close. I shall enjoy watching the blood pump from your body, Marena Benarden!"

Hasiaph bared her fangs and leaned close, her fetid breath oddly cool on my face. She was about to rip my throat out when she suddenly jerked backward. She released me from her grip, a startled look on her face. I admit that even through my pain, I too felt a surge of surprise, for protruding from her chest was Gondegal's rune-engraved blade.

The monstrous crone let out a coughing moan and slipped to the floor. Even as she fell, Gondegal withdrew his sword and severed her head from her shoulders with a mighty blow. My legs gave out also, and a battered and bloody Gondegal rushed to help me to my feet. A question formed on my lips, but before I could ask how he had survived the fall from the parapet, I spotted movement behind Gondegal. He noticed the shift in my expression, because he whirled about, ready to face the new threat.

A fine mist rose from the blood spilling from Hasiaph's body. It slowly coalesced into a large, humanoid shape. Gondegal and I recognized the form, uttering shocked gasps in unison: We were watching the formation of a spectral hag! Hasiaph's hatred of my lineage was so strong that even death would not stop her from slaying me and wiping it out!

Even before her shape was fully defined, she threw back her head and issued the hideous cackle with which she had revealed her true nature earlier. Once again, I felt the blood freeze in my veins. Pain and fear overwhelmed me. I burst into tears and shrieked like a baby.

Gondegal uttered a string of oaths so intense that I blush even while recalling them as I write this. He started to retreat, holding his magical sword in a

guarding stance and urged me to follow. My legs would not obey. All I could do was stare at Hasiaph's transparent form and weep hysterically. He then grabbed me and threw me over his shoulder, fleeing the ruined castle as swiftly as possible.

—From the private journal of
Sister Marena of the
Order of Healing Hands

Spectral hags retain the appearance and basic level of combat skills they enjoyed in life, although they appear to have lost the ability to mask their hideous appearance behind more pleasing visages. They are also very clearly incorporeal. As with most other ghosts, they can only be hit by weapons that are enchanted, and they are immune to all spells that affect the mind or living biological processes of the body.

Every touch from a spectral hag, from a caress to a savage blow, drains life energy from the victim with an intensity that mirrors that of the average vampire. As I demonstrated in my *Guide to Ghosts*, this ability is not unremarkable among evil spirits by itself. There is an additional twist to this power as it is displayed in the spectral hag, however: The souls of those so slain become trapped in an undead state as spectres under the undead hag's command, serving her in death as her minions served her in life.

Although I have already dismissed a link between vampires and hags in relation to their magical resistance, when I discovered the nature of their powers as undead, I had to revisit that dismissal. Their life-draining powers and resistance to magic is close to that of vampires.

Is it possible for a living being and undead creatures to somehow be drawing from the same source, the theoretical Negative Material Plane to which many philosophers believe that undead creatures are linked? Or is there a hidden link between hags and the undead that has escaped the notice of the witches and warlocks who have

been standing against them since before recorded history? I would not be surprised if scholars following me discover that there is a link between this resistance to magic and the evil nature of the creatures we battle, nor would I be surprised if they show that link has nothing whatsoever to do with the Negative Material Plane. There is much we still have to learn about the forces that both direct and hold together the universe.

But, I digress. Let it be said that there are many mysteries surrounding the spectral hag, and that the greatest of those mysteries is perhaps the origin of their most monstrous power—their ability to turn an innocent maiden into a twisted monster as she was in life. Each spectral hag has this ability, a ritual that she seems to gain an instinctive understanding of after her death. The ritual is normally only known by, and can only be performed by, hags who are part of a hag covey, as described in full

in the following chapter. Nonetheless, all spectral hags possess knowledge of this vile talent and can perform it whether or not they were part of a covey in life. Because of this, spectral hags can spread even more pain and suffering than they did in life, visiting more than just death on the beautiful maidens they hate with such passion, turning them into instruments of destruction and evil.

As with all undead creatures, the spectral hag also has its weaknesses. Priests and some holy warriors can drive her off by confronting her forcefully and putting their faith in the power of their gods. The spectral hag also burns when holy water is sprayed on her insubstantial form. Finally, a spectral hag is utterly powerless if exposed to sunlight. The rays of that blessed orb do not destroy her, but they do render her utterly powerless; she does not become invisible, so if a group of hunters can prevent her from escaping, killing her should be easy.

Spectral Hags

Spectral hags are described in the *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix III*. The following notes allow Dungeon Masters without access to that resource to roughly approximate spectral hags in their campaigns.

Spectral hags retain all abilities, powers, and defenses they possessed in life, including their hit points and their massive physical strength (and resulting combat bonuses), despite the fact that they no longer possess physical bodies.

Spectral hags no longer use weapons. Instead, they rely on their deadly, icy touch, which inflicts 1d8 points of damage and drains two life energy levels from the victim of the attack. Any being totally drained of life energy becomes a full-strength spectre under the control of the foul hag. A spectral hag is usually encountered with 3d6 spectres who were once her enemies.

Spectral hags can be hit only by weapons of +1 or better enchantment. They enjoy all the standard immunities

of ghosts, spectres, and other incorporeal undead.

The most powerful new ability gained by spectral hags is the ability to transform innocent females into living hags by performing a ritual at certain times of the month. This ability is normally reserved only for hag coveys, but individual spectral hags can perform it as well. Rules for this twisted ability are provided in Chapter Two. Victims so transformed are treated as though they were under the influence of a permanent *charm person* spell cast by the spectral hag.

Being undead, spectral hags can be turned by priests and paladins. Holy water inflicts 2d4 points of damage when splashed on them. A *raise dead* spell instantly destroys a spectral hag if her magic resistance is overcome and she fails a saving throw vs. spell. Further, spectral hags are completely powerless while exposed to sunlight. It does not harm them, but their tie to the Negative Material Plane is sufficiently weakened that they cannot affect anything around them. They may still be attacked, however.

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Macbeth: How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags! What is 't you do?

Three Witches: A deed without a name.

—William Shakespeare
Macbeth

CHAPTER TWO: HAG COVEYS



ne statement that holds true for nearly all endeavors is this: *There is strength in numbers.* It is a truth that has kept alive many of

those who have taken up arms against the evil creatures that plague our lands. It is also a truth from which those very evil creatures gain strength.

Undead of all types enslave lesser undead, werebeasts hunt in packs, and even bandits and Vistani travel in bands. However, few of them draw as much strength from their numbers as do hags. Although mostly solitary creatures, hags occasionally band together in what are termed *coveys*. With their combined evil genius and minions thus pooled, it is clear that together they can form a great threat. Furthermore, a hag covey's members gain powers they do not possess as individuals. These powers are often deadlier than can be believed.

Hag Coveys

The basic hag covey consists of three hags. Semine is familiar with at least one covey that consists of four hags, but there is little benefit to be gained for the members beyond the first three. As far as she knows, there is theoretically no limit to the number of hags that can be part of a covey. However, only three are required to execute the mightiest of the covey's abilities—the casting of covey rituals. Several members of the Healing Hands coven confirmed Semine's observations, commenting that if there's anything that proves hag coveys have no relation to witch and warlock covens, it is that as the number of witches or warlocks who band together increases,

the scope of what they can do with the magic widens. This is clearly not the case with hags, and it is something the world should be grateful for.

The base covey is always composed of three hags, although they can be in any combination (two greenhags, one annis; one sea hag, one annis, one greenhag; and so on). The specific powers and abilities of individual coveys vary, reflecting the interests and goals of the hags that comprise them.

Like solitary hags, coveys dwell in relatively isolated places, typically glens deep within forests. Here, the hags inhabit a small cave or shack, while their minions live in hovels or caves nearby. Each covey is guarded by a large number of hag minions. It is virtually impossible to predict who or what these might be, or how many creatures might be in the service of the hags, but there does not seem to be a covey in existence that does not have at least a few minions.

A covey has more use for minions than individual hags do. Hag coveys not only tend to take more prisoners than solitary hags, but they also engage in activities that may open them up to attack by cunning foes. They research unique magical forms, covey spells, and covey rituals. Prisoners are frequently used as raw materials to further their magical researches. More often than not, those poor souls who are imprisoned by hags would be better off dead.

Telltale signs allow travelers and hag hunters to recognize whether they have stumbled onto the dwelling place of a hag covey. First, near every hag covey is a clearing strewn with the bones of dozens or hundreds of humanoids, the remains of countless hag meals. Although this clearing need not necessarily be adjacent to the glade where the covey lives, it is a certainty

Hag Coveys

When hags join together in a covey, they keep their individual minions. Therefore, when generating a covey, the Dungeon Master should roll on the appropriate tables in the previous chapter and add the results into a single formidable force of guardians. If the list of minions ends up being an incompatible one—if two or more races are selected that are enemies of each other, or if there is another logic problem with the creatures being at the same place and working together—the Dungeon Master can remove one kind of creature, assume one group is traitorous to the hags (the creatures are willing to help the party to get rid of their enemies and hag enslavers), or just assume that the stronger creature type has sufficiently dominated the lesser one in order for them to function as one unit.

As Van Richten mentioned, hag coveys frequently keep prisoners in earthen pits near their lair. Particularly powerful or dangerous prisoners are sometimes kept in a *forcecage*. The

Dungeon Master can use the following table to determine the nature of the prisoner.

Hag Prisoners Table

1d100	Result
01–05	No prisoner
06–09	Dead prisoner
10	Dead prisoner, now a wight
11–45	Zero-level, human female, helpless and afraid
46–60	1st–6th-level fighter, driven insane by torture; might attack, might do nothing
61–66	1st–6th-level attractive female thief; will rob party, despite her gratitude
67–70	7th–10th-level cleric, whose church rewards the party for the rescue
71–90	<i>Polymorphed</i> hag minion wearing a <i>hag eye</i> (see later for <i>hag eye</i> information); the minion appears to be an attractive human female
91–00	Zero-level human couple, female and male, terrified and helpless

that it is nearby. Hags never bury their victims' remains, leaving them exposed to fate and the elements both as an act of blasphemy and so that they may have a ready supply of bones for use in powerful necromantic magic.

Second, every hag covey will have one or more pits within which they keep their prisoners. While goblins and other humanoids may keep prisoners in pits as well, those pits are rarely as heavily guarded as those found near covey lairs. More on the surroundings of hag coveys is given in Chapter Five.

Covey Spells

Least vile among the activities that a covey undertakes is spell research. In the claws of hags, magic is only used for twisted and evil purposes. As solitary hags devote much of their time to devising traps for unsuspecting victims, hag coveys likewise spend a

substantial amount of time in evil-natured spell research.

Coveys focus much of their attention on wizard magic, but many mages scoff at the quality of hag spellbooks. Fiori ridiculed the spellbook we recovered from the lair of a covey in Valachan that we confronted and destroyed. However, when she found a wizard adaptation of a priest spell—a spell the hags referred to as *cause light wounds*—her scoffing became subdued, and the hunger for magic that all wizards know took hold in her.

Apparently, Fiori found a number of innovations within the spellbook, spells she said that she would have thought impossible if she was not looking at them. She was particularly fascinated by the way the hags seemed to constantly improve the spells they researched. After studying the spellbook for a few days, she declared that, despite the apparent absence of any organizing principle in the

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spellbook or to the spells themselves, she was looking at a magical system superior to the one her own people used. Like all Sithicans, Fiori is an extremely proud (some might say arrogant) woman, so the hags' magical system must be truly remarkable. Fiori stated that she recognized many of the spells described in the spellbook as reinventions or independent creations of magic widely available to sorcerers in her homeland. If she had not seen the evil deeds done by the covey with her own eyes, I suspect that she would have felt regret over having slain them, as I later heard her comment that one or more of the hags must have been a magical genius.

Covey Rituals

Covey spellbooks are primarily devoted to the recording of powerful magical

incantations that hags refer to as "covey rituals." Semine and Marena both stated that covey rituals are hardly ever employed in combat, nor are most of them even suitable for such use. Instead, they are one of the primary tools used by hags while weaving their wicked plots against nearby settlements. A common ploy is to use covey rituals to either force or trick victims into performing heinous acts that usually result in leading more victims into their web of evil and deception. Some of these victims are used to further the hags' quest to spread chaos and destruction, while other victims are devoured. Any creature who resists the covey is immediately devoured alive.

Covey rituals have their origins in the same hazy past that gave birth to the hag races. Semine said that the hag who taught her during the Change told her of

Hag Covey Spellbooks

Covey spellbooks are a collection of notes and bizarre formulas. It is extremely rare for any of the spells recorded in them to resemble the neatly codified format in typical wizard spellbooks; even bardic spellbooks appear neat and orderly by comparison. Although coveys could probably draw on spellbooks seized from wizards they murder, they rarely do, with the exception of hags who were trained as wizards before the Change. Coveys never possess more than one covey spellbook each, although they may, of course, have seized spellbooks from characters they slew, or one of the hags may still be a spellcaster from her days before the Change.

Covey Spells

A covey spellbook may contain (1 in 6 chance) variants on wizard or priest spells researched by the covey. If the spellbook does not contain wizard spells, it has the covey's rituals (see later) described within its pages.

If a covey spellbook contains noncovey ritual spells, the Dungeon Master should roll on Table 90 (Scrolls) in the *DUNGEON MASTER Guide*,

considering the number of spells indicated to be the ones found in the covey spellbook, excluding covey rituals. Any priest spells indicated are treated as wizard spells that are two levels above that listed in the *Player's Handbook* or other sources. (For example, *cause light wounds* is a 3rd-level wizard spell if it is found in a covey spellbook.) In addition, bizarre variants of established spells are often in their repertoire, such as a *magic missile* spell that causes a large bee to materialize and sting the target of the spell.

To preserve game balance and the separation of classes, priest spells found translated into wizard spells in covey spellbooks cannot be used by hero wizards except in rare circumstances and for limited times. Though curative spells are properly in the realm of clerical magic, a wizard spell that somewhat duplicates a curative spell (such as *neutralize poison*) might be usable but once with a large amount of alchemical equipment, effort, and expense.

Each covey member can memorize one of the spells in the covey spellbook per day. The spell is treated as if it is cast by a 9th-level caster.

Hag Covey Rituals

As mentioned by Van Richten (and detailed in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome), hag coveys can perform rituals that cause effects similar to high-level wizard spells. The time it takes to perform these rituals is equal to the casting time of the equivalent wizard spell. The covey must also possess the needed components mentioned, with the additional requirement that all three hags must be within 10 feet of one another and conscious. (One or more of them can be paralyzed, blinded, or otherwise disabled, but as long as they are all conscious and at least one hag is able to perform any verbal and somatic components to the ritual, it can be performed.) Once the ritual has been started, all three hags must be disabled in order to stop the spell effect from taking hold. Each covey ritual can be used once per day. They take effect as though cast by a 9th-level wizard.

Although the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* tome lists a selection of spells that hag rituals mimic, that list is not complete. Different coveys perform different rituals, depending on what research they have undertaken. The schemes hatched by the covey and the strategies used in executing them are frequently determined by the rituals the covey possesses. Therefore, the types of rituals a covey can cast are important because they determine to a large extent how the hags relate to the story line of a given adventure or campaign.

the powers of coveys, but the rituals themselves would have to be discovered through experimentation performed by a covey. Though Semine had never joined a covey and thus had never cast a covey ritual, she saw their effects, as did I when my comrades and I stood against the Valachan covey. Fiori was also very generous with her insights as she studied the covey spellbook we seized.

The descriptions of covey rituals vary greatly in length, ranging anywhere from a brief paragraph to several pages of

To determine which rituals a hag covey knows, the Dungeon Master can use either the default list in the *MONSTROUS MANUAL* or roll once on the Hag Covey Ritual Table that follows. Naturally, if the Dungeon Master already has specific activities in mind that the covey will undertake, then the rituals to which the covey has access should be defined. (For example, the Dungeon Master may decide that a covey has access to a handful of priest spells as well as wizard spells, so that the hags are able to perform specific acts.) We recommend one rule of thumb: No covey should have access to more than nine such rituals.

Hag Covey Ritual Table

1d100 Ritual List

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | <i>Curse, animate dead, telekinesis, control weather, death fog, maze, forcecage</i> |
| 2 | <i>Polymorph other, reincarnation, dream, veil, forcecage, mind blank, sink</i> |
| 3 | <i>Curse, polymorph other, animate dead, dream, mass charm, veil, forcecage</i> |
| 4 | <i>False vision, control weather, vision, forcecage, mass charm, mind blank</i> |
| 5 | <i>Curse, animate dead, conjure elemental, veil, forcecage, maze, mind blank</i> |
| 6 | <i>Polymorph other, animate dead, false vision, dream, veil, maze, forcecage</i> |

detailed notes regarding observations of effects the ritual has and quickly jotted notes on how the ritual is performed. As with the other spells, covey rituals appear to be group projects that the hags constantly modify and test. Fiori was not as impressed with them as she was with the variations on standard common spells, but she did find them to be interesting versions of powerful magic that she had rarely seen practiced.

Covey rituals are not, however, usable by those who, like Fiori, cast traditional



magic spells. Nor can witches and warlocks use them. Although Fiori was able to draw parallels between the covey rituals and standard magic, she was unable to successfully create any spell effects with the rituals. This supports Marena's notion that hags in a covey form spiritual bonds similar to those between members of covens. However, there is also evidence to indicate that hag coveys are not similar at all to witch covens; hags seem to retain some of their covey abilities even after a covey has lost members or otherwise been disbanded. Nonetheless, it is clear both from many field and battle observations that covey rituals can be performed only if all three covey members are present and acting in concert.

Hag Eyes

One of the most remarkable and disturbing benefits that hags gain from banding together in a covey is the ability to create magical devices known as *hag eyes*. These are created by magical rituals that are a closely guarded secret. Semine refused to reveal any details on *hag eyes*, so I had to rely on my own experience and the expertise of the members of the Hospice of the Healing Hands. A *hag eye* permits the covey members to view the surroundings of its bearer, no matter where the bearer of the device is. A *hag eye* also allows the covey to dispatch its minions on spying

missions and to be sure of receiving accurate information so long as the minion bearing the *hag eye* reaches the location of interest to the hag.

All that is known about the creation of a *hag eye* is that the ritual requires a gemstone, worth no less than 10 gp, and the left eye of a humanoid being. The rest of the method of their creation remains an unknown, but the item clearly yields an effect similar to that of a wizard's *crystal ball* or scrying pool. By focusing their will, the hags who created the *hag eye* can view the area around the eye by gazing into a cauldron filled with liquid.

Hag eyes appear to be gems of fairly low value, rarely appraised for more than 10–20 gp. They are usually set in medallions or brooches of steel, impure silver, or bronze—a cheap metal that is appropriate to the seeming value of the gem, making the *hag eyes* inconspicuous. While hags typically outfit their minions with *hag eyes*, they might also, while cloaked in illusions, give *hag eyes* to their unsuspecting enemies so coveys will know their every move.

The stalwart band that joined me in a battle against a greenhag-annis covey in northern Valachan learned how dangerous *hag eyes* can be. A young warrior, Randall by name, inadvertently allowed the covey to know our every move by accepting a gift from someone who he believed was in love with him, but who was actually a hag in disguise. I can hardly fault the young man or any of my companions for our oversight. After all, most magical items require components of the finest quality, yet the brooch that contains a *hag eye* will often barely seem worth stealing to a thief, and the brooch in question was not unlike others young lovers give as gifts.

Hag eyes radiate magic and even possess a curious semblance of life. Fiori speculated that the covey transfers a portion of its own life force into the gemstone as the hags enchant the eyeball. According to Fiori, the *hag eye* is then linked to the covey through the same Negative Material Plane energy that permits some vampires to establish

psychic and physical links with those they have fed on.

Fiori's theory has its origin in a most curious event that *unfolded* as we faced the Valachan covey in final battle. One of the hags attempted to taunt young Randall by revealing herself to be his beloved. In a fit of rage, he threw the

brooch she had given him to the ground, then smashed it with his sword. One of the greenhags shrieked as blood suddenly burst forth from her eyes while the monster that had been taunting Randall staggered back as if struck by a mighty blow. Essentially, an attack on a *hag eye* that results in its destruction is

Hag Eyes

While *detect magic* will indeed reveal a *hag eye* as magical, it is not until it is viewed using *true seeing* that it is revealed as a scrying device. *Detect magic* yields an inconclusive result stating the item seems to be fluctuating between Necromantic and Divination magic. *True seeing* reveals a ghostly image of an eye at the center of the gem. The eye seems to gaze at the person examining the gem, while the stone itself appears to be some sort of gelatinous substance that pulses slightly, like a beating heart. The Dungeon Master should attempt to describe the true appearance of a *hag eye* as something repulsive and strangely alive.

Van Richten is correct in his statement that destroying a *hag eye* causes a backlash to strike one of the hags in the covey responsible for its creation. Specifically, the hag who harvested the eye used in the magical item's creation is the one who is injured, immediately suffering 1d10 points of damage. She is also blinded for 24 hours. (Only a *heal* spell can alleviate the blindness before that time.) Further, any other of the hags who were gazing through the eye at the time of its destruction must roll a saving throw vs. spell or likewise suffer 1d10 points of damage. They are not struck blind.

All *hag eyes* function as described by Van Richten and in the MONSTROUS MANUAL tome, but a few have additional magical effects that are derived from the raw materials (the eye plucked from a living being). These side effects may insure that characters who claim such a piece of jewelry may not recognize it for the insidious spying device that it is. While the bearer enjoys whatever benefit the item grants, the bearer also gives

valuable information to a *hag covey*—information might get friends and loved ones killed, or even make the *hag covey* privy to the strategies commonly employed by the heroes. This will make any battles against the hags far more difficult, since they will be prepared for whatever tricks the heroes rely on, having had a close-up look at their activities, thanks to the *hag eye*.

The following table and descriptions allow Dungeon Masters to determine the nature of any *hag eyes* claimed from their servants. Dungeon Masters are, of course, welcome to make up their own unusual additional effects for *hag eyes* in their personal campaigns. The trick here is to mask the fact that the magical item that the party has found or plundered from a fallen foe is a *hag eye*, and portray it as some other sort of unique magical item.

Hag Eye Table

2d6	Effect
2-3	No special effects
4	Dwarf: Wearer has 90% chance to detect sloping passages and shifting walls
5	Elf: Wearer has 90% immunity to paralyzation attacks
6-7	No special effects
8	Halfling: Wearer has 90% chance to spot secret doors when actively searching
9	Medusa: Wearer has 90% immunity to petrification attacks
10	Minotaur: Wearer has 90% immunity to <i>maze</i> and <i>misdirection</i> spells
11	Nereid: Wearer has 90% immunity to contact poisons
12	Vampire: Wearer has 90% immunity to <i>ESP</i> and all <i>charm</i> effects

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more devastating than most direct attacks will ever be, particularly against creatures such as greenhags.

After Randall destroyed the *hag eye* that had been given to him as a gift, even I was able to bring down one of the greenhags single-handedly. Admittedly, she was stumbling around, blind and shrieking, as blood flowed from her wounded eyes. As I have said many times, when fighting creatures of darkness one must take advantage of any opportunity that presents itself.

After the battle, we found three other amulets identical with the one Randall had worn. Apparently, a covey can manufacture any number of *hag eyes*. Safely back in Mordentshire, Fiori studied them, realized they were all indeed magical and, drawing on her findings and the information I had collected months earlier during my stay at the Hospice of Healing Hands, formulated her theory.

Sadly, none of the *hag eyes* remain in our possession. Some of the covey's surviving minions—a group of paka—staged a daring raid on my home, killing Randall in the process and absconding with the *hag eyes* and a number of my notebooks and other artifacts from my collection. I consider those actions a clear indicator of how loyal these cat people are to the annis.

Spawning Rituals

Undoubtedly, the most obscene ability that a hag covey bestows on its members is a way to create more members of the foul hag races. According to Semine, spawning rituals are among those most commonly shared by older hags with hags who are completing the Change, as well as with those whom the older hags wish to have join a covey. "Spawning rituals are a way to fulfill the need to have offspring without exposing ourselves to the inconvenience of pregnancy," said Semine.

Once a hag joins a covey, she can transform females of humanoid races into mature hags, bringing the Change to them through magical means. They appear to be able to identify females

suitable for transformation by scent, although I am certain there is some form of magic involved as well.

Semine later added that using these rituals is the preferred way to replace a covey member should one die or decide to leave the covey. Spawning rituals are the only rituals that individual hags can use if apart from a covey. However, according to Semine, the ritual never works unless the hag has been part of a covey at some point; something unknown and mysterious continues to be part of a hag's makeup even after her covey is gone. Members of the Healing Hands coven expressed the opinion that whatever evil forces bless the hags with power when they band together in coveys also makes sure that individual hags retain the ability to rebuild a covey, or perhaps even fracture a single covey into three. This theory has some chilling implications.

Females who are transformed by spawning rituals become slavishly devoted to the hag who so twisted them, much like a newly risen vampire is loyal to the creature who brought the curse of undeath upon it. Since hags who come into existence through more natural means are supremely arrogant, a covey that consists of a single "real" hag and two that are created through the use of spawning rituals will be a covey that poses a tremendous threat to all innocent people unfortunate enough to dwell near it. Such a covey will work toward a single goal, because it has a clear, undisputed leader whose decisions and goals are never called into question. Hags that come into being through the spawning ritual remain under the control of their creator until the creator is slain. At that time, they become their own masters and carry out their own evil schemes.

While most covey rituals are the same regardless of which hag performs them, according to Semine, the ritual to transform a maiden into a hag varies according to the type of hag. The one common denominator between the ritual is that the females they use are always ones of great beauty. Any woman would be suitable, but that the hags' great

hatred of all beautiful things causes them to target only attractive females.

An annis performs the spawning ritual on the night of the new moon, when she can transform a purehearted female of any race into an annis. The annis picks the victim very carefully, using not only great beauty as a criterion but also selecting women who are widely admired and loved by members of their community. A noble young woman who is known for her generosity and who actively attempts to help the sick and crippled in her city is a prime target for an annis.

The greenhag spawning ritual must be performed on any night during which the moon is full. However, the greenhag ritual can transform only elf women. Since elves are found in large numbers only in Sithicus and eastern Darkon, greenhags are also more common in those domains. Like the annis, the greenhag selects women who are well loved in their communities, so that they can spread sorrow while gaining a minion. As readers may know, elves are fiercely protective of their own kind, so greenhags may well find themselves in a great deal of trouble after abducting their victims.

Sea hags perform their spawning ritual using female halflings, gnomes, or dwarves. When the moon slips into full nighttime eclipse, the sea hags hold their foul rituals and condemn the poor captives to an existence of horror and misery. Of the three rituals, the sea hag's is clearly the most difficult to perform. Halflings, gnomes, and dwarves are even more rare than elves—being found in few places outside Darkon—and their communities are rarely located in the areas where sea hags make their homes. The scarcity of needed victims near the sea hag's habitats, and the fact that a lunar eclipse occurs only once every five or six years, means that sea hags only rarely perform their spawning ritual. Of course, when a lunar eclipse draws near, there is a good chance that sea hags will travel inland to demihuman communities in search of victims.

Unlike their counterparts, sea hags are not concerned about the beauty of their victims, only that they are pure of

heart and of the proper racial stock. This is not surprising, I suppose, considering the limited time frame they have in which to perform their spawning rituals. However, according to Semine, sea hags typically remain in the area where they performed the spawning ritual for several months after its completion, sending the newly created hag against her former friends and loved ones.

As I mentioned earlier, spectral hags can also perform the spawning ritual. They use the ritual that is appropriate to what sort of hags they were in life, and they are subject to the same kind of restrictions as their living counterparts. A living hag, not a spectral one, is the result.

Suitable candidates for the spawning ritual are female characters of good alignment. Any hag that is a member of a covey can tell whether any female she meets fits into this category. This ability is considered Divination magic, so characters protected from this kind of magic are protected from the hag ability as well.

When a victim is subjected to the spawning ritual, she must make a saving throw vs. polymorph with a -2 penalty. If the save is successful, the hag's ritual fails. The victim is not safe yet, however, as the angry hags invariably try to slay and devour her. A successful transformation causes the victim to become an average hag of the same type that performed the spawning ritual. She ages according to the standard rules presented in the previous chapter, shifts to the alignment of the appropriate hag type, and is considered to be under the effect of a permanent *charm person* spell that is treated as if cast by her "creator." (The transformed woman must make a saving throw against the *charm* only if the master hag orders her into a clearly dangerous situation, as described in the description of *charm person*.)

The spawning ritual cannot be undone by any magic other than a *wish* spell. Even if changed back, the victim retains her evil alignment until a second *wish* spell is used.

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Watho at length had her desire, for witches often get what they want...

—George MacDonald

“The Romance of Photogen and Nycteris”

CHAPTER THREE: WITCHES, WARLOCKS, AND HEDGE MAGICIANS



aking up arms against hags brings with it challenges unlike any other. Hags are dangerous, fearsome, and intelligent

foes, as intelligent and cunning as vampires and far more powerful than most werebeasts. Still, death at the claws of hags is not the greatest danger a hunter can face. No, the greatest danger is for the hunter to mistake other practitioners of magic for hags, and slay innocent victims. A hunter might also attack innocent outcasts who simply do not fit in with their communities. Unlike vampires and werebeasts, hags are very adept at hiding among us, because in most cases they grew up among us. Their magical corruption can be as subtle as each hag chooses it to be.

It is human nature to fear that which we do not understand. It is also human nature to assume that what we fear is evil. When we discover that practitioners of strange magic reside among us, we invariably assume that they are agents of destructive forces that are spreading corruption in our midst. While I would be the last to encourage anyone to reduce their vigilance, I would ask that such vigilance be total, that hag hunters take it on themselves to verify that their victims are indeed guilty of wickedness.

In this chapter, I impart the knowledge I have of several minor groups of magic-wielders that exist among us. Read carefully and weigh this material in your mind before you assume you have uncovered a hag or a hag covey. Hags often attempt to pass themselves off as something they are not, and they delight in framing others as monsters.

I devote the majority of this text to a group of women and men who call themselves witches and warlocks, and who are mostly associated with the Church of Hala. They are perhaps the more numerous of these rarely seen “hedge magicians.” If approached properly, they might prove to be valuable allies in your struggle against the forces of darkness. They have been waging the same struggle for a long time and have often kept records that date back generations. This group is particularly relevant in any struggle against hags, as witches and warlocks are singularly devoted to sweeping those foul creatures from the face of the earth.

Witches and Warlocks

A frequent subject of study for me is that of the cultures that exist hidden in our midst. Some are dangerous, such as the network of werewolves who procure victims for one another from Verbek to Hazlan, while others work toward furthering the cause of good wherever they can, such as the band of warriors known as the Knights of the Shadows. A variety of other societies exist in the middle ground between these two, blending in more or less effectively with those who live around them. Your best friend might lead a secret life that you could not imagine even in your wildest dreams, and the activities he undertakes might be fair or foul. Only those who are part of his secret society will ever know the truth.

Few peoples who populate the domains of our land, however, have sparked greater fascination in me than the witches and warlocks of the Church of Hala. Unlike so many of the hidden power groups that exist in the land, the only agenda held by these people is to continue their existence and to further their magical crafts and religious faith. Many of them also share a desire to

advance the cause of good where possible. This is not to say that they are all righteous and upstanding folk, as even they will admit that there are those among their ranks who are greedy, selfish, larcenous, or even evil to the core. As a whole, though, they are more likely to be devoted to the same ideals as a person who would take up arms against vampires, werebeasts, and other children of the night. Trusting others in the struggle against evil is always a risk, but from what I have learned and experienced, approaching the Church of Hala in the hopes of finding allies or information is less risky than many other courses of action.

History and Legends

As with virtually every other people in existence, the roots of the witches and warlocks are lost in the mists of time and myth. Different myths are present in the archives at the Hospice of Healing Hands, and when I visited another center of witch activity—the Sisters of Grace Hospice in Falkovnia—I found yet another myth describing the origins of witches and warlocks. The collection of material at the Sisters of Grace Hospice was nowhere near as impressive as that at Healing Hands.

There is a common theme in these legends, speaking of gods that create a world, then withdraw, not caring to involve themselves directly in the lives of mortals for one reason or another. The exception is Hala, the goddess of healing that most witches and warlocks worship, and it is from her that witches and warlock claim to get their powers.

The most basic version of the creation myth and origin of the magical abilities of witches and warlocks is found in *Tales of the Ages*, a text widely used as a source of inspiration for high-ranking priests of Hala and all witches and warlocks.

In the beginning there was Chaos, a swirling gray mass without form and with no more substance than air. The

nine gods saw the Chaos, and they resolved to make the World, a place where those born of flesh would be left to their own devices.

The nine gods took the Chaos and etched patterns into it. They linked the patterns into the Weave. Upon the Weave, the gods built the World. The gods then found those born of flesh, and they placed them into the World.

Their work done, the gods withdrew from the World, believing it to be a place where those born of flesh would achieve both the greatest and darkest deeds possible. It would be a World shaped by the actions of those born of flesh, and the gods would interfere only by granting magical powers to their most loyal servants and those who gave them worship.

But one of the Nine Gods, she who is named Hala, knew more needed to be done. Alone among the gods, she felt the pain and suffering of the mortals that had been created to populate the World, and she could not stand idly by. The meager powers that the gods agreed to grant to their most loyal servants and those who gave them worship were not sufficient in Hala's mind.

However, the other gods would not permit any interference. The gods had agreed that beings born of flesh were the ones who were to shape the course of the World. The gods agreed that they would minimize their involvement. Hala claimed that none of them had foreseen what the World would become if those born of flesh were left to their own devices. She wanted to do more, so she took matters into her own hand and betrayed her promise to her fellow gods.

Hala reentered the World. She walked its hills and searched its villages. She searched for men and women who shared her desire to do more, who wanted to ease the pain and suffering of the mortals who had been created to populate the World.

Some of those born of flesh became her first priests, and to those she gave the gifts permitted by the other gods. From the ranks of her priests, she chose the Thirteen, her most devoted priests

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and priestesses, those who felt the pain and suffering of the mortals most strongly and who wanted to ease it. To these Thirteen, seven women and six men, she revealed the Weave and bound them to it. She granted them abilities like those of the gods. She gave them the ability to sense the Weave and the patterns the gods etched in Chaos when they created the World. She taught them how to use the Weave to further her goals and desires. Those born of flesh could not manipulate the Weave as effectively as the gods did, and the limitations of the flesh determined how the Weave would bend to their will. The gods had created males and females to be different, so their abilities to manipulate the Weave were different as well.

The text goes on to describe how Hala taught the first thirteen witches and warlocks to band together in covens to neutralize the differences between the sexes in drawing on the Weave, and how to use additional magical powers that are not available to individual warlocks and witches. I discuss covens and their makeup in the next chapter.

As for the magical abilities that witches and warlocks have been granted by Hala, it was explained to me that witches primarily cast spells that most closely resemble priests' magic, while warlocks cast spells that are similar to those cast by wizards. Both witches and warlocks claim that it is the indisputable biological difference in the sexes that causes the Weave to manifest itself differently when drawn upon. (This does not explain why both men and women can become normal mages or clerics, of course.) One warlock even went so far as stating that he and his wife, who was a witch, cannot even see the same patterns in the Weave when they are searching for spells. These differences are overcome once several witches or warlocks band together in covens.

The most fundamental belief of witches and warlocks is that they are charged by Hala herself to ease pain

and suffering in the land. They believe they have been given access to the most basic elements of creation, and with that power comes a responsibility to live up to the trust the goddess has placed in them.

"We are not priests, and we are not interested in converting others to our ways," Marena told me. "The church can certainly make the world a better place if only everyone would lead their lives as Hala suggests. Yet we do not force anything on anyone, except destruction on beings who are irredeemably evil."

The history of witches and warlocks is one of secrecy. As mentioned previously, they exist hidden among us, indistinguishable from our other neighbors. What histories they claim as their own are the chronicles of their families and those of the covens. Records of the battles that covens and witch and warlock lineages have waged against hags and dark sorcerers—some of the latter of whom also call themselves witches and warlocks, but should not be mistaken for those I discuss in this section—are part of the unique history of their secret society. True, the history of whatever domain witches or warlocks call home is also their history. They are very much part of the society around them, just as virtually all hospices of Hala are, and they do not wish to be apart from their communities.

"That's the primary reason we keep our talents secret from all but our own kind," Marena told me. "Too many people worship those with power, or at least treat them differently or attempt to manipulate them. We do not wish to be anyone's pawns, and we do not wish to be treated any differently from anyone else of our station. So, with the exception of those who choose to serve Hala directly, we make no effort to set ourselves apart."

Further, Marena added, by keeping a low profile, witches and warlocks can more easily help those they consider to be in need. Warlocks and witches are often at the forefront of movements to fight oppression or ease the suffering of

people. Like the goddess most of them honor, the majority of warlocks and witches put helping others as their highest priority. To set themselves apart from society is wrongful and to be avoided.

Society and Secrecy

As could be expected of a group that exists hidden and spread out among us, there is virtually no universal culture among the witches and warlocks. Their ranks are as diverse as the citizenry of the domains of our world. They do not even always agree on how to properly honor their deity Hala.

One trait shared by all witches and warlocks, however, is a deep, abiding love of privacy. Perhaps this is also a reason for their secrecy, as once someone has been recognized as special there is very little in that person's life that can remain private. Certainly, I can attest to the fact that my meager fame has brought me more trouble than joy, and I often wonder if I should have published my works under an assumed name! Incurring the wrath of countless creatures—some of them powerful rulers of domains in our land—has forced me to turn my home into a fortress. If witches and warlocks were to operate openly, they too would likely be besieged by those who believed their powers were evil, by those who do not understand them and wish to question them, or by those who want their help.

Another universal trait among witches and warlocks is a love of knowledge. Some witch covens devote most of their activities to recording and storing knowledge, as Marena's coven does, while others seek out and gather magical artifacts of all sorts. They are a highly scholarly and inquisitive people, and this is why they can be valuable allies of those who would battle darkness. The light of knowledge is our primary weapon.

The secrecy under which witches and warlocks operate is also a danger to them, which Marena came to recognize and is in part why she took me into

their confidence and sanctioned my inclusion of a brief overview of them in this volume. They are distrusted by other churches in the domains, and when discovered by independent crusaders against evil—such as many of you reading these very words—they are often mistaken for sinister forces. Sometimes they are engaging in sinister acts—as I have said, there are evil men and women among their ranks—but more often than not, they are upstanding individuals. (On speaking with Marena, I was surprised to look back and recognize that on four separate occasions where I thought I was being aided by a priest, I was actually being aided by a witch.) Sometimes, a village wise woman with magical abilities may indeed be a hag in disguise, but sometimes she may be a witch who is merely doing her best to advance the will of her goddess and to serve her community.

Witches and warlocks as described in this section are not common. There is a 2% chance that a village "wise woman" or "sage" is actually a witch or warlock, if the Dungeon Master is inclined to determine such things randomly. Nonplayer character witches and warlocks are typically of level 1d6+1.

The bond between witches and warlocks is their unique magical talents, their supposed gifts from Hala. As Marena revealed some of her secrets to me, I shared a few of them with the mage Fiori. She scoffed at the secrecy under which warlocks and witches operated, claiming that they were merely another stripe of wizards masking their activities in mystical jargon to baffle the uninitiated. The cynical elf commented that I was falling victim to their posturing, just as the people in her homeland believe the Order of High Sorcery is sanctioned by the gods themselves.

"Anyone can learn magic if she puts her mind to it," Fiori sniffed. "I'll wager that these people are no different. They

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are more sophisticated about their 'divine sanction' claptrap, but that's all."

Fiori also disputed Marena's claim that witches and warlocks were deeply private individuals who did not advertise their presence. "What good is a magical society if you do not recruit members?" Fiori asked. "Unless they cannibalize the ranks of their own church's clergy, how do they keep their organization going? My good doctor, they may have helped us against the hags, but they've sold you a false bill of goods in the process!"

I thought about Fiori's words, and I put her question to Marena and other people at the hospice. The reply was surprising; to be honest, I am not entirely sure that I believe it. Apparently, witches and warlocks can detect one another when they are within close proximity, without using their normal five senses. The connection they share with the Weave supposedly resonates in such a way that they can "hear," "see," or "feel" it in the other person. It is in this way that they recognize each other—and even recognize someone who has the potential to be a witch or warlock but who is unaware of it. According to Marena, the ability to draw on the Weave for magical power is inherited, and all witches and warlocks in the land are descended from the original thirteen chosen by Hala.

The Wisdom-check ability that witches and warlocks have to recognize each other is described in the DUNGEON MASTER Appendix, as part of the rules for hero witches and warlocks.

Spellcasting and the Weave

Although witches and warlocks are born with magical potential, it takes specific training for that potential to be realized. Marena and the others I spoke with at the hospice, as well as those witches I sought out in Falkovnia, refused to provide details on the training of potential witches and warlocks. They confided that they taught certain meditation techniques; what those techniques are is one secret none would share.

Some might think that this reticence would bolster Fiori's claim that the secrecy is just to add mysticism to the efforts of witches and warlocks. Nonetheless, there is little doubt in my mind that despite the fact that the spells cast by witches bear similarities to priests' magic, and those cast by warlocks bear similarities to wizards' magic, witches and warlocks wield a type of magic that is different from either two. Unsurprisingly, the witches and warlocks themselves claim that their magic resembles priest and wizard magic because at the most fundamental level, all magic comes from the same source: the power of creation as embodied by the Weave.

Aside from the claimed hereditary requirement, two physical components must be present in order for a witch or warlock to practice magic.

The first is some sort of object that holds personal significance to the caster, an item that will be used to channel the power of the Weave and transform it into spell effects. Marena characterized this item as an extension of body and soul that was not as frail as either. Reportedly, this item is created through solemn rituals, and some of the witch's or warlock's life force is infused in it.

The second component is the spellbook. As with wizards, the spells of a witch or warlock are arrived at through research and study. The process is very different, however, and the results are unlike anything that a wizard would recognize as a spell. Fiori's reaction upon being permitted to gaze into Marena's spellbook was "My, what pretty pictures you've drawn." Fiori also noted that there was no residual magic in the spellbooks of witches and warlocks as there is in those spellbooks of wizards. Fiori then claimed that witches are but priests who have adopted the trappings of wizards.

My observations lead me to believe there is far more to witches and warlocks than that. One of the rituals I was permitted to see was the method through which witches and warlocks gain their spells. They do so by entering a trance

and gazing on the Weave with their "mind's eye," hoping to locate and record a pattern of magical force that lets them create a particular magical effect. As they do so, they scribe the magical pattern in sand or another equally manipulable material. The caster must then perform experiments to verify that the pattern found is indeed the spell sought. Apparently, gazing on the Weave in this fashion is a hit-or-miss affair. Once the witch or warlock has determined that the pattern recorded is a workable spell—even if it is not the spell initially sought—the pattern is recorded in the spellbook in a permanent fashion, looking like a randomly drawn collection of colors and lines. The witch or warlock then memorizes the spell from the book as a wizard would, though without the use of words.

Clearly, on the surface, the witch and warlock appear to be crosses between a priest and a wizard. The spell focus is similar in function to a priest's holy symbol, while the spellbook is like that of a wizard. They memorize their spells as do wizards, but they cannot cast spells without their spell foci. A spell focus is the only required material component for the majority of witch and warlock spells.

Although most witches and warlocks I met were very devoted to Hala, none were able to wield the full powers of a priest or priestess. In fact, it appears that they practice their unique magical abilities to the exclusion of other forms of magic. One warlock I spoke to said that there was no need to learn other forms of magic, and that all the power a witch or warlock needs can be obtained by joining a coven. Whether they can master other forms of magic is unclear. Marena said that she believed they could not, but she also admitted that she was not aware of any witch or warlocks who had felt the inclination to try.

The witch and warlock kits are defined and detailed in the *DUNGEON MASTER* Appendix of this section. They cannot cast any magic other than their own peculiar sort.



Relations with Churches

A favorite topic in many temples in our realm is the lure of power. Another is the existence of hidden, corrupting influences. Believers can find protection through faithful devotion to the proper gods and their churches. It should be clear then that witches and warlocks are at risk of being obvious targets of priests of all stripes, even, at times, the Church of Hala itself.

In fact, one of the reasons that Marena gave for her desire to draw back the curtain from her kind at this date, and for choosing me as the medium through which she could communicate the facts about her people, was because there has been increasing pressure from the other churches of the land on the Church of Hala and witches and warlocks alike.

"The Great Upheaval struck terror in the hearts of many," she said, "and they are looking for scapegoats. Some priests of Hala have received visions from the goddess that even darker times are ahead for all of the people of the world. It is time for all of us to join together to resist such danger, and I am taking the first step."

As I have found witches and warlocks to be valuable allies, I want to dispel any misconceptions and ill will directed toward them that I can. Therefore, I now present witches and warlocks as they are perceived through the eyes of the various clergymen of the land. As I

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have mentioned in other works, they are often powerful and valuable allies in the struggle against evil, but their counsel is one that is invariably colored by their

devotion to their gods and their church. When dealing with a shadowy group like witches and warlocks, it is important to recognize that fact.

Churches in Van Richten's World

In the RAVENLOFT setting of the Demiplane of Dread, three major religions exist: the Church of Hala, the Church of Ezra, and the Church of Bane. All three are monotheistic in orientation, although their tenets acknowledge the existence of other gods and powers. The three churches are not uniform across the domains, but instead feature dogma and beliefs that vary greatly from region to region. For example, in some areas, the Church of Ezra preaches that Hala and Bane are merely different names or aspects of Ezra, while in other places a priest might label Hala and Bane as false or inferior gods.

Another unusual facet of religions in the Demiplane of Dread setting is that they are not quite so focused on alignment as is typical of religions in other AD&D worlds. The three major churches encompass a wide range of alignments, from lawful good to chaotic evil, under each umbrella of faith. This is why churches of the same faith might have widely differing beliefs from place to place. Nonetheless, each church has certain basic beliefs that are adhered to, regardless of regional differences.

All three faiths have standard AD&D game clerics in their ranks, with Bane and Ezra also featuring priests unique to their faiths. These are described in *Domains of Dread*, with Ezra's anchorites receiving the greatest amount of detail (see Chapter Five and Appendix Three). Hala also has a brand of "specialty priests," but these are warlocks and witches, which are never of the priest class proper.

Note: If this material is used in a campaign setting other than the Demiplane of Dread, the Dungeon Master can replace these churches with suitable counterparts.

The Church of Hala: The most noble goals in life are to ease the suffering of

the sick, to empower the weak and downtrodden, and to help those in need. These goals are primarily pursued through the hospices that can be found in virtually every domain. The Church of Hala does not actively proselytize its religion, and the hospices are always open to anyone in need. If someone expresses an interest in learning more about Hala, priests are always happy to talk about their goddess, but they do not do so uninvited. Generally speaking, the Church of Hala is of neutral good alignment.

Priestesses of Hala tend to wear simple robes and veils, while priests wear robes with large hoods. The color of the robes vary depending on the order, but they are mostly white or powder blue. Priests do not typically carry weapons, although they might on rare occasions if part of an adventuring party. When they do, they are limited to using blunt weapons.

The Church of Ezra: Followers should emulate the example set by Ezra before her ascension to godhood by combating corruption and destructive forces wherever they may be found. Of course, the definition of "corruption" is in the eye of the beholder. The Church of Ezra shares with Hala a desire to help the sick and injured, but attention is typically focused on those devoted to the faith of Ezra, with other individuals taking second place.

Priests of Ezra actively proselytize their faith at almost every opportunity, attempting constantly to win converts. However, they rarely insist that those who convert to the worship of Ezra swear off honoring the gods they previously worship, although this is not true of certain evil sects within the faith. Ultimately, the Church of Ezra is devoted to absorbing all other faiths and religions into the kind arms of its patron goddess. Generally speaking, the Church of Ezra is of lawful neutral

or lawful good alignment. More than any other major faith in the RAVENLOFT setting, Ezra's clergy and adherents represent all alignments. Priests and priestesses of Ezra favor dark clothing of any appropriate sort.

The Church of Bane: Banites believe that everyone is predestined to a certain lot in life, and those who rule or otherwise grow powerful do so because Bane permits it. Bane punishes those who would attempt to rise above their station. The Church of Bane believes that Bane is the highest and most powerful of all gods in the world, and there are many whispered tales that Ezra is a concubine of Bane rather than a full goddess in her own right. Hala is treated either as a servant of Bane or as a false goddess. Banites do not spread their faith so much as they attempt to drive off all other organized religions in the vicinity of their temples. The Church of Bane is generally of lawful neutral alignment, although strong streaks of lawful evil run through its teachings as well. (Players familiar with the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting should be aware that the Church of Bane in the RAVENLOFT setting differs from the one on Toril.) Priests of Bane wear red and black robes.

Relations with the Church of Hala

Obviously, relations here are mostly good, as the Church of Hala and the witches and warlocks of our land are almost entirely synonymous. However, until recently many low-ranking members of the priesthood did not understand that the majority of those staffing the faith's hospices and centers of learning were not priests at all, in the traditional sense. While the majority of Hala's clergy is favorably disposed toward witches and warlocks, as the clergy is granted at least the same degree of insight into their ways as I was, there are exceptions.

The clergy of the Church of Hala is supportive of warlock and witch covens, assuming they are not devoted to furthering evil goals. The priests frown strongly on solitary witches existing

outside the confines of their hospices and monastic orders, and actively oppose any solitary warlock who comes to the clergy's attention. Priests of Hala are greatly concerned about rogue warlocks, fearing that the destructive capabilities given to them by the Weave (or Hala, in the mind of many priests) will cause more suffering in the world than it will ease. According to Marena, several priests of Hala have cooperated with priests of Ezra or Bane in order to see a rogue warlock eliminated from an area.

Although my opinion is entirely irrelevant in this matter, I find myself in agreement with the priests of Hala, although I have to wonder if they should not be concerned about solitary witches as well. Far too often have I seen men and women who started out good at heart become corrupted by their own power because they became enamored with what they could do with it. Even without the ability to practice highly subtle magic, such people can do great harm to many innocents before stopped.

Considering the destructive potential of warlocks—a potential that is not even necessarily arrived at through years of study and devotion to the arcane art forms, so it is power gained without experience or concerted effort—I worry that an individual warlock would put his desires ahead of anything else and draw on the Weave to fulfill those desires in the quickest way possible. Such a person might cause a great deal of harm to anyone unfortunate enough to cross his path. Solitary witches are cause for concern because they, too, have the ability to use the Weave to bend people to their will, although they are far more likely to do it in a subtle fashion, using their magic to *charm* and *beguile* their way to success. Like the warlock, their powers are not always earned through hard work, and therefore solitary witches might not have the wisdom to resist the temptation to abuse those powers.

As will become clear in the next chapter, covens can help prevent warlocks and witches from falling to the temptation of pursuing power for its own sake. While covens give individual

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warlocks and witches more power, they also make them part of a whole and place their responsibility to that whole foremost in their minds. Priests of Hala want witches and warlocks to be possessed with a sense of community so that they can effectively further the church's goals through the powers of the Weave—which, as you recall, were given to them by Hala for the purpose of improving the lot of mortals in this tortured world.

Relations with the Church of Ezra

The Church of Ezra and the Church of Hala have always had a rocky relationship. The belief in Hala predates that in Ezra by a number of centuries, and some historians that say Ezra was a priestess of Hala before she ascended to godhood. Needless to say, as aggressive as the priests of Ezra have become in spreading their faith in recent years, this notion does not sit well with much of Ezra's clergy.

Nonetheless, the Great Cathedral, the central authority to which the many varied sects of Ezra look for their foundational doctrines, has made a point of stating that it considers the hospices operated by the Church of Hala to be a great benefit to all the people of the land. The Great Cathedral has also acknowledged Hala as a force for good in our dark land. However, it has stated an official distrust of Hala's church because of a claimed "hidden agenda" on the part of the governing hierarchy of Hala's church, an agenda that is kept secret even from many of the rank-and-file followers of Hala.

Many local priests have taken the distrust expressed by the Great Cathedral one step further and have started preaching against this supposedly secret side of the Church of Hala. As many clergymen are wont to do, they engage in hyperbole and create imaginary devils where none might be, telling the faithful that the Church of Hala might heal the body but in doing so corrupt the mind and soul. Marena told me that the High Priests of Hala have

attempted to quell the fears of the Great Cathedral by giving them insight into the truth about witches and warlocks, but so far they have been unable to set things right. As is often the case when politics and religion mix (for, make no mistake, the Church of Ezra is one of the most powerful emerging political forces in our domains), reaching an understanding is oftentimes very difficult.

It is not all politics, however. In my home town of Mordentshire, an otherwise reasonable and levelheaded priest of Ezra followed me back to my home. He had overheard me discussing my research into witches and warlocks and the Church of Hala with my good friend Daniel Foxgrove, in a pub we all frequent. He proceeded to warn me that I had imperiled my mortal soul by just speaking with witches and warlocks. He followed up his claims with a number of half-truths and distorted legends of how witches stole babies as they slept and replaced them with demon-spawn. He also explained to me how it was necessary for him to bless me to guarantee that my mind was not being affected by dark magic. In the interest of keeping good relations between myself and the local clergy, I permitted him to give me the blessing of his goddess—there was no harm in accepting it, and at the time I could not deny the possibility that my mind had somehow been subverted by Marena and the other witches and warlocks at the Hospice of the Healing Hands. However, no fog lifted from my mind following the blessing, nor did I suddenly realize that my thoughts were not my own.

I mention this encounter with the priest in Mordentshire to illustrate how much superstition and myth might be presented to would-be hunters as fact. As I have said, there are evil warlocks and witches, and they do have the power to cloud human minds. As a whole would they would no more do so than all sorcerers would suddenly begin using their magic to subvert the will of others. It is important that hunters take steps to confirm any information gathered to avoid launching attacks against potential innocents!

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Relations with the Church of Bane

The importance of confirming that a target is not innocent applies strongly to dealings with priests of Bane, or even that church's hierarchy. The Church of Bane is the most outspoken critic of the Church of Hala, and the former actively persecutes the latter's clergy and worshippers. Banites have always believed Hala's ranks to contain many warlocks and witches. Banites believe all witches and warlocks are engaged in a grand conspiracy devoted to undermining the authority of the legitimate rulers of our land's domains. As such, the Church of Bane and its priests view the Church of Hala as actively working against them and the goals of their god, one of which is the strengthening rightful rulers of our lands. There are virtually no hospices operated by Church of Hala in regions where the Church of Bane is strong. However, that does not mean that witches, warlocks, and covens of Hala are not active in such areas. According to Marena, a number of covens operate secretly in the countryside of Hazlan, where Bane's worship is strongest, opposing that domain's tyrannical wizard-lord at every turn.

Marena stated that witches, warlocks, and the Church of Hala itself have never made any bones about the fact that they will always take steps to ease the pain and suffering of people everywhere. If the source of the suffering is the ruler of the land in which they dwell, the doctrine of Hala can be interpreted to mean that those faithful to her must oppose such rulers in all things. This does not necessarily mean taking up arms against the ruler; if a worshiper of Hala is dead, how can he or she help those in need? For example, Marena stated that at one time there were two small witch covens operating secretly in the domain of Hazlan, where they subtly worked to undermine the notion among the populace that the racial group known as the Mulan rule because of divine sanction. These witches were in grave danger from Hazlik the Red Wizard, Hazlan's undisputed tyrant, as well as

enforcers of the Church of Bane, who would kill them for their blasphemy. These covens were even at risk from adventurers and monster hunters in Hazlan, for they hid in exactly the places where one expects to find hags: the barren wilderness in the western and northern parts of the domain. These covens have since moved elsewhere, so my mention of them here in no way imperils them now!

Still, Church of Hala hospices frequently serve as havens for the persecuted, and Hala's clergy often works closely with opposition groups. For example, in the eastern part of the domain of Invidia was once a hospice reportedly offering solace to those Gundarakites who were weary of Barovian oppression and eventually fled in search of better lives. This hospice, too, has had to move elsewhere to save itself.

Major Enemies

While witches and warlocks often have a less than ideal relationship with the other organized religions in the land, and they are not well-liked by tyrants who recognize what they stand for, neither side seems necessarily devoted to the out-and-out destruction of the other. In fact, Drakov of Falkovnia does not send agents against witches in other domains, nor would a warlock pursue unto death a leader who showed improvement in his treatment of his people or was driven from power. The same, however, cannot be said of the select few parties that witches and warlocks have declared as their eternal enemies.

Hags

I have already mentioned that witches and warlocks are sworn enemies of hags. While part of the animosity grows out of a perceived shared heritage—the witches and warlocks being deeply offended by the notion put forth by hags that they, too, were created by Hala—the primary hatred grows from the unflinching devotion that hags have to spreading death and destruction. The

annis are the most dedicated foes of witches and warlocks, but all hags are marked for death, according to Marena. "They ask no quarter of us, we ask none of them," she said. "Hags are a blight on the creation of the gods."

Sorcerous Witches

Rarely seen and quite distant from the lands we know well is a different stripe of "witch," with whom our local witches and warlocks have a never-ending war. Sorcerous witches (as I term these beings, in order to keep them distinct from the other witches discussed in this text) are reportedly an evil force in the lands they call home, typically as bent on spreading pain and suffering as are hags. They are a subgroup of wizards, although they are shunned by normal mages; Fiori spat on the ground when I mentioned them to her, saying that the Order of High Sorcery in Sithicus kills such spellcasters on sight.

Sorcerous witches are known for a suite of spells that only they can cast. I know very little about these spells, and very little facts can be had. Fiori and Marena both did little but defame these sorcerers, for what little they knew of the latter. Sorcerous witches apparently enjoy controlling the minds of others and commanding the elements.

Marena and Fiori did agree that sorcerous witches frequently live in the same isolated regions as hags, and they might even be mistaken for these beings. Marena claimed the root cause for the animosity between witches and warlocks and the sorcerous witches is the fact that the latter tend to ally themselves with hags whenever possible, though I have yet to encounter such a spellcaster personally.

Hedge Magicians

The previous section will assist hunters to avoid mistaking witches for hags hiding among innocent folk. There are other obscure practitioners of magic that I feel obligated to mention in the interest of keeping them from harm at

Sorcerous Witches

The sorcerous witch is actually a mage who either uses the witch kit in *The Complete Wizard's Handbook* (TSR #2115) or specializes in the witch spells presented in the four volumes of the *Wizard's Spell Compendium* (TSR #2165, 2168, 2175, and 2177).

Although widely discriminated against, not all sorcerous witches are evil. However, 80% of them are of evil alignment in RAVENLOFT campaigns, and if heroes attempt to get assistance from one, they will often regret it. (If there is a hag in a region, there is a 15% chance that a sorcerous witch is in league with the hag, at the Dungeon Master's discretion.)

the hands of overzealous adventurers and monster hunters.

The Vistani

Out of all the human races that exist in our land, the Vistani are the one group that I would caution readers against trusting under most circumstances. These nomads wander the domains, free of any ties or any loyalties save those to their own kind. They may on occasion appear to share the same goals and desires as heroes, but they often attempt to twist a situation to their advantage and often have hidden agendas. You must always guard yourself if you find it necessary to deal with the Vistani, and under few circumstances should you ever offer to deal with them, for certain ones among them will take your words and use them against you as they did with me.

Although the Vistani as a whole are difficult to trust, I have encountered solitary Vistani who were kindhearted if tragic figures, as they often feel isolated because of their separation from their kin. However, as they frequently continue to practice the magical rites of their people, they warrant discussion in this section, as the females among them may be mistaken for hags. Two rough groupings of solitary Vistani are at particular risk.

Sedentary Vistani: These Vistani have given up the nomadic ways of

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their people, typically after marrying a non-Vistana. For reasons that remain unclear to me at this time—for I have yet to convince any of the sedentary Vistani I am acquainted with to discuss the matter with me—they seem to lose the gift of second sight that all Vistani otherwise possess.

Compilers' Note: This Guide to Witches was written before the Guide to Vistani, as should seem apparent to the careful reader. We debated whether we should strike this paragraph, as Dr. Van Richten later learned the cause surrounding the loss of second sight among the sedentary Vistani. We let the passage stand, as Dr. Van Richten's research into the Vistani, and the circumstances under which he made his peace with that race, are described in his Guide to the Vistani in the previous section of this volume. Curiously, Dr. Van Richten did not discuss recluses, witches, or warlocks among the Vistani in his later work, as he does later here. We cannot say why this is so.

—LWF

Many sedentary Vistani take up the more formal arts of magic once they settle, hoping to find a replacement for the powers they have lost. They focus their attention on the magical schools of Enchantment/Charm and Divination. Though they usually receive some training from skilled sorcerers, they tend



to experiment with their own spells early on. They also flavor their magic with the trappings of their culture, making their magic appear even more arcane than that wielded by most spellcasters. Finally, even when they settle into communities, they never quite fit in. The Vistani are simply too alien, and even those who are kind, good citizens and able to adapt well to a more civilized way of life oftentimes find themselves plagued by the dark reputation of their roaming brothers and sisters. Do not mistake for a hag a sedentary Vistani woman who has taken up spellcraft!

If you do encounter a sedentary Vistana, you might consider seeking advice or asking for insights into the local community. Vistani have spent their early lives as thieves and tricksters, and such individuals are very aware of the comings and goings of strangers in their vicinity, as well as being excellent sources of gossip and information. (True, this description also applies to an immature sea hag, so such a female may bear watching no matter how helpful she seems.)

A sedentary Vistana is often very concerned with threats to the community; it is as if the Vistana considers the community as tight-knit as the old tribe had been. This is an admirable attitude, considering that Vistani are rarely accepted by those around them, no matter how worthy they might be on an individual level. Even the most righteous among them can never be free of the reputation created by their nomadic cousins.

Vistani recluse: Vistani have certain inborn abilities that allow them to see the future and perform other mystical feats that are usually the province of powerful mages or priests. A Vistani recluse is a woman who was driven mad by the dark secrets that were revealed to her and now lives apart from all humanity.

The Vistani recluse frequently makes her home in a cave or other natural shelter. Although they may roam across several square miles, her Vistani blood

Sedentary Vistani

If heroes can convince a sedentary Vistana that they are not enemies of the Vistani and they truly are attempting to help the community of which the Vistana is now a part, the Vistana will have 1d6 clues or helpful bits of advice to give the party. The Vistana will never actually join in the expedition, however.

Fully 85% of sedentary Vistani are zero-level characters. The rest are bards (10%) or wizards (5%) of level 1d6+1. Their spell selections focus on the Enchantment/Charm and Divination schools. Half of the sedentary Vistani are neutral in alignment, while 30% are good. They will help the party, at no charge, or at the very most ask for any spell components expended to be replaced. The remaining 20% are evil in alignment, and these characters charge 2d10 gp for each consultation by the party. Further, they may actually be in league with the very evil forces that the party hunts. They will not reveal this to the party, of course, but will instead let the villains know that the party is on their tail.

makes her restless even in the throes of madness. The more isolated and desolate the region inhabited by the recluse, the happier the recluse is. She spends her days cackling and wailing to the spirits that travel with her everywhere she goes. She cares little for her appearance, wearing whatever rags the weather and a sense of modesty require. She eats whatever small animals, plants or fungus is found in the vicinity of her dwelling. Her barren life, the mental strain of constantly being surrounded by spirits of the dead, and the stress on her tortured, isolated spirit leaves her looking haggard and far older than she actually is.

In my time spent traveling the dark back roads of our land, I have met two recluses. Both were, in fact, very helpful in the penning of my *Guide to Ghosts*. Both were also hopelessly mad, alternating between speaking to me, speaking to whatever spirits happened to

be nearby, and spouting off predictions of a universally dire nature. Some of those forecasts were undoubtedly mad ramblings, but one of them did predict the death of a stout dwarven companion who had joined me for that expedition.

Vistani recluses are frequently well-known to small communities nearby. One of the recluses I dealt with was always consulted by young women contemplating marriage. If she did not declare doom for the relationship, the wedding would happen. Their powers of foresight are not as impressive as those of other Vistani, but they are reputed to be accurate.

It should be clear to the reader why Vistani recluses might be mistaken for beings who are sinister rather than pathetic. It is, after all, easy to conceive of a hag who would disguise herself as a bizarre old woman who relates prophecies of doom and destruction to those who seek her out.

Vistani warlocks and witches: Yes, even among the Vistani bands are witches and warlocks. I feel they are more properly listed here; according to Marena, Vistani warlocks and witches do not feel any bond or obligation to others who call on the Weave. Instead, their loyalties are with their Vistani clans first and foremost.

I have a far from ideal relationship with the Vistani, so I have not spoken personally with any of their number [Again, this was written before the *Guide to the Vistani* was published.—LWF], but Marena tells me that there exist three, maybe four, bands of Vistani that are made up of wandering covens and solitary witches and warlocks. She would not go into details about this matter, saying that she had no interest in violating their privacy even for the purposes as noble as that represented by this text. "I have decided that it is time to draw back the curtain on our secrets, Dr. Van Richten," she said, "but I will not reveal those of any others."

Marena did state that Vistani warlocks and witches are like those I had already met, insofar as they carry spell foci with

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them and work magic in a similar fashion to those operating the hospice. She also revealed that there were other rituals unique to Vistani warlocks and witches. They mark their caravans with symbols that identify their nature to other Vistani. Marena explained that the different Vistani tribes have varying outlooks on the Weave; some view it just as another form of magic, while others consider it a dangerous and corrupting influence. Vistani warlocks and witches mark their *vardos* to give others the opportunity to give them a wide berth. She would not tell me what were the distinguishing characteristics of the Vistani witch and warlock bands, repeating her statement that she did not want to intrude into the privacy of other people. If they wanted me to be able to identify them, they would tell me how, she said, adding that she suspected a man of my insight and broad base of knowledge would probably recognize them on sight. (This was the only time during our time together that Marena spoke to me with sarcasm in her voice. She made it clear to me at other times that she felt I was unfairly bitter toward the Vistani in my books. Of course, she had never had any child of hers kidnapped by them!)

The only Vistani warlocks and witches that she would offer any details about were the Baromanoffs. Once, they had been among the most powerful of the Vistani covens, but they angered Count Strahd, the vampire lord of Barovia. He butchered all of them except one male and female, whom he let go so that they might warn other tribes of the price that all who cross Strahd must pay. Not even the Vistani intimidate Strahd, it seems, and he did not appear to suffer from the notorious Vistani ability to curse their enemies. Marena said that it is unknown what happened to the surviving members of the destroyed coven, but she suspected they had joined up with one of the other Vistani bands.

Perhaps these Vistani warlocks and witches do not deserve as much space as I have devoted to them here, or perhaps they should have more properly been described above with the other witches

and warlocks. I felt it best, however, to separate them out because there is so much that is unknown about them.

*Compilers' Note: Shortly after we began editing this volume, Gennifer and I attended a most curious traveling carnival and sideshow when it visited Mordent. It had two very surprising aspects: Its freaks were far more chilling and prevalent than those of any other sideshow I had ever visited, and the wandering clowns were all Vistani, with some of the most grotesque painted faces I had ever seen. I examined their wagons, which served as the carnival's mode of transport, in an attempt to use the knowledge from the Guide to the Vistani, which was still fresh in my memory, but I found Vistani were absent from all of them. I approached one of the clowns and attempted to speak with him, but he never made a sound. Instead, he escorted me to a *vardo* (as the Vistani call their wagons) where I had a brief conversation with a Vistani crone who said simply, "Mind your own business, child."*

A trio of young Vistani women followed Gennifer and I everywhere we went for the rest of that day. On more than one occasion, they seemed to know where we were going to go before we got there, or what we were going to do before we did it, even to the point where they waited for us at a food vendor, each holding sweet rolls that my sister and I had considered ordering, independently and without speaking.

It is a shame that we did not begin our review of this manuscript until after the carnival had departed from this area. We would not have let ourselves be brushed aside so easily, nor would those three women have been able to intimidate us as they did. I hope that we cross paths with that carnival again during our travels. I would like to speak with that crone, armed with the knowledge in this book. Gennifer and I both believe that the carnival was actually one of those wandering groups of warlocks and witches, perhaps formed from two or three immense covens! It

might explain how the carnival came and left with barely a trace—none of the farmers around Mordentshire saw the carnival on the roads to or from the town. On the other hand, Vistani are capable of mist navigation, and this would explain it, too.

A curious final note: Is it possible that the face paint these Vistani wore—which was vaguely clownlike but hardly humorous, despite the motions they were all going through—is a symbol to other Vistani of their nature? It seems like a terribly obvious way of going about it, but despite being a secretive people, the Vistani do have a rather obvious demonstrative side. Maybe that's what Marena meant when she said Dr. Van Richten would recognize them when he saw them.

—LWF

Eremites

An eremite is not a spellcaster, but rather a particularly rustic and self-taught alchemist who uses rare herbs and types of dirt or clay found in isolated regions to create potions and poultices. The eremite leads a lonely life far from civilization, emerging only when a rare potion component can be found only in a town or city. An eremite is so focused on the creation of potions that he or she often disregards physical health and proper appearance.

On the face of it, educated men and women might find the idea of an eremite being mistaken for a hag a foolish one. Sadly, as is often the case, the educated find it difficult to view the world through the eyes of the common and uneducated citizens of our domains.

To the common citizen, the eremite is a figure of mystery who is conceived of as a bent old crone who spends her nights stirring a bubbling cauldron, or perhaps a male hermit who lurks in a hidden valley and brews foul-smelling magical brews that can either cause or cure the worst ailments. An eremite is sought out only under the most dire circumstances, for to waste an eremite's time (it is widely rumored) is to risk

Contrary to Van Richten's assumptions, Vistani witches do not have any abilities beyond those their status as witch or coven member grants them. Vistani warlocks likewise only have the abilities attributed to other warlocks.

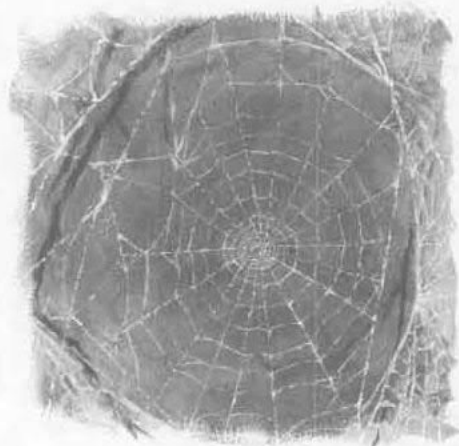
The Weathermay-Foxgrove twins are also incorrect in assuming that the carnival they visited was home to one of the wandering bands of Vistani warlocks and witches. (Laurie was not as well read in Vistani lore as she imagined herself.) The sisters might pass along such confused information to heroes who consult them as a campaign "red herring."

However, there were nonetheless three witches among the ranks of those mysterious carnival Vistani. They are mostly unaware of their heritage, having been drawn to each other due to their link to the Weave. Although they have yet to discover their spellcasting abilities, they have almost by accident become a three-member coven and now gain the magical benefits that affords. (See the next chapter.) They were the women who followed the sisters for the rest of their visit. This small coven, the Vistani of the carnival, and all the freaks and mysteries of the place are featured in the game accessory *Carnival* (TSR #11382). However, the Vistani in that product are intentionally kept vague and mysterious. If the Dungeon Master chooses, the Vistani can be recast as a collection of warlocks and witches with relative ease.

poisoned wells and withered crops. As the reader can see, there are a number of obvious similarities between the existence led by hags and that preferred by eremites.

While eremites are outsiders, they are no more or less evil than are sorcerers or priests. There are good eremites and evil eremites, but none are as monstrously wicked as hags. Several eremites have stood by my side in my battle against darkness, foremost among these being

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Dylahna of Kantora. A magical brew she concocted bought myself and a companion just enough time to slay the lord of Castle Bloodmere, a most foul beast who had been preying on the blood and life force of peasants in his land for decades. Dylahna created a tonic that granted us resistance to his life-draining touch, though it made us violently ill, too.

Observant hunters who follow my urging to be cautious will be able to tell eremites from hags with relative ease. Eremites do not wield any form of magic aside from the potions that they brew, while hags perform rituals that create a wide number of magical effects. Further, hags might employ minions, something that solitude-loving eremites will never do.

Attacking an eremite by mistake can stain a hero's hands with innocent blood. Eremites are potentially valuable sources of information as well as peculiar potions. Since they might share habitats with hags, they might be able to provide solid and relevant leads to the hunters' true prey. Eremites might even choose to assist a hunter who seems capable and helpful, or at least polite. On the other hand, an evil eremite may well share a hag's destructive goals, something that may also become evident if the hunter takes time to observe the situation.

Redheads

There is a common folk belief in some parts of our world that red hair is a sign

of natural magical talent. Many mages scoff at these beliefs, but there is at least one group of red-haired men and women who do indeed have significant inborn magical abilities.

Although the domain of Forlorn is now mostly overrun by violent tribes of goblins, for many centuries it was home to a thriving druidic culture. The most powerful among the druids were the so-called redheads, individuals who the human inhabitants of Forlorn believed were granted powers by the land itself. As the goblins became more plentiful, many of the druids found themselves faced with a choice between

Eremites

Eremites are a cross between specialist wizards and druids. They shun civilization and all unnatural and elaborate clothing and objects. They garb themselves in crudely made leather, cotton, wool, and other natural fabrics, and they use no forged-metal objects or weapons. They spend their lives in almost complete isolation, finding companionship among a tiny circle of strange friends and the animals of the forest.

Eremites are classed as wizards, but they do not actually cast spells. Instead, they brew potions that mimic spell effects. These potions create any spell that has a range of "touch" or "0." The "casting time" for each spell effect is 1d4+2 rounds, regardless of the spell duplicated. This encompasses opening the potion bottle, imbibing it swiftly, and waiting for the potion to take effect.

An eremite can prepare a number of potions per day equal to the number of spells that a wizard of equal level is able to cast every day. The effectiveness of a potion is equal to the eremite's level. A Dungeon Master can randomly determine the number of potions an eremite possesses by using Table 90 (meant for use with spell scrolls) in the *DUNGEON MASTER Guide*.

Rules for hero eremites are presented in the *RAVENLOFT accessory Champions of the Mists* (TSR #9559).

flight or death. Thus, the magically gifted redheads of Forlorn spread to other domains.

Although most redheads long ago abandoned the worship of nature and

other aspects of druidic culture, they retained their magical talents, as have their direct descendants today. True to the folklore, the brighter red the hair, the greater the redhead's magical talent.

Redhead Spellcasting Abilities

Redheads are humans who have a natural talent for creating effects that mimic priest spells from the following spheres: All, Animal, Healing, Plant, and Weather. Their talents manifest themselves in childhood and remain with them throughout their life, regardless what class they may adopt. Van Richten's opinion aside, the magical powers of redheads are indeed granted from the land of his world, and redhead magic works only if the redhead casting it is in the domain of his or her birth.

Redheads are always true neutral in alignment. Should their alignment be changed through a curse or other means, they lose their magical abilities until their alignment is restored.

Redheads can cast their spells twice in a 24-hour period—once during the daylight hours and once at night. They do not need to pray for these spells, and they need neither spell components nor holy symbols. The only requirement for casting redhead spells is that the caster be within the realm of that redhead's birth, and capable of consciously willing the spell to occur (which happens six seconds later). All spell effects manifest as if they had been cast by a druid of the same level as the redhead, regardless of the character's actual class. (Zero-level redheads are considered 1st-level druids for the purposes of their spells.) There are no class restrictions on redheads, although many of them tend to gravitate toward activities that keep them in the wilderness. Redheads cannot be witches or warlocks, although they can belong to other spellcasting classes.

The shade of a redhead's hair affects that person's degree of power. A character with dark auburn hair can only employ one 1st-level spell; one with a lighter shade of reddish-brown, two 1st-level spells; one with

strawberry-blond to pale red hair, three 1st-level spells; one with distinctly red hair, three 1st-level spells and one 2nd-level spell; and one with carrot-orange hair, three 1st-level spells and two 2nd-level spells. (If the Dungeon Master wishes to allow redheads to be heroes, the particular shade of each character's red hair must be determined.)

The spells of redheads are selected from the following lists. The Dungeon Master can pick specific ones or roll randomly.

Subtle differences exist between the redheads described in this section and those described in the *Castles Forlorn* boxed set (TSR #1088). The redheads of Forlorn have stronger ties to their land than those outside that domain.

Redhead Spell Tables

1st-level Redhead Spells

1d10	Result
1	<i>Animal friendship</i>
2	<i>Bless/curse</i>
3	<i>Cure light wounds</i>
4	<i>Detect poison</i>
5	<i>Detect snares and pits</i>
6	<i>Entangle</i>
7	<i>Faerie fire</i>
8	<i>Locate animals and plants</i>
9	<i>Pass without trace</i>
10	<i>Purify food and drink/putrefy food and drink</i>

2nd-level Redhead Spells

1d10	Result
1	<i>Augury</i>
2	<i>Charm person or mammal</i>
3	<i>Goodberry/badberry</i>
4	<i>Heat metal/chill metal</i>
5	<i>Messenger</i>
6	<i>Obscurement</i>
7	<i>Slow poison</i>
8	<i>Snake charm</i>
9	<i>Speak with animals</i>
10	<i>Warp wood/straighten wood</i>

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Redheads now usually dwell in small villages or on isolated farms. Invariably, they are revered by their neighbors as healers and seers, and they possess minor magical abilities akin to the spells priests cast when calling on the powers of their gods.

In my years of struggling against creatures of darkness, I have had the honor and privilege of knowing several redheads. In Nova Vaasa, for example, two redheads—husband and wife—joined me in battle against an ancient spirit that was causing horses to turn on humanity. Sadly, the wife died at the hands of the ghastly creature, but the husband was certain their carrot-topped infant daughter would carry on her mother's legacy of kindness and community spirit.

Now, folk tales do exaggerate the magical prowess of those with red hair. I have yet to see evidence that any except those with red hair who can also trace their lineage back to Forlorn have innate magical abilities. If a person is indeed a redhead, he or she will display a strong liking for nature at an early age, and magical abilities will manifest themselves before the person enters teenage years.

Unlike witches, warlocks, and eremites, redheads outside Forlorn hardly ever receive special magical training—with the exception of those who happen to have been called to the service of a god. Nor do most of them desire training. They prefer to lead simple lives, tilling the soil or serving as woodsmen. They do, however, share the sense of community that one finds in witches and warlocks. Redheads, however, tend to view themselves entirely as part of the community around them rather than sharing a special status apart from it. Also, and this is very important to note, I have never met an evil redhead. They are, without fail, kindhearted and gentle souls.

When I mentioned redheads to Marena, she told me that there are witches and warlocks who believe the redheads draw their powers from the Weave. However, she acknowledged that redheads, males and females both, cast what the covens recognize as witch

magic, so maybe it comes from another source. Further, no redhead has ever been detected by a witch or warlock as a witch or warlock.

The redheads themselves still believe their magical powers are gifts from the land itself, a reward for their history of service to it. There are those who claim that the land of our world is alive, and that the land reacts to deeds both cruel and kind. I myself have witnessed things that might support such beliefs, although I am quite hesitant to accept or espouse them. I have invariably found that whenever an inanimate object—such as the earth beneath our feet—is shown to have consciousness, it is usually a fraud or the work of an evil spirit.

Since I cannot believe an evil entity would reward good folk like the redheads with magical powers, and since I cannot bring myself to believe that our world is one so saturated with evil that it breathes in the very earth, I cannot believe that the land is alive. In summary, I hope this look into obscure practitioners of magic will be a useful guide to hunters in avoiding complications arising from mistaking potential allies for enemies. If hunters keep their wits about them and remain wary of potential treachery—for one can never be certain when evil intentions might be lurking behind a smiling face—they will draw invaluable support and information from the sources presented here.



... (C)here was a woman in the village who was reputed to be a witch. Nothing very out of the way about that. In fact you wouldn't have to look very far to find witches (or reputed ones) in these west-country villages today.

—R.H. Malden
"The Thirteenth Tree"

CHAPTER FOUR: WITCH AND WARLOCK COVENS



In the previous chapter, I described witches and warlocks as secretive and private people, individuals who conceal their true nature from virtually everyone. While I mentioned that they have the ability to recognize other witches and warlocks on sight, I also said that there is no particular shared culture among witches and warlocks. For example, Vistani witches and warlocks purposefully segregate themselves from others of their kind, both Vistani and witches and warlocks.

However, under one condition will witches and warlocks give up their valued privacy and lay bare every secret, hope, and dark desire they possess. According to their beliefs, Hala gave them the ability to tap the Weave individually, but she also gave them an incentive to band together by teaching the first thirteen witches and warlocks about covens. Covens are worth examining because their members can be extremely useful allies in the fight against darkness. They can be powerful opponents if wronged. Further, the smallest and most common coven type in existence consists of three members, and it is possible to mistake such a group for a hag covey.

Covens are unions of witches or warlocks created for the purposes of teaching spellcraft, defending each other and their families, and gathering magical power. Covens are always made up entirely of either witches or warlocks. While witch and warlock

covens may work together in harmony and even be united in a fashion through intermarriage, witches can never belong to warlock covens, and warlocks can never belong to witch covens.

When witches and warlocks join covens, they gain access to a wider range of spells, including the ability to cast magic that resembles priest magic (for warlocks) or wizard magic (for witches).

History and Legends

According to *Tales of Ages*, covens were an afterthought on the part of Hala. After she showed her thirteen chosen ones how to access the Weave, the men and women became envious of one another, each feeling the other sex had been granted a greater boon by Hala. This envy led to strife, and the Thirteen almost killed each other. Before the first witches and warlocks could establish which sex was the stronger, however, Hala stepped in, again violating the agreement between the gods and interfering directly in the affairs of mortals.

Tales of Ages says that Hala showed the Thirteen more of the Weave, and the Thirteen saw that within every man was some of woman and within every woman was some of man. "We have been fools," they told the Caregiver. "We will teach our children that despite our differences, men and women are also the same. But how can we be sure they will believe us and heed our teachings?"

Hala heard their words and knew that those born of flesh are frail and prideful. She had to do more to ensure that they could overcome their limitations. So she gave the Thirteen more secrets of the Weave, and through those they gained a

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greater understanding of each other; the women gained a greater understanding of the male side within them, and the males gained a greater understanding of the female side within them.

Hala chose to show them parts of the Weave that were crafted in such a way that the more witches or warlocks who banded together to draw on the Weave, the stronger their powers became and the more able they were to enact the will of Hala.

This section deals with the creation of the first covens. If it reflects actual historical events—in which the warlocks and witches warred on each other—then one has to wonder why the covens are organized strictly along sexes. I asked Marena why this was. She said that this is the way it has always been, and that all attempts to make mixed covens had failed. It was not impossible—there were records in the archives about witch and warlock covens, the members of which seemed to gain access to the same magical abilities they would draw on if they had been part of traditional covens—but in all cases, those mixed-sex covens were eventually torn apart by jealousy and resentment.

"It is possible for men and women to work together as brothers and sisters," she said, "but only for so long. Eventually, lust and desire enters into the picture, and when one is dealing with a situation as intimate as a coven, that spells disaster."



The Structure of Covens

At a coven's core is usually a witch or warlock of at least medium power, although according to the witches and warlocks I spoke with, there is no specific time at which a coven can or cannot be formed. Immature witches and warlocks are discouraged by their elders from forming or joining covens, as the experience of joining one is usually more emotionally challenging than many youngsters can handle.

Also, there is an opinion among experienced coven members that it is important that a person know himself or herself as an individual before becoming part of a whole.

Regardless, a coven always starts with a single individual, no matter that person's age or skill with magic. This is usually a person of strong convictions or who has a particular set of goals. The person then searches for individuals who share the same beliefs and goals, inviting them into the coven. The person who started the coven usually remains its leader until death, at which point the coven either dissolves or another of its members steps forward and assumes leadership. According to Marena, the latter result is more common than the former; usually, the other members are devoted to the goals of the coven and wish them to be carried forward. They share a wish to see the coven continue to grow in experience and ability.

The core of a coven is three witches or warlocks. This is the smallest membership a coven can have and still be a functioning coven. As soon as a third member is added to the coven, all three of its members gain the extra powers that come with coven membership. The coven then grows from that point, and as the coven increases in numbers so do the magical powers that can be tapped by its members. The largest and most powerful covens have a maximum of thirteen members.

Joining a Coven

When a witch or warlock is inducted into a coven, the inductee becomes familiar with the deepest and darkest secrets of the other coven members—and vice versa. This explains the necessity for every member to share certain attitudes and beliefs with all others. The initiate and all the other coven members literally bare their souls to each other.

The ritual to initiate a new coven member takes seven hours and, at least for witches, involves the burning of incense and melodious chants. I was permitted to observe from a distance the initiation of a young woman named Karolyne into the Healing Hands coven. It began at sunset and concluded as the sun rose the next morning. None of the witches or warlocks I dealt with were willing to go into any details beyond what I was allowed to observe from afar, but they all agreed that the mingling of souls that they experienced while being inducted into their covens was a singularly moving experience.

Being inducted into a coven does more for witches and warlocks than draw them closer together. It also expands

Coven Spell Selection

Upon initiation into a coven, individual witches or warlocks find that the selection of spells from which they can choose is greatly expanded. The number of spells they can cast per day remains the same.

Witches who are coven members can now choose to memorize spells from the following wizard schools, in addition to the priest spheres to which they already had access: Alteration, Enchantment/Charm, Elemental (Fire and Air), Lesser and Greater Divination, Illusion, and Necromancy.

Warlocks who join a coven can choose to memorize spells from the following priest spheres, in addition to the wizard schools to which they already had access: All, Chaos, Combat, Divination, Elemental (Water and Earth), Necromantic, Thought, Time, and Wards.



their magical abilities. As a direct result of being inducted into a coven, witches and warlocks find themselves more easily able to draw on magic.

I wish I could provide more information on the rituals involved, but I was stymied at every turn when I attempted to gain more information; the witches and warlocks would only trust me so far. I must leave this part of my research blank, therefore, until later.

Compilers' Note: Our experience was similar to that of Dr. Van Richten's when we attempted to gain information to expand this section of the text. Since he dealt with the Hospice of the Healing Hands, Marena and twelve other witches there have left to deal with a dark evil in a faraway land known as Cavitus; supposedly, visions from Hala told Marena that this evil was about to spread its influences beyond the cage in which it is presently being contained, and Marena felt obligated to attempt to stop it. Other witches there have since started a new coven that numbers only four at present, but they would not tell us any information that had not already been shared with Van Richten. We have not seen Marena since.

—GWF

Magical Powers of Covens

According to Marena and other members of her coven, solitary witches

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and warlocks tap the Weave through powers that exist within themselves. Coven membership opens new vistas for the witches and warlocks, granting them the ability to draw on a broader expanse of the Weave. One warlock I spoke with likened the difference between being in a coven versus not being in a coven to being given the freedom to roam through all of the outdoors nude versus being confined to an underground cell fully clothed. Once part of a coven, witches and warlocks can still use their personal powers to wield magic as they always have, but they can also draw from external forces. Marena claims these are the same energies controlled by the sorcerers of the domains, but that this magical power manifests itself very differently when tapped by witches and warlocks.

Essentially, coven membership gives warlocks the ability to wield magic similar to that of witches, while witches gain the ability to cast spells that resemble those typically cast by warlocks. This is clearly explained in the legend that describes the origins of covens, but the benefits of coven membership go further than this. A coven's members also gain additional powers that grow as the coven's numbers grow.

Particularly devout priests of Ezra or Bane are able to band together to cast spells of exceptional power, combining their faith in their goddess to cast what is

referred to by wizards as "cooperative magic." Witch and warlock covens are able to create similar effects. Their members join together to draw on the Weave to create spells that are more powerful than anything they could create alone. These magical effects are not drawn from spellbooks and do not require any components other than the collective will of the coven members. According to the warlocks and witches I interviewed, the effects present themselves to the leader of the coven in visions, and the leader then confers this knowledge to the other members of the coven.

The nature of the magic wielded by a coven is determined by its size. The number of coven members has mystical significance, and when membership reaches a certain number, the coven can draw on the Weave for additional powers. Here are the powers of covens that I observed while researching this text. The abilities of lesser covens remain available to the members of larger covens; these powers are additive, not exclusive.

Three-member covens gain the ability to gaze into the hearts of men and women and determine what dark secrets they might be hiding. This ability can be very handy for hunters who successfully befriend a coven, and it is one of the reasons hags hate witches and warlocks so much: Hags might be able to hide behind illusory, beatific faces, but they cannot hide their dark hearts from the penetrating gaze of a coven. (Of course, covens can also use this ability to harm their enemies, since there is not a person in existence who does not have some secret he would rather remain hidden. An evil coven might well abuse this ability.)

Seven-member covens can strike terror in the hearts of enemies with an act of will. The intensity of the terror and the number of enemies that can be affected depends on the number of coven members who are willing the effect into existence. Further, coven members can cause themselves and their allies to become invisible, and even cause the entire coven to instantly

vanish from one location and reappear in another. (This last ability is reserved only for coven members and does not apply to its allies.)

Thirteen-member covens can create a wide range of destructive effects rivaled only by the most powerful wizards and priests. They can cause objects to instantly change form, fiery death to rain from the heavens, the sky to darken with clouds, and the dead to be restored to life. The degree of power wielded by such a large coven is fearsome, and it makes me wonder what might happen should witches and warlocks decide to turn their powers to conquest. However, based on the attitudes of the friends I have made among their ranks, I do not believe that covens will ever attempt to force their will on others, as it goes against their basic personalities—which are of a strongly individualistic bent—and against the teachings of Hala, the goddess they believe in.

It is possible that covens can create a range of other magical effects that I have not yet observed. The witches and warlocks I interviewed were somewhat tight-lipped about the exact abilities of covens. Marena wanted word of their existence to be propagated, but she did not want those who might wish to threaten them to be completely aware of their abilities, so they did not grant me complete knowledge.

All coven magic is ritualistic. The witches and warlocks engaged in its casting must first clear their minds, then focus their will on the effect they wish to create. If the entire coven is casting the spell, its leader must spearhead the effort. If only part of the coven is creating a certain spell effect, the most senior member present leads the effort. "Leading" means choosing the target of the spell, as the effect is created through the consensus of the coven.

The mystic union created by coven membership also has benefits not related to spellcasting. Marena told me that as a coven grows in size, its members gain increased resistance to magic cast by others. For example, the members of a three-person coven can

easier shrug off the beguiling effects of a wizard's *charm person* spell or a vampire's mind-addling gaze. Further, if a witch or warlock should lose a spell focus—without which the witch or warlock cannot cast any personal spells—the person is nonetheless still able to join with the rest of the coven in the casting of cooperative magic.

Coven Membership Changes

Covens can grow over time. A "three-member coven," for example, can have as many as six members, yet the coven cannot perform magical rituals any more powerful than if it had only three members. Similarly, if a coven with seven members loses one member, the remaining witches or warlocks immediately lose the benefits that come from being a seven-member coven until a replacement is found.

Adding members to a coven is not something undertaken lightly. Typically, the potential new member must be a practicing witch or warlock—bringing in someone who has just recently been made aware of his or her heritage hardly ever leads to constructive results, Marena claimed—and the existing members of the coven must be certain the individual is a suitable candidate.

Suitability is determined when the coven leader, or at least two other members of the coven, befriend the



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candidate and spend time together. The witches or warlocks engage the candidate in conversation on a range of topics: politics and cultural beliefs, esoteric philosophy, magic, and religion. Their goal is to get to know something about the candidate to ensure the person is suitable to join the coven. Although the candidate must be a witch or warlock, the candidate must also be of a mindset and outlook that closely matches that of the coven members. A coven is a joining of like spirits through the Weave. It is not something that anyone wants to enter into lightly, and the coven members take steps to ensure they are not making an error in

judgment. Once a person has been inducted into the coven, she or he is bonded to the other coven members. Marena told me that while it is possible for witches and warlocks to leave covens through the performing of a certain ritual, there is no way to undo the fact that the member has seen the deepest and innermost secrets of all fellows.

Sometimes, covens have more members than are required to reach their power level. In such cases, should a member die or choose to leave the coven, one of these "extra members" will take the empty place, thus keeping the coven at the level of power appropriate to its membership.

Coven Magical Powers

The following section describes the powers of witch and warlock covens. The membership numbers listed are benchmarks. It is possible for a coven to have eight members, for example. All eight members gain all "single-member" benefits, but only those up to and including the seventh member are able to draw on the powers that require more than a single coven member to use. The eighth member is also unsuitable for use in casting cooperative magic. This changes as soon as one of the first seven members leaves the coven or is killed. (It is not unheard of in evil covens for members to kill each other to gain access to the coven's powers.)

Three-member Coven

Single member: The member receives a +1 bonus to all saving throws against Enchantment/Charm spells and spell-like effects that mimic Enchantment/Charm spells. (In cases where no saving throw is allowed, the witch or warlock gains a saving throw vs. spell with a -4 modifier.) Further, individual coven members can focus their will to create an effect similar to a limited form of ESP, in which each member can hear the thoughts of a single sentient being (within a range of 5 yards) for as long as all members concentrate on it. The target must

make a saving throw vs. spell to avoid the effect. The effect is treated as if cast by a wizard of the same level as the witch or warlock. (If used against undead in a RAVENLOFT campaign, this ability merely gives the user a false reading of harmless thoughts.)

Three members: If at least two of the three members focus on the same target, they hear thoughts that the target actively wishes to conceal rather than surface thoughts. This effect lasts for as long the target is being concentrated on, but it has a range of 5 yards. (If used against undead in a RAVENLOFT campaign, this ability merely gives the users a false reading of fairly dull secrets.)

Seven-member Coven

Single member: The benefits are the same as for a three-member coven, as well as gaining a +1 bonus to all saving throws against Abjuration spells and all spell-like effects or abilities that mimic Abjuration spells. (In cases where no saving throw is allowed, the witch or warlock may make a saving throw vs. spell with a -3 modifier.)

Three members: The benefits are the same as for a three-member coven, plus the ability to create an effect identical with the 2nd-level wizard spell *scare*, with the ability to affect a number of targets equal to the total levels of the three coven members

performing the ritual. The casting time equals that in the description of *scare*.

Five members: The coven members can perform rituals that create the effects of the 7th-level wizard spells *charm undead* and *mass invisibility*. The spells are treated as if cast by a 14th-level caster, but take twice as long to cast as stated in the spell descriptions. Only one spell can be mimicked per ritual.

Seven members: The coven members can perform rituals that create the effects of the 7th-level wizard spells *forcecage*, *limited wish*, *teleport without error*, and *vanish*. No components other than the coven members' spell foci are needed. The spells function as if cast by a 15th-level mage. Only one spell can be cast per ritual, and the casting times are twice the length given in the spell descriptions.

Thirteen-member Coven

Single member: The benefits are the same as for a seven-member coven, as well as +1 to all saving throws against Necromancy spells and all spell-like effects or abilities that mimic Necromancy spells. This includes *energy drain* attacks. (In cases where no saving throw is allowed, the witch or warlock may make a saving throw vs. spell with a -3 modifier.)

Three members: The benefits are the same as for a seven-member coven, plus the ability to summon and control birds, bats, wild dogs, or wolves. In full, 3d6+6 animals arrive to attack targets that are considered threatening by the coven members. The animals arrive 1d6 rounds after being called. The Dungeon Master must decide what kind of animals are called based on the circumstances of the encounter.

Five members: The benefits are the same as for a seven-member coven, plus the ability to perform rituals that permits the casting of any spell of levels 1-4 from the priest sphere of Time (from the *Tome of Magic*). Only one spell can be cast per ritual, and

the casting time is twice the length given in the spell description. The spells are treated as if cast by a 15th-level caster. Only one spell can be mimicked per ritual.

Seven members: The benefits are the same as for a seven-member coven, plus the ability to perform rituals that create the effects of the 8th-level wizard spells *clone*, *sink*, and *polymorph any object*. The spells are treated as if cast by a 15th-level caster, and take twice as long to cast as stated in the spell description. Only one spell can be mimicked per ritual.

Nine members: The coven members can perform rituals that permit the casting of any spell of levels 1-6 from the priest sphere of Time (from the *Tome of Magic*). Only one spell can be cast per ritual, and the casting time is twice the length given in the spell description. The spells are treated as if cast by a 16th-level caster. Only one spell can be mimicked per ritual.

Eleven members: The coven members have the ability to perform rituals that permit the casting of any spell of levels 2-7 from the priest sphere of Numbers (from the *Tome of Magic*). The spells are treated as if cast by a 17th-level caster, and take twice as long to cast as stated in the spell descriptions. Only one spell can be mimicked per ritual.

Thirteen members: The coven members have the ability to perform rituals that permit the casting of the following 9th-level wizard spells: *gate*, *meteor swarm*, *time stop*, and *wish*; and the following 7th-level cleric spells: *animate rock*, *control weather*, *creeping doom*, *exaction*, *restoration*, and *resurrection*. The spells are treated as if cast by an 18th-level caster, and take four times as long to cast as stated in the spell descriptions. Only one spell can be mimicked per ritual. If casting *wish*, each member of the coven (including those not present at the casting) must make a successful saving vs. death magic or else age one year.

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Arise from my bones, avenger of these wrongs!

—Virgil
The Aeneid

The sword of justice has no scabbard.

—Joseph de Maistre
Les Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg

CHAPTER FIVE: HUNTING HAGS



As the years have passed, I have found that those who purchase my works can be divided into three categories: scholars, hunters, and would-be hunters.

To the scholars, I must say that there is little in this chapter that will be of interest to you. This chapter is about destruction, so you will find little here that is edifying, unless your area of study is the process of monster hunting itself. Even so, if that is the topic you are interested in, I must refer to some of my other works, such as the *Guide to Ghosts* or *Guide to the Ancient Dead*. Those texts include more extensive commentary on how one might undertake a hunt of supernatural menaces, and the preparations suggested there are more typical than those I touch on in this chapter. Although there is no such a thing as a routine monster hunt. Those hunters who fall into such a mindset swiftly fall victim to the beings they wish to combat. I do not repeat what I consider basic precautions for any skilled hunter in these pages, because I believe hags are foes that only the most experienced of our numbers should dare to challenge.

To the hunters, I will repeat a caution that may be familiar to you by now. You must think long and hard if hags are truly creatures you want to engage in battle. They are exceedingly clever and should you fail to defeat them, you or your loved ones will be at grave risk. Hags have long memories and long lives, and their vengeance against those who challenge them is of a

twisted and extreme nature that reflects their dark souls.

A further caution (which I cannot repeat enough) is that hags are so clever that it is sometimes difficult to tell them from innocent women who may just be eccentric recluses or actual witches. Hunters need to be more careful than ever when undertaking hag hunts, because they may find themselves targeting innocents or potential allies. When hunting hags, you must be even more prepared than when undertaking quests against ghosts and vampires, because a lack of preparation may well cause the hunter to inadvertently commit deeds that rival those of his prey.

Of would-be hunters, I ask that you reflect long and hard on your desire to take up arms against the servants of darkness. The path that I have walked has been long and painful. Friends and loved ones have paid a steep price for my efforts. Even if you are successful in your endeavors, as I largely have been, you will find that despite being victorious, you gain no sense of accomplishment. Indeed, more often than not, your reward will be nothing but more misery and hardship. Further, once you start down the path that I have walked, it is likely that will find yourself unable to ever leave it. The desire for more knowledge will be too great, and the call of vengeance beyond your resistance. Before picking up this burden, be aware that you will probably never be able to return to the life you presently know.

Finding the Scent

The first step in any hunt is to determine the nature of the threat that

plagues an area. Several signs indicate that a hag or a hag covey has become active in an area. These include: unexplained disappearances, sudden changes in the habits of humanoid savages in a region, and the sudden appearance of new tales (or the confirmation of old ones) about dryads, nymphs, wise women, or other unusual females with magical powers that are reputed to be agents of good.

If only one of these signs is present, it is unlikely that the foe you are attempting to find is a hag. In all likelihood, it is some other creature or person. If all these elements can be uncovered in the course of an investigation, then you may have found part of a hag's web of evil.

Unexplained Disappearances

This is perhaps the most common sign of hag activity in an area, but it is also the hardest to read. Townsfolk and travelers who vanish without trace in isolated areas could be the victims of a great many menaces, including wild beasts, mad wizards, doctors performing loathsome experiments, vampires, or werebeasts on the prowl. It is also not unknown for the travelers themselves to be at fault, having unwisely taken wilderness paths and become lost, to starve and die. They may deliberately pretend to have perished in the wilderness to start new lives elsewhere for dishonorable purposes, escaping debts and obligations. Illness, accidents, and natural disasters always must be considered as factors, as these are very common in our world.

When attempting to determine whether the disappearances are the fault of a hag, the hunter should attempt to determine the nature and pattern of the disappearances and any unexplained violent deaths. If the majority of victims have been attractive young males and females, it is very possible that hags have become active in the area.

There is an equal chance that a vampire has become active in the area,

as many vampires are attracted to beauty from a desire to pervert it rather than to destroy it. Hunters must make an effort to investigate rumors and gossip in an area in order to identify the possibility of a woman who has recently gone through the Change. If the personality of a woman who was among the first to vanish happens to match one of the personality profiles I outlined in Chapter One, then she may actually have been a hag. Of course, while conducting such an investigation, the hunter must be open to all eventualities.

Years ago, several stalwart companions and I stalked a vicious werewolf who went by the name of Natalia Vhorishkova. A long-standing enemy of mine, despite her relative youth, she was monstrous even by werebeast standards. She delighted in bloodshed and violence to such a degree that I have encountered others of her kind who actually wanted me to slay her, so much did she repulse them.

Natalia had led us on a merry chase through Invidia and southern Richemulot. After many weeks of preparation, my companions and I were certain we had convinced her that we were no longer on her trail. She once again became careless with her kills—murdering young lovers by rending them into dozens of pieces and consuming parts of their bodies. We followed the bloody trail, and that led us to what we believed was her hiding place. It was an isolated spot, deep within a tangled forest, yet a location near the center of all recent murder scenes on a map. A small lean-to stood in the center of a clearing strewn with the rib cages and skulls of human beings. If I had known then what I know now, I would have recognized that we had not found a werewolf lair at all, but had instead come on the dwelling of a hag.

At that point, however, the mistake was not apparent until my companions and I were battling the unbridled fury of the annis who I later learned was named Balihnda. Several good men perished on that day, and I almost lost my own life. It was an object lesson in why one

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should never assume that a monster has been defeated until one is standing over its dead body. Natalia played us for fools, and we almost died as a result. Hags are, as a rule, far more clever than even the brightest of werewolves, so if Natalia could lead myself and my band of experienced hunters into the clutches of a hag—a battle for which we were unprepared—so a hag will undoubtedly try the same should she discover that you are on her trail. Conduct your inquiries and scouting missions with the greatest of stealth and care.

Changes in Humanoid Behaviors

As mentioned previously, many hags recruit minions from the humanoid population in the region where they make their homes. A single hag may cause a number of changes in humanoid behavioral patterns that have been recognized by locals for many years. If humanoids suddenly alter their migration patterns, become more aggressive and organized in their raids, or seem to go out of their way to be destructive to surrounding settlements and the environment, there is a good chance that they are now under the leadership of a superior force, possibly a hag.

An example of this would be the *bakhna rakhna* tribe that once plagued western Kartakass and eastern Sithicus. *Bakhna rakhna* are a race of nomadic, albino goblins that wander certain regions in a fairly specific pattern; some say they are more accurate than the seasons. One year, about a decade ago, these creatures deviated from their regular pattern. Rather than merely plaguing the small village of Sangfugl for a few weeks before moving on, they lingered in the area for months. I had just completed an investigation in Sithicus, and when my companions and I looked into the *bakhna rakhna* situation, we found that they had been enslaved by an annis. We did not actually come into direct conflict with the annis at that time, as the *bakhna rakhna* ended up joining our fight

against her and managed to break her hold over them.

Of course, there may be another reasons for changes in humanoid behaviors, and hunters should make sure to eliminate these causes before assuming that they have located a hag. For example, Nova Vaasa has seen an influx of goblin raiding bands into its northern territories where in the past the goblins kept to the forests of Tepest. This is not, despite the verified existence of at least one greenhag in those woods, a result of hag influences but rather a side effect of a misguided crusade against "fey" and "fairy folk" by the priests and citizens of Tepest. As the priests of Tepest consider everyone and everything that is not human (including elves, dwarves, and halflings) as "agents of the fey," that land is quickly becoming extremely hostile to all. Needless to say, the goblins have started to flee the forests of Tepest for safer regions, preferring to take their chances with the lances of Nova Vaasan horsemen rather than face the torches and tortures of the Tepest's priests.

It is thus important to familiarize oneself with the political and cultural situation in an area when tracking hags. It helps establish other possible causes for humanoid behavior. (Also, one might uncover an active hag covey. More on this later.)

Wise Women or Female Fay

This is the trickiest of signs to deal with. In most cases, tales of encounters with dryads in the forests are just tales, and tales of fortune-tellers dwelling in isolated caves typically mean that a Vistani outcast has settled in the region, beginning her slow and inevitable descent into madness as spirits haunt her. In rare circumstances, these tales actually originate with a hag or hag covey that has recently become active in the area.

In order to lure victims into their clutches, or to determine how to most effectively visit chaos and suffering on a community, individual hags and hag



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coveys will often spend a period of time ranging from weeks to months posing as harmless sellers of herbal cures, or they may take advantage of local legends about spirits living in lakes and rivers, or about magical, kindhearted beings in nearby forests. Hags do this to avoid the attention of potential hunters—for hags have many enemies—and because they hope that if they are revealed to be the monsters they are, it will destroy the belief in the pleasant legend they imitated, and undermine faith in the power of good everywhere. Semine commented, "Destroying hope is as fun for many hags as marring a beautiful girl's face before consuming her."

When pursuing these tales in order to see whether a hag is hiding behind them, hunters must take great care to not mistakenly attack an eremite, redhead, witch, or warlock. To do so would not only strike a blow for evil but will cost you allies. It is likely that a clever hag who realizes that hunters are tracking her will attempt to misdirect them into attacking some of the goodhearted magic-users who also dwell in the wilderness areas of the domains.

Battling Individual Hags

Before confronting a solitary hag, hunters should make an effort to determine what type of minions she may have at her disposal and how many of them are present. Hags may be arrogant, but they are not fools. At the first sign of danger, a hag will summon her minions. The reason for identifying the minions is threefold. First, it helps in determining the type of hag that the hunter will be facing, as different types of hags prefer different minions. Second, if approached properly, the hag's minions might be encouraged to support the hunters rather than the hag. Third, knowing the kind of minions the hag has at her disposal helps the hunter more properly prepare for the battle. A powerful annis, for example, may have cowed an entire

tribe of hobgoblins, and in such a case, the hunters will probably have to hire some men-at-arms to assist in dealing with these lesser threats, if they cannot safely be bribed.

Through personal experience, conversations with Semine, and reviewing the records of the Hospice of Healing Hands, I have formulated the following advice about battling hags. Note that when dealing with creatures as intelligent as hags, it is possible that some will have invented countermeasures to circumvent their weaknesses. Wise hunters will be prepared to exploit a hag's weaknesses, but will also be capable of fighting battles at a disadvantage if the weakness appears to be nonexistent.

Hags in general: Make sure you have located the hag's true lair. Many hunters believe that a bone-scattered glen is always the place where the hag's primary dwelling place can be found. This is sometimes not the case. Attacking a hag that dwells in such a glen might cause the hunt to ultimately be a failure if the hag is very clever. It is possible the hunter has slain either a woman who has been transformed by a spawning ritual, or one of the hag's minions that was *polymorphed* into the semblance of a hag and used as a decoy.

Annis: Rely on damage-inflicting spells that can be cast from a distance, for while the annis has a degree of magic resistance, spells will more frequently affect the annis than not. Long-range spellcasting also keeps the hunters out of reach of the annis's battle prowess. If the hunters find themselves forced to engage an annis in melee, blunt weapons should be employed. During my own battles against annis, my companions and I noticed that blunt weapons seemed to injure the creatures more severely than swords and arrows. (Nonetheless, peppering an annis with arrows from a distance is highly advisable, as it will have an effect!)

Greenhags: A hunter's best bet is to rely on brute force and an extensive amount of it. Attacking from a distance

with archers is the advisable way of dealing with greenhags, as they do not have hides as thick as annis do. However, I do not recommend that hunters rely on spells when it comes to battling greenhags. Many of them possess a significant resistance to magic, and the likelihood of a spell being turned away is very high. Using *protective magic* such as the priest *bless* spell is highly advisable when engaging the greenhag, as protective magic is one of the few equalizers that can help a hunter circumvent these creatures' resistance to magic.

Sea hags: Do not to gaze upon them, as their appearance is so hideous that it can cause even a hardened adventurer to die from fright. Most ranged weapons are of little use, as archers might not be able to even draw a bead on their target. Spells are almost entirely useless against sea hags; their powerful resistance to magic means that most spells used against them will fail completely.

The only way to engage a sea hag is for warriors who are practiced in the art of blind-fighting to challenge her in melee combat. For those readers who may not be familiar with this technique, it is a little-practiced form of combat in which a combatant trains in total darkness, relying primarily on hearing and warrior's intuition rather than sight to know where and when to strike a foe. Warriors so trained need not look upon a sea hag in order to engage her in combat.

Although possessed of great strength, sea hags are quite frail by hag standards, so warriors who are masters of their chosen weapons and practitioners of blind-fighting should be able to defeat them. I recommend that at least two or three warriors attack each sea hag at once, as some sea hags are quite skilled in the art of combat themselves. Needless to say, such warriors need to train together before facing the hag, lest they mistake each other for their foe in the heat of battle. Warriors who engage a sea hag blind-folded are immune to her baleful gaze.

In game terms, Van Richten is suggesting that heroes use the Blind-fighting nonweapon proficiency in order to circumvent the sea hag's primary defense and her gaze attack

Baffling Coveys

While doing research and recuperating at the Hospice of the Healing Hands in Valachan, I found myself drawn into battle against a hag covey. I have made reference to this struggle previously in this book, and I will now provide additional details about it, as it represents a successful campaign against one of these unions of evil.

Three maidens vanished from a nearby elven village on the Sithican side of the border. Word of this came to the priests and coven members at the hospice through Fiori, who had tracked a greenhag from the rocky hills of her homeland. *The creature had killed several young females in the vicinity of Har-Thelen, including Fiori's sister. She had started her quest for revenge with three other elves, but the greenhag ambushed them a few weeks earlier. Everyone in her party except Fiori died. She would also have perished but for a young swordsman, Gerrad, who came upon the battlefield and nursed her back to health. It was two months before she was well enough to travel, a testimony to the savagery of the greenhag's attack, for Fiori is a very hardy individual despite her frail appearance, and Gerrad joined her in her quest to end the greenhag's life. It was fate that brought them to Healing Hands and me (or, as the coven members there might say, the pattern of the Weave was right). At the same time, I was myself fully healed and newly armed with the wisdom of the hospice's archive and knowledge about the inhabitants and myths of this portion of Valachan.*

An investigation into the disappearance of the three elf maidens brought us the information that the elves believed a grove within the forest

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to be sacred to Quenesti-Pah, an elf deity of romance and fertility. A villager had overheard one of the maidens tell the others that she had caught sight of the goddess herself dancing in the grove. The two girls had then ventured into the forests with offerings to the goddess, for they each pined after one of the village lads.

We spent a few days in the village, gathering as much information as we could. During this time, Gerrad became quite close to the daughter of a human woman and elf woodsman who lived on the outskirts of the village. (Later, we discovered that the half-elven daughter of this couple had fallen victim to the hags some time ago, and that her form had been usurped by one of the covey members to spy on the village. The disguised hag took the opportunity to play with a young man's heart and to gift him with a *hag eye* in the process.)

During this time, it became clear that something else troubled the villagers. After much coaxing, they admitted to Fiori that other villagers had seen Quenesti-Pah. She claimed to be angered by the villagers' callous, coldhearted nature and said she would level the village unless she was sent a couple who could prove they were truly in love. Fiori stated this was blasphemy, as she claimed the true goddess would never test people in this way. The villagers, however, said the goddess had made the earth shake and had ruined an outlying farm to prove her point. The villagers meant to send a young couple to Quenesti-Pah's forest home during the next full moon. Fiori and I arrived at the conclusion that the single hag she had been hunting had joined a covey, as we both recognized the ability to cause an earthquake as a power belonging to a covey. It seemed clear that Fiori's prey had gone from abducting and slaying young women to terrorizing entire communities.

Reluctantly, and prompted only by Fiori's display of her own destructive magical capability, the villagers

revealed to us where Quenesti-Pah was reputed to dwell. We spent a few days searching that part of the woods but found no sign of the missing maidens, or of hag activity. Eventually, however, we discovered a small, well-hidden paka community on the mist-choked hills that form Valachan's western frontier. At its edge, we found an earthen pit with two prisoners, one of whom was one of the vanished maidens. We subdued the paka sentries and rescued her. From her, we learned that the paka seemed to be the covey's primary minions and that its members included two greenhags and an annis. We also learned that it was too late for one of the three maidens. Tragically, she had served as the hags' meal that very night. We also learned that the hags were intending to use a spawning ritual on the second maiden. We had to hurry if we were to save her.

The information we gleaned from the maiden who was kept in the pit made our final battle against the covey a little easier, since we learned from her the minions we would have to contend with, as well as the nature of the hags we would face. While rescuing any potential captives of a hag covey is in and of itself a reward, if they are being kept closer to the hags' minions than the hags themselves, there are other potential benefits, so hunters should always attempt to locate captives before they confront the hags.

I have already described the battle with the hag covey; we used the tactics I mentioned previously in the section about battling individual hags, but I must confess our victory came more easily than we had anticipated when Gerrad smashed the *hag eye* he had been carrying. If that hag had not taken the time to gloat, the well-prepared hags would have defeated us.

Final Words

It is my experience that some people feel sympathy for hags, even those people who should know better. I can

see how it might be easy to fall into this trap. Hags were once beautiful women, but they were transformed into monsters through no fault of their own. During our correspondence about hags, one young woman of my acquaintance held the position that if a hag could be captured alive and shown that not everyone will reject and hate her for her hideous appearance, the creature might well eventually abandon her evil, destructive ways and instead turn her powers to good. "Most creatures will return good acts with good acts, and trust with trust," she wrote.

While I wish this outlook was indeed a true one, it is more a reflection of a kind heart than of reality. When she was adventuring, my correspondent did indeed trap more monsters than she slew and did manage to bring out the humanity that lurked within them. She dealt mostly with evil, pathological werebeasts, which she did indeed return to the path of goodness. It should also be noted that it was her kind heart that resulted in her abandoning the adventuring life for that of a priestess of Ezra; she felt she could do more good as a member of the clergy than as a member of a party of monster hunters.

The early life of hags and their partially self-imposed exile from the societies they were once part of is exactly the kind of thing that awakens sympathies and prompts people to attempt to lend them assistance. These well-meaning men and women will become victims rather than saviors if they approach hags with a resolve directed toward anything but the annihilation of those monsters.

The problem here is that a sympathetic view fails to take into account that hags are born evil. From the moment they are conceived, they are inclined toward wickedness. They are not shaped by circumstance or fate, so there is no opportunity to return a hag to the path of goodness as one might do with certain types of lycanthropes or other victims of curses. Hags were never good to begin with.

Hag hunters, do not forget this and do not allow yourselves to fall victim to your own decent nature. For hags will not hesitate to destroy you if you give them an opportunity to do so.

But what of Semine? you say. She was indeed a major source of information for this book and did not attempt to harm me in any way, despite several occasions of threatening to do so.

Semine is no less evil than any other of her kind. She saw a use for me in that she wanted me to be her tool of revenge against all other hags. As long as I am forwarding her cause, she will not harm me. I am not blind to the irony, but I will tell you this: If you read these words, Semine has been destroyed. Our truce will only last so long. Though I am grateful for the assistance she provided, she knows that I will use the knowledge she gave against her should our paths cross again. When I do, either she or I will be dead at the end of that night. After that final confrontation, the survivor will arrange for the publication of this book, as such an action will better our separate causes.

Regardless who writes the final words in this volume, or who is responsible for its publication, I hope the knowledge within its pages will lead to the end of Semine and all her kind.

Compilers' Note: As my sister and I were preparing the second volume in this series, a letter arrived at Van Richten's herbalist shop. It was from our Uncle George, who—like Dr. Van Richten—has devoted his life to hunting and destroying creatures of darkness. He reported that he had encountered a greenhag in the wilds of Nova Vaasa and destroyed her. Among her belongings was a diary that recounted her dealings with Dr. Van Richten. Uncle George thought Van Richten would want to know of her passing. With Semine dead, Laurie and I decided to include portions of the diary in this, our final compilation of Dr. Van Richten's published works.

—GWF

This appendix provides rules and guidelines for creating witch and warlock heroes. Of course, Dungeon Masters can also use this section to create detailed nonplayer characters if the players cannot use this material. The witch/warlock kit blurs the lines between classes and could be problematic. The restrictions on these heroes, however, are also considerable.

Witch/Warlock Kit

Basic Information

Classes Allowed: Fighter or thief
Races Allowed: Elf, half-elf, human, Vistani, half-Vistani

Alignments Allowed: Any nonchaotic (witch); any nonlawful (warlock)

Ability Requirements: By class
 Intelligence 10+
 Wisdom 12+
 Constitution 9+

Prime Requisite: By class
Starting Cash: By class

Proficiencies

Available Categories: Common
 By class and race
Bonus Proficiencies: Herbalism (witch); Spellcraft (warlock)
Recommended Proficiencies: None

A witch/warlock kit can be used only with a non-spellcasting class. The individual cannot cast any other form of magic, and thus cannot ever be a cleric, druid, mage, specialist wizard, paladin, ranger, or bard. The witch or warlock also cannot be a psionicist or have psionic wild talents, as per *The Complete Psionics Handbook* (TSR #2117).

The witch or warlock gains all saving throws and attack rolls appropriate to the chosen class. The hero may also use any armor or shields allowed by class, unless casting spells.

Requirements

Only a female hero can adopt the witch kit. Only a male hero can adopt the warlock kit. The two kits differ in only a few details, and thus are described as one for most of this section.

A witch hero cannot be of chaotic alignment. A witch possesses too strong a love for community and sense of duty toward others to be chaotic.

A warlock hero cannot be lawful in alignment. A warlock values the individual above all else, and since lawful characters tend to emphasize society and its rules, no warlock will ever be of lawful alignment. They are all a bit rebellious.

A witch or warlock must have the mental acuity to successfully draw on the Weave while practicing witchcraft. The hero must have an Intelligence score of not less than 10 and a Wisdom score of not less than 12. The hero must also be of good health to withstand the rigors of manipulating the Weave, thus requiring a Constitution score of not less than 9.

Finally, before a witch or warlock can fully enjoy the benefits of this kit, the hero must first be taught the basics of witchcraft from a witch or warlock of at least 3rd level. The witch or warlock must then fashion a spell focus. A witch or warlock who had at least one parent who was already a witch or warlock is assumed to have already been raised in the tradition and so taught; the hero must nonetheless create a spell focus before being able to wield magic. Unless the rules for introducing witchcraft into a hero's later life are used, the hero is assumed to have received this training before play begins.

To fashion a spell focus, a witch or warlock must spend three days and nights performing rituals over the chosen focus. The hero might use a favorite weapon, a precious keepsake, or a piece of jewelry for this purpose. The only restrictions on what can be used as a focus is that it must be

something durable and hard—wood, stone, metal, crystal, glass, or a mixture of such materials. The spell focus also cannot be any form of armor, though it can be a shield, if allowed to the hero by class. The focus is nearly always an item that can be carried and hidden easily on one's person, although it is not unheard of to use standing stones or even a home as a spell focus. (However, the witch or warlock in such cases would be able to cast spells *only* when in contact with those large, immobile items—a grave restriction.)

The rituals bind the focus to the hero and to the Weave, permitting the hero to shape the stuff of the Weave into magical effects. The process of creating this focus causes a portion of the character's life energy to be bound into the focus. This life energy is represented by an expenditure of 1,000 experience points. Therefore, a hero who starts play with this kit must first earn at least 1,000 XP before being able to create the spell focus (setting aside three days to do so) and thus gain spellcasting abilities.

A witch or warlock is assumed to be a direct descendant of a member of the first group of witches and warlocks in the campaign world. The Dungeon Master may adjust the specifics of the background story, but the ability to use the Weave is assumed to be hereditary in all cases, allowing for various characters in a campaign to have the undiscovered potential to become witches and warlocks. No element of physical appearance is necessary to distinguish a witch or warlock from anyone else; the hero's ancestors are also assumed to have intermarried with those who were not warlocks or witches.

Description

As noted, no specific appearance is associated with this kit other than the presence of a spell focus at all times. The exception here would be for a warlock or witch who is part of a

coven, in which case all spell foci are marked with the sigil of the coven. Witches and warlocks are adept at keeping their unique nature hidden from those who are not let into their confidence.

If they are forced to display their powers among those who are not warlocks, witches, or allies of the same, they will claim to be former wizards, priests, or the like. To this end, warlocks learn some of the theories involved with the arts of wizardry, represented by their free proficiency in Spellcraft. They can add the appropriate gestures and carry the appropriate spell components to make it look as if they are casting normal wizard magic. Real wizards or other characters with the Spellcraft proficiency can see through this deception.

Roleplaying

Witches

At the core of every witch's being is a strong parental instinct to nurture and protect the family. This family does not need to be a spouse and children, but could just as easily be an adventuring group, the witch's coven, or orphans in the city she inhabits. No matter who her "family" is, a witch is willing to lay down her life to save those she loves. Further, she will go to great extremes to take revenge against those who have harmed her family. This causes a witch with a family to be careful about picking her battles. Once a struggle is joined, however, she does her utmost to ensure complete victory. She leaves opponents unable or unwilling to threaten the witch or her family again.

A witch is typically active but not necessarily forward, often preferring to work behind the scenes to accomplish her goals. She makes a charismatic and well-liked leader, teacher, manager, or aide, and she functions best while directing or working in a group. A typical witch dislikes working alone for long periods of time. A witch

is not likely to question a group rule or law, thinking "If everyone is doing it, it must be okay" (unless the law is obviously destructive and results in evil or chaos).

Witches prefer to operate within a given social structure, supporting the better aspects of any state or town they inhabit. They have been known to hold political office, run charities, operate temples and hospices, and take part in similar groups that benefit the general welfare of their societies. It is not unknown for witches to support and enforce restrictive laws if they perceive it will benefit the "greater good." Thus, if Vistani have been known to make trouble in a town inhabited by witches, it is likely the witches will support laws designed to keep all Vistani out of the town proper.

Warlocks

Most warlocks are men who possess strong social consciences, though they do not necessarily subscribe to the values of the majority of their society. They want everyone to be healthy and happy, and to have an equal chance to achieve their dreams. They value individual rights, freedoms, and desires above those that a lawful society might try to dictate; they are often found on the forefront of struggles to change societies where one or more groups keep others back because of their background or racial origins. They work alone much more effectively than do witches, tending to rebel when made to work in groups for long periods of time. A warlock tends to think "If everyone is doing it, it must be bad because it forces everyone into mental slavery."

One exception to the warlocks' love of individual freedom concerns covens. Here, warlocks work together with their brethren to forward the goals of the coven, as well as goals shared by any witch coven cooperating with them. (A warlock

coven might be disguised as a warrior band or thieves' guild, though it will not truly be either.) However, since coven members invariably have similar interests and goals, few warlocks feel as though they have sacrificed any of their principles by joining. Indeed, the added power they enjoy helps them work toward achieving their important goals. Warlock covens rarely think small, and they rarely focus on the short term. They initiate plans that take generations to complete; thus, many of them are prone to use magical means to extend their lives.

Another exception to the warlocks' love of individual freedoms is the tendency the covens have to come into conflict with one another. Covens tend to write down their long-term agendas. Over time, as the original coven members die and others take their place, these written records cause some warlocks to grow as hidebound and close-minded as some of the churches and governments they oppose. Hence, it is not uncommon for well-established warlock covens to be in conflict with new ones over petty issues such as how to apply their magic to further the cause of personal freedom or how to recruit other warlocks. Witch covens only rarely come into conflict like this, but warlock covens often do.

Good-aligned warlocks tend to use their powers to secure the rights of others to pursue their destinies. They act against governments and authorities only when they behave in an oppressive fashion that denies individual rights, opportunities, and happiness. On the other hand, warlocks of evil alignment work against authorities and governing bodies of all types. In both cases, warlocks reserve their most destructive magic for use against those who attempt to oppress the weak. Good-aligned warlocks frequently attempt to show those they have freed from tyranny how to handle

their new freedom, while evil warlocks simply leave them to their own devices or, at worst, prey on them.

Benefits

The primary benefit of this kit is the ability to wield magic. For the sake of simplicity, witch and warlock spells duplicate the effects of priest and wizard spells from the *Player's Handbook* and *Tome of Magic*, along with any other spells the Dungeon Master feels are appropriate for the campaign. These spells, however, are not true wizard or priest magic. Creatures and items that enjoy magic resistance or immunity to certain schools and spheres of magic still enjoy those benefits against witch and warlock spells duplicating those schools and spheres, but items specifically designed to affect or interact with wizard or priest magic do not affect witch or warlock spells, and witch and warlock spells do not affect or interact with them. (For example, a warlock cannot cast spells into a *ring of spell storing*, nor can a witch enjoy the benefits of a *ring of wizardry* or *pearl of power*.) Certain spells have additional limitations.

The number of spells a witch or warlock can cast is determined by level (see the Warlock and Witch Spell Progression table). The casting time on all witch and warlock spells that duplicate wizard or priest spells is twice the length given in the spell description. On the other hand, the witch requires none of the material, somatic, or verbal components mentioned are needed. Unless noted otherwise, all a witch or warlock needs to cast a spell are the memorized Weave patterns (obtained from studying a spellbook) and a spell focus.

A witch or warlock begins play with a spellbook that has $2d6+2$ 1st-level spells allowed to the hero, as given later in this section. The Dungeon Master gets to decide which

spells are in the spellbook. The starting allotment of spells never includes coven spells. The witch or warlock can discover additional spells through the use of *reveal the weave*, a 1st-level spell described later in this section.

Witches

Individual witches can create magical effects that duplicate priest spells from the following spheres: All, Animal, Creation, Elemental (Water and Earth), Healing, Plant, Sun, and Travelers. Although these spells are not truly priest magic, witches nonetheless gain the bonus spells that high Wisdom scores would afford them if they were priests.

Additionally, witches can band together in covens. Witches who are part of a coven gain the ability to create magical effects that duplicate wizard spells from the following schools: Alteration, Enchantment/Charm, Elemental (Air and Fire), Lesser and Greater Divination, Illusion, and Necromancy. Finally, they can also select spells from the list of new spells that appear later in this chapter.

Whenever a witch is within 60 feet of another person who is a witch or warlock, the Dungeon Master should make a Wisdom check for the character. If it is successful, she feels drawn to that person; if the person is not in sight, she feels a strong urge to go in the direction of that person. If the other person is a practicing witch or warlock, the Wisdom check is made with a +3 bonus. This attraction is present even in a hero who is not a trained or practicing witch. If she has been taught about her heritage, the sensation is understood; an untrained witch won't understand what is happening.

When a witch finds someone linked to the Weave, she typically takes the time to determine if that person is suited to become a witch or warlock. If the character has the raw mental and physical power to handle

the stress of manipulating the Weave, is interested in learning witchcraft, and is female, the witch becomes a teacher (assuming she has the free time and is at least 3rd level as a witch). If the character is male, the witch has no free time, or she is below 3rd level, she sends the prospective student to a warlock or witch she trusts. Often, even if the character is not capable of becoming a practicing witch or warlock, the witch still attempts to forge bonds with the person, hoping to make a friend and ally.

Warlocks

Individual warlocks can create magical effects that duplicate wizard spells from the following schools: Abjuration, Conjunction/Summoning, Elemental (Fire and Air), Invocation/Evocation, Necromancy, and Wild Magic.

Additionally, warlocks can band together in covens. Warlocks who are part of a coven gain the ability to create magical effects that duplicate priest spells from the following spheres: All, Chaos, Combat, Divination, Elemental (Fire and Air), Necromantic, Thought, Time, and Wards. The casting of these spells is governed by specific guidelines, described later. Further, warlocks can select spells from the list of new spells that appear later in this chapter.

A warlock has a chance of recognizing another warlock or witch within his line of sight, to a distance of 30 feet. If the warlock hero makes a successful saving throw vs. paralyzation, he feels a slight tingle when looking on another person who is a warlock or witch, or has the potential to become one. A person with the potential but no training can be recognized if the warlock makes a successful saving throw vs. paralyzation at a -2 penalty. The warlock usually reacts similarly to the witch, noted earlier.

Hindrances

A witch or warlock's bare flesh must be in contact with the spell focus in order to cast spells. If the witch or warlock should ever be without the spell focus, or be unable to touch it, the hero cannot shape the Weave into magical effects. For this reason, a spell focus is often a ring, necklace, or other ornament.

Should a witch or warlock's spell focus ever be damaged or destroyed, the 1,000 XP placed into it at its creation are lost. The hero can then create a new one, but only by spending three days and nights performing rituals, and by placing 1,000 XP of life force into the new focus; if this amount would cause a level loss, the drop in level is taken, with appropriate loss of hit points and other benefits. A witch or warlock can have only one spell focus at a time. Should the hero ever create more than one, they both cease to function, all experience points placed into them are lost, and the witch or warlock must create a third focus, at the cost of an additional 1,000 XP.

A hero with the witch or warlock kit can have only one class, fighter or thief, and can never be dual-classed (if human) or multiclassed (if not). From the start of play, the experience point costs required to reach each new level in that class double, accounting for the hero's time spent learning how to use the Weave as well as practicing normal class skills. A new witch or warlock level of spell use is gained whenever a new experience level in the normal class is gained (see the Warlock and Witch Spell Progression table). Thus, a 1st-level thief who is a witch has all the powers of a 1st-level witch once she gains 1,000 XP and creates her spell focus. She will be a 2nd-level thief/2nd-level warlock when she gains a new total of 2,500 XP.

Witches and warlocks never gain experience point bonuses from high

scores in their prime attributes. While they may be as skilled in their field as any other character, their time and attention is divided between the everyday pursuits of their class as well as the extra effort it takes to master the powers that come with their link to the Weave. Therefore, they are able to hold their own, but they do not excel as other naturally talented people in their fields do.

No armor of any kind can be worn while casting witch or warlock spells, and the hero cannot hold a shield or a weapon unless one of these is the spell focus.

An additional danger to this kit lies in the risk of attribute drains. If a hero should ever drop below the required attribute levels to be eligible for this kit, he or she is still considered a warlock or witch but cannot cast any spells. The kit cannot be abandoned, but the hero can continue to advance normally in levels in the main class. Spell loss continues until the hero once again meets the minimum requirements for the kit. The exception to this is if Constitution drops below 9; in this case, the hero can continue to cast spells, but must make a System Shock roll every time a spell is cast. If the check fails, the hero suffers 1d10 points of damage from magical feedback, then slips into a coma for 1 hour per point of damage suffered.

A thief with the witch or warlock kit cannot cast spells from scrolls at high levels, and will never belong to a true thieves' guild or similar criminal group, always acting alone. Training costs for a thief with this kit are doubled when new levels are being gained, since the hero must be self-taught in so many things.

The ability to detect other witches and warlocks also means the hero can be detected by them. This can be a major drawback for a hero who is at odds with other witches, warlocks, or covens, particularly if the latter are evil.

Witch and Warlock Spell Progression

Character Level	Spell Level*					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	1	—	—	—	—	—
2	2	—	—	—	—	—
3	2	1	—	—	—	—
4	3	2	—	—	—	—
5	3	2	1	—	—	—
6	3	3	2	—	—	—
7	4	3	2	—	—	—
8	4	3	3	—	—	—
9	4	4	3	—	—	—
10	4	4	3	1	—	—
11	5	4	4	2	—	—
12	5	4	4	2	—	—
13	5	5	4	3	—	—
14	5	5	4	3	1	—
15	5	5	5	3	2	—
16	6	5	5	3	2	—
17	6	5	5	4	2	—
18	6	5	5	4	3	—
19	6	6	5	4	3	—
20	6	6	5	4	3	1

* Priest spells for witches, wizard spells for warlocks.

Discovering a Heritage

A Dungeon Master can allow a hero to adopt the witch or warlock kit after the start of play, even late in the campaign. However, the hero must still have only a single class and no other psionic or spellcasting abilities in order to gain this benefit.

Training as a witch or warlock then occurs, taking the hero (and the teacher) out of the campaign for two years of game time in order to learn how to use the Weave. From the moment the hero reenters play, the experience point cost required to reach each new level doubles. The hero's level as a witch or warlock begins at 1st, regardless of the level in the normal class, and a new witch or warlock level is gained whenever a new experience level in the normal class is gained. Thus, a 7th-level fighter who becomes a warlock is considered a 7th-level fighter/1st-level warlock. When he

reaches the 8th level of ability as a warrior (at 250,000 XP), he also becomes a 2nd-level warlock.

Obviously, it is much more difficult for a hero who has advanced far in his normal profession to learn how to be a witch or warlock than it is for a hero who starts out life properly trained. Once a witch or warlock has embraced this birthright, there is no turning back or changing course.

Using Warlock and Witch Kits

If the Dungeon Master wants to introduce witches and warlocks into an ongoing AD&D campaign using the RAVENLOFT rules, the best time is when the adventurers travel to an isolated region of the world, a place about which they know little. New character types can then be introduced during the general discovery process. For example, the Dungeon Master can pick an island in the GREYHAWK, DRAGONLANCE®, or FORGOTTEN REALMS campaigns as home to witches and warlocks who serve female deities of nature or magic.

A warlock or witch from a tiny location (an island or the like) should not be able to cast spells higher than 3rd level, regardless of what level the hero attains. Once making landfall elsewhere, the hero must create a new spell focus attuned to that world alone.

Another way to handle the addition of witches and warlocks to a setting is to devise a plot in which it is revealed that nonplayer characters who had been assumed to be clerics, druids, or wizards are actually witches or warlocks. If such additions grow naturally out of a well-crafted plot, they will not seem like a jarring change to the setting and may in fact provide excitement and life to an ongoing campaign. Discovery keeps a campaign going.

In any event, witch and warlock covens should be rare things, limited only to a select few areas where the culture lends itself to them. Witch and warlock heroes are generated

otherwise according to the standard rules of the current campaign (such as adding blood abilities to heroes in the BIRTHRIGHT campaign, or psionic wild talents to heroes in the DARK SUN® campaign).

Special Notes on Spells

While much of the magic drawn from the Weave duplicates wizard and priest spells, there are certain spells that warlocks and witches cannot cast, and others that display subtle differences from standard spells.

When used in a RAVENLOFT campaign, spells used by warlocks and witches are subject to all the limitations and changes in effects set forth in *Domains of Dread*, unless otherwise stated in this section. Even if used outside the RAVENLOFT setting, we advise that Dungeon Masters who have access to *Domains of Dread* impose the alterations on the spells that are set forth in that volume in order to give warlock and witch spells a different flavor and feel.

The spellcasting abilities of witches and warlocks are tightly tied to their native worlds or realities. It is a commonly held belief that their magic simply will not function if they leave their native worlds. For that reason, very few of them ever do. Few warlocks and witches ever become powerful enough to cast *plane shift*, and even fewer are willing to risk being stranded in some foreign reality without the magic to bring them home. Some witches and warlocks even claim that their magic is tied to the kingdoms or domain in which they were born, so some rarely even leave their homeland.

For reasons that are not clearly understood, no witch or warlock has ever successfully woven spell effects like those from the priest sphere of Law. This sphere is considered off limits to them.

Witch and warlocks are not subject to the "wild surges" and level increases and decreases described in

the *Tome of Magic*, even when creating effects similar to Wild Magic spells.

Notes on Priest Spells

These notes apply both to spells being used by warlocks and witches within the RAVENLOFT setting, as well as any other AD&D campaign world in which the Dungeon Master is willing to allow players to use these kits.

Witch and warlock magic does not draw on the divine favor of the gods. Although their spells produce effects similar to those in the normal spell descriptions, any references to divine might, influence, or favor should be considered references to the Weave. Witch and warlock magic is not affected by any restrictions or benefits that state they specifically impact magic of a particular god, pantheon, or alignment.

Aside from this general observation, there are a number of specific considerations and changes to the way priest spells function when they are used to represent witch and warlock magic. The following material addresses spells and spellcasting methods found in the *Player's Handbook* and *Tome of Magic*. Dungeon Masters and players must to extrapolate other changes as necessary should spells from other sources be used in individual campaigns. (In the lists that follow, "no" means "not available to witches or warlocks").

Cooperative magic: Witches and warlocks create these spells only through their covens. At least three coven members must be present in order to cast a cooperative spell, and each member must be familiar with it. (Such magic is handed down through each coven and soon taught to newcomers.) Generally, only witches or warlocks of the same coven can use cooperative magic. However, it is possible for witches of one coven to work with warlocks of another to create cooperative magic if the two covens have a long-standing alliance. It is not possible for witches from two different

witch covens to band together and cast cooperative magic, nor can warlocks from two different warlock covens do so.

Faith magic: Witches and warlocks cannot gain these types of benefits.

Quest spells: Covens with seven or thirteen members can use these spells, but individual witches or warlocks or three-member covens cannot.

First-Level Spells

Call upon faith: no

Combine: This cooperative spell can only be cast by witches or warlocks who belong to the same coven.

Ring of hands: All casters must be members of the same coven in order to create this spell effect.

Speak with astral traveler: no

Second-Level Spells

Chant: The effects here are cumulative with the *luck* spell.

Create holy symbol: no

Draw upon holy might: no

Spiritual hammer: no

Third-Level Spells

Line of protection: This spell can only be cast by witches or warlocks who belong to the same coven.

Prayer: no

Fourth-Level Spells

Circle of privacy: Witches and warlocks must still use salt to create the circle, but no other material components are needed.

Cloak of bravery: The effects of this spell are cumulative with the *luck* spell.

Focus: no

Solipsism: no

Uplift: no

Fifth-Level Spells

Commune: n/a

Extradimensional manipulation: no

Extradimensional pocket: no

Flame strike: no

Forbiddance: For witches and warlocks, this spell can only be used to keep non-coven members from entering their meeting place using the magical or conventional means. The

spell always functions as "alignment different with respect to good and evil," and non-coven members must always mention the password if they are to enter safely. This password must also be uttered as part of the casting of the *teleport*, *plane shift*, or other spell being used to enter the meeting place.

Sixth-Level Spells

The great circle: This spell requires cooperative magic and can only be created by witches or warlocks belonging to the same coven. Further, the coven must have at least seven members, and no fewer than three members must work together to cast the spell.

Word of recall: This spell is usable only by witches and warlocks who belong to a coven. It takes them instantly back to the coven's meeting place.

Seventh-Level Spells

No warlock or witch has ever been known to become skilled enough at manipulating the Weave to create magical effects of this magnitude.

Notes on Wizard Spells

These notes apply both to spells being used by warlocks and witches within the RAVENLOFT setting, as well as any other AD&D campaign world in which the Dungeon Master is willing to allow players to use these kits.

Aside from this general observation, there are a number of specific considerations and changes to the way wizard spells function when they are used to represent witch and warlock magic. The following addresses spells and spellcasting methods found in the *Player's Handbook* and *Tome of Magic*. Dungeon Masters and players will have to extrapolate other limitations based on these.

First-Level Spells

Conjure spell components: no

Find familiar: In a RAVENLOFT campaign, this spell has a 50% chance

of summoning a dangerous pseudo-familiar (see *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix III*).

Identify: no

Nahal's reckless dweomer: no

Read magic: This spell does not give witches and warlocks the ability to read spellbooks and spell scrolls. It does, however, allow them to identify other forms of magical sigils and scripts, as set forth in the spell description.

Wizard mark: no

Second-Level Spells

Chaos shield: no

Third-Level Spells

Explosive runes: no

Augmentation I: no

Far reaching I: no

Fourth-Level Spells

Dilation I: no

Rary's mnemonic enhancer: no

Far reaching II: no

Fifth-Level Spells

Contact other plane: When this spell is cast, the Dungeon Master should roll percentile dice. If the result is 01-03, it functions as described in the *Player's Handbook*. If the result is 04-50, the witch or warlock actually manages to reach out and contact a powerful being (15th-level or higher priest or wizard, a fiend, vampire, lich, or other such monster) that resides on the same plane as the caster. If the rules from *Domains of Dread* are being used, the spell functions as described within those pages. If the result is 51-00, the spell simply does not work. In all instances, the caster always has a 65% chance of going insane, regardless of other variables.

Far reaching III: no

Khazid's procurement: Unlike most warlock spells, this spell requires the material components specified in the description and can be cast only by covens.

Magic jar: The witch or warlock's spell focus is the "special receptacle" specified in the spell description.

Sixth-Level Spells

Augmentation II: no
 Dilation II: no
 Mordenkainen's lucubration: no
 Wildshield: no
 Wildstrike: no

Seventh- to Ninth-Level Wizard Spells

No warlock or witch has ever been known to become skilled enough at manipulating the Weave to create magical effects of these magnitudes.

New Spells

The following spells can be cast only by witches and warlocks using spell foci. They are created using the Weave and can be memorized by both witches and warlocks.

As mentioned in the kit descriptions, the magical powers used by witches and warlocks are not truly wizard or priest spells. For purposes of dealing with spell immunities and resistances that exist in the AD&D game, these spells are all classified as Alteration magic. However, this does not mean that witches need to form covens in order to cast them.

These spells are commonly known among witches and warlocks. They are usually taught to the young by their masters or serve as gifts to someone who first achieves the ability to cast a spell. They are inscribed in the recipients' spellbooks of Weave patterns.

Young witches and warlocks are also given the same warning: "Use your power carefully and never take the Weave for granted. The incautious user may become entangled and paralyzed in its netting at the most inopportune moments." In other words, even these spells may have unexpected side effects, and a warlock or witch should always be prepared to rely on wits and skills rather than the Weave.

Luck

Level: 1
 Range: Touch
 Duration: 3 turns/level
 Area of Effect: 1 target
 Components: S, M
 Casting Time: 1
 Saving Throw: Negates

This spell impacts the forces of fate, which are viewed by witches and warlocks as being yet another manifestation of the Weave. It grants the recipient a +1 bonus to all attack rolls and saving throws made during the spell's duration, as well as providing a targeted rogue character a +10% bonus to all thief skill checks made while the spell is in effect. Further, it provides a 10% bonus to all other percentage-based checks where appropriate, always to the benefit of the target.

The reverse form of the spell, *bad luck*, imposes -1 penalties to all attack rolls and saving throws. It also affects percentage-based checks, but the -10% penalty is applied to the detriment of the target.

Reveal the Weave

Level: 1
 Range: 0
 Duration: Special
 Area of Effect: Caster
 Components: M
 Casting Time: 1 hour+2d6 turns
 Saving Throw: Negates

Through the use of this spell, witches and warlocks can discover new spells in the intricate patterns of the Weave. Warlocks use this spell to identify patterns that duplicate wizard magic while witches use it to discover the patterns for priest magic.

To use this spell, the caster first spends 30 minutes in meditation, burning specially prepared incense. The caster then enters a trance in which the world seems to fade away and the misty patterns of the Weave become visible. The caster can, through force of will and familiarity with the Weave, identify the patterns

that must be imprinted on the mind to create a desired spell effect.

Once this pattern has been identified, the caster of the spell sketches it on a piece of paper or traces it in a tray filled with white sand while still in the trance. As soon as the pattern is traced, the spell ends. The caster then transfers the spell pattern to a more permanent form and refines the duplication of the pattern, testing the new spell in the process.

The work needed to refine the spell takes 2d6 hours, plus 1 hour per level of the spell. It requires the caster to attempt to memorize the pattern he has uncovered, then attempt to cast the spell. Refining the pattern requires a successful Wisdom check. If the pattern has not been properly refined, the spell fails when the witch or warlock attempts to cast it. The character must then spend 1d6 additional hours working on the pattern, following by an additional Wisdom check. The caster can continue to refine the pattern, or attempt to cast the spell again and start from scratch. Attempts to cast the spell will automatically fail until the correct pattern has been arrived at.

For example, to discover the secret of the 1st-level wizard spell *wall of fog*, Elias casts *reveal the weave*. It takes him 2 hours and 10 minutes of intense concentration. When he's done, he's got the rough Weave pattern scribbled on a piece of parchment. He then spends the rest of the day (7 hours) refining the rough pattern. Once he thinks he's gotten it right, he spends a few moments studying the pattern, imprinting it in his mind. Then, holding his spell focus, he attempts to cast the spell. Nothing happens. (Elias failed his Wisdom check.) Tired from a long day of study, he goes to bed. The next day, after an additional 5 hours of refining and revising the pattern, he successfully masters *wall of fog*.

With a successful Intelligence check, the caster can, through force of will and familiarity with the Weave, identify the

patterns needed for mental imprinting to create a desired spell effect. If the Intelligence check is failed, the caster still manages to discern the pattern for a 1st-level wizard or priest spell, depending on what is appropriate. (Warlocks will always find wizard spells, and witches will always find priest spells.) The Dungeon Master chooses the spell, but does not inform the player what it is. The spell should be one the character did not already know, and the character will not know that this is not the desired spell until it has been successfully tested.

Reveal the weave is a good way for Dungeon Masters to introduce new spells or spells of their own devising into the campaign. There are endless permutations of the Weave, and witches and warlocks are constantly discovering new and bizarre magical effects that they can bring about with it.

Arcane Insights

Level: 2

Range: 0

Duration: 1 round/level

Area of Effect: 1 item/level

Components: S, M

Casting Time: Special

Saving Throw: None

This spell functions exactly like the 1st-level wizard spell *identify*, except that the caster does not need to handle the item and thus suffers no consequences from such contact.

Love Charm

Level: 2

Range: 20 feet/level

Duration: Special

Area of Effect: 1 target

Components: M

Casting Time: 2 rounds

Saving Throw: Negates

This spell allows the caster to generate an intense feeling of love in the subject, directed toward any chosen person of the opposite sex (the target), including the caster. When the spell takes effect, the subject responds to the target as though the target had

a Charisma of 19. In addition, the subject feels a strong romantic and physical attraction toward the target. The subject will do whatever it takes to spend as much time as possible in the company of the target. He or she is unable to conceive of betraying or taking violent action against the target.

Saving throws versus this spell, as well as its duration, are handled in a fashion identical with the *charm person* spell. Should the subject shake off the spell, however, the subject feels no hostility toward the target; the intense feeling of love merely ends. However, if the target has treated the subject as a suitor and lover would, it is possible that true romance has blossomed between them.

In order to successfully cast this spell, the caster must possess two items, one belonging to the subject and one belonging to the target. In addition, the caster, subject and target must all be within the spell's range when it is cast. Depending on the circumstances under which this spell is used, the caster might need to make a powers check, if the rules from *Domains of Dread* are in effect.

Master Coven Magic

Level: 2

Range: 0

Duration: Special

Area of Effect: Caster

Components: M

Casting Time: Special

Saving Throw: None

Once a warlock or witch has joined a coven, the bond allows the hero greater access to and control over the Weave. Warlocks gain the ability to reproduce the effects of select priest spells, while witches gain the ability to reproduce the effects of select wizard spells.

This spell is considered cooperative magic. It can be cast by two or more members of the same coven who are interested in discovering the Weave pattern for a particular spell. The casters settle on a spell that they wish to learn, then spend the first 30 minutes

of casting time in meditation, burning a variety of specially prepared incense. They then enter a trance in which the trappings of the real world fade and the misty patterns of the Weave become visible to the casters. The casters identify the pattern that they need to imprint upon their minds to create the desired spell effect and copy it down as a wizard would write down a spell.

Once this pattern has been identified, the casters, operating as one, sketch it on a piece of paper or trace it in a tray filled with white sand while still in the trance. As soon as the pattern has been traced, the spell ends. The casters must then transfer the spell pattern into a more permanent form and refine the duplication of the pattern, testing the new spell in the process.

The work needed to refine the spell takes 2d6 hours, plus 1 hour per level of the spell, and requires each individual caster to attempt to memorize the pattern uncovered, then attempt to cast the spell. Refining the pattern requires a successful Wisdom check. If the pattern has not been properly refined, the spell fails when the individual witch or warlock attempts to cast it. The character must then spend 1d6 additional hours working on the pattern, following by an additional Wisdom check. Alternatively, the character can simply copy the pattern from the spellbook of a coven member who successfully transcribed the rough spell, spending 20d6 rounds doing so.

The casting time for *master coven magic* is 1 hour+2d6 turns, less 1 turn for each coven member involved in the casting, with a minimum of 1 turn.

Lethe

Level: 3

Range: 30 yards

Duration: Permanent

Area of Effect: 1-4 targets in a 20-foot cube

Components: V, M

Casting Time: 2

Saving Throw: Negates

This spell is a more powerful version of the 2nd-level wizard spell *forget*. It causes up to four targets within the spell effect to forget the events of the last 3 hours per level of the caster. (Thus, a 15th-level witch can cause a target to forget the last 45 hours.) The caster decides which of creatures are to be affected, and the saving throws are modified as they are in the *forget* spell.

The excision of so much memory is traumatic. If it is ever returned (by the use of a *heal* or *restoration* spell, for example), the shock is so great that the subject must make a saving throw vs. wand or be stunned for 1 round per hour of memory excised.

The Weave's Bounty

Level: 4

Range: Unlimited

Duration: Special

Area of Effect: Special

Components: V, M

Casting Time: 7

Saving Throw: Special

The Weave's bounty is a similar to the wizard spell *limited wish*, but it has a number of significant restrictions. The caster must state the desired result of the spell in a maximum of seven words. If the words comprise a statement that makes some kind of sense (even if it is not the sense that the caster intended), there's a 70% chance the spell takes effect. If the statement of desire runs over seven words, or if the percentile roll indicates failure of the spell, the spell is expended but nothing happens.

The Weave's bounty always provides what the caster desired, but in a natural—not supernatural—way. The result of the spell does not become apparent for 1d6 days, but when it does, there will always be a logical explanation for it. (For example, a witch wishes for wealth. Several days later, she discovers her parents and older brother have died at the hands of a mysterious killer, and she has inherited the family estate.)

Each time this spell is used, there is a 30% chance the caster permanently loses 1 point of Intelligence. This Intelligence loss may occur whether or not the spell actually has any effect.

The Dungeon Master is encouraged to be somewhat perverse when adjudicating this spell. However, this product is designed with the intent of bringing a little terror to AD&D campaigns, so the player should consider the words of his or her character carefully.

A RAVENLOFT campaign adds special difficulties. Immediately after casting this spell, the Dungeon Master should roll a saving throw vs. breath weapon for the witch or warlock. Regardless whether the spell has the desired effect or not, if the saving is failed, the character has attracted the attention of dire and mysterious forces.

The player should roll percentile dice. If the roll is greater than 5%, the character suffers the effects of a *curse* spell (the reverse of *bles*). A *protection from evil* or *remove curse* spell will lift this adverse effect on the character, but as it is being cast, the character must roll another saving throw vs. breath weapon. If this save is failed, incandescent mists suddenly well up around the caster and the target. The cursed witch or warlock (and any of companions who enter the mists) must defeat a number of skeletons equal to the target's level plus 2d4. These skeletons focus their wrath on the caster and the target of the spell. If the battle is won, the spell is effective and the character is no longer subject to the *curse*. However, the character casting the spell is now subject to the *curse*. (It can be removed through normal means, or even a *dispel magic* cast against an 18th-level caster.)

Experienced warlocks and witches discourage the use of *the Weave's bounty* except in dire circumstances. They also warn against using it unless one is part of a coven that can supply the needed magic if the worst happens.

Needless to say, if such mysterious events happen on a frequent basis, the character's reputation in the community may be damaged.

Borrowed Time

Level: 5

Range: Self

Duration: Special

Area of Effect: Caster

Components: M

Casting Time: 3 days

Saving Throw: None

Warlocks and witches often struggle against powerful foes or face tasks they cannot complete in their lifetimes. To achieve their objectives or even the odds with their enemies, they might turn to the Weave for help, to extend their lives through unnatural means.

This spell is similar in some ways to the ritual that wizards and priests use to become lichs, although the result is not quite as predictable and the effect does not grant the caster eternal life. Instead, it allows the caster, once his life has ended through natural or unnatural means, to rise as an undead and to continue his existence in this form until a specific task has been completed. That task must be specified during the casting of the spell, which takes place over the course of three days and involves a series of purification rituals and meditations to focus the character's mind on the task to be done.

Regardless of the character's intention or the task to be completed, the single-mindedness that prompts someone to cast this spell attracts the attention of local evil powers, if the rules from *Domains of Dread*, Chapter Seven, are in play. Upon completion of the spell, the character must make a powers check with a 5% chance of failure.

If a character dies before the stated goal has been obtained, the caster rises again within 1d6+1 days as an undead. During this time, *raise dead* or *resurrection* spells have no effect. If the body is destroyed as a result of the

circumstances surrounding the death, or it is destroyed before the caster returns from the dead, the caster becomes an incorporeal undead. (The type of undead that the caster becomes is determined by using a table later.) If the caster manages to complete the set task before death, the spell has no effect.

The character's undead existence lasts until three days after the specified task has been completed. The character then expires a second time and cannot be revived by any means at all, including a *wish*. The Weave provides the character with enough time to achieve the goal, then completely absorbs the caster as "interest" on the "borrowed time." A character slain while in an undead state is forever destroyed. If the caster does not make constant progress toward achieving the goal, the Weave may claim the caster prematurely. Essentially, the completion of the task should always be the character's top priority, although minor side trips and distractions are permissible for characters who are part of covens, or who want to continue to work with lifelong comrades. (The Dungeon Master decides whether the player is abusing this extra "lease on life" that the character has received.)

The witch or warlock retains the alignment and spellcasting abilities possessed in life. The character continues to become more adept in spell use by using the advancement system provided in the guidelines for characters who adopt the witch or warlock kit in play. The character earns 25% of the normally gained experience points. All other class benefits are lost except for basic weapon and nonweapon proficiencies. Hit Dice are the standard for the monster type assumed.

A hero who rises as an undead must add +5% to all powers checks made under the *Domains of Dread* rules. If a hero fails five such powers checks after starting this new

existence, the hero is automatically destroyed and cannot be brought back to life through any means, even a *wish*. (Dungeon Masters might also consider making the hero roll a saving throw vs. death magic whenever the undead abilities are abused, used in offensive ways that do not relate directly to achieving the task set while casting the spell. Once five such saving throws have failed, the hero is destroyed as described above.)

In a RAVENLOFT campaign, however, there is a special risk. Upon dying again, a hero makes a saving throw vs. paralyzation as per a fighter of a level equal to the hero's Hit Dice. If the saving throw is successful, the character is absorbed by the Weave and gone forever from the campaign. If the save fails, the character rises again three nights later as a full-strength wraith, with a burning hatred for all living things, particularly former friends and loved ones.

Borrowed Time Consequences

1d100	Undead type
01-10	Odern*
11-20	Revenant
21-30	Death knight
31-45	Zombie lord*
46-56	Wraith
57-65	Radiant spirit**
66-75	Revenant
76-85	Ghost (second magnitude)***
86-90	Ghost (third magnitude)***
91-95	Ghost (fourth magnitude)***
96-00	Vampire

* See the first RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix, or else replace this with a ghost.

** See the RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix III, or else replace this with a revenant.

*** Ghost magnitude is detailed in *Van Richten's Monster Hunter's Compendium, Volume Two* (TSR #11507). The Dungeon Master assigns appropriate salient abilities, determines the ghost's personality, and the circumstances under which the ghost was created. Otherwise, the ghost from the MONSTROUS MANUAL should be used.

Mind Write

Level: 6
 Range: Touch
 Duration: Permanent
 Area of Effect: 1 target
 Components: M
 Casting Time: Special
 Saving Throw: Negates

This powerful spell could be described as the reverse of *lethe*: Instead of removing the target's memory, it lets the caster feed false memories into the target's mind. The target is unable to distinguish false memories inserted this way from natural memories.

The total length of "memory time" that the caster can insert is limited to a half-hour per level. This means that a 20th-level warlock can create false memories for a 10-hour period. The time taken to insert these memories is 5 minutes for each hour of memory being created, and the caster must remain completely focused on the events being fabricated in order for the spell to be successful. Thus, a witch would need 20 minutes to insert 4 hours of false memories.

The caster can choose exactly how far back in the target's memory the false memories are to be implanted. The limit is 1 year per level of the caster, so the warlock from the previous example could insert the false memories as far back as 20 years ago.

The caster must have some reasonable familiarity with the events being described, but the target's own brain fills in the fine details. For example, if a warlock is inserting memories of a ferry ride, he must be familiar with the sensations of being aboard a small vessel. He does not need to fill in all the details, such as the weather, the ferryman's name, and so on, unless they are meant to be significant parts of the memory.

If the target has real memories covering the same period as the false memories, confusion results. The target cannot tell which version of events is true, but the contradiction is recognized. If there is no specific day

attached to the false memory, the target may simply think that his or her memory is "playing tricks." If the memory is tied to specific events or a particular day, the victim must make a saving throw vs. spell once per day. If the saving throw is failed, the victim behaves as if under the influence of a *confusion* spell for 2d6 hours. False memories that include actions totally against the subject's nature (such as a good-aligned priest slaying a paladin with a *holy sword*) will prompt a saving throw vs. spell every round until the *confusion* effect takes hold.

For these reasons, intelligent casters will use *lethe* on a victim before implanting false memories. (The Dungeon Master must adjudicate if a contradiction in a target's mind is so striking so as to prompt the saving throws.) The use of *heal* or *restoration* spells on the victim reduces the intensity of the false memories, so that the target can recognize them for what they are.

This spell cannot be used to rework the target's identity and basic personal knowledge (name, hometown, parents and siblings, etc.). These matters are in the memory record in too many different places to modify in such a way. Similarly, *mind write* cannot be used to teach the target any spells, skills, or proficiencies. The target can be made to falsely remember casting a spell or using a proficiency, but the target is incapable of doing so now.

Depending on the circumstances under which this spell is cast, and the caster's intentions for doing so, its use may require a powers check if the rules from *Domains of Dread* are in use.

New Magical Items

This section features magical items produced by hag coveys and witch and warlock covens. These items are all very rare and are typically not encountered in the hands of others, with the exception of those specifically created to be given to minions or trusted associates. Unless the Dungeon

Master rules otherwise, these magical items can be created or recharged only by hags or witches and warlocks.

Hag Items

The following magical items can be placed in hag treasure troves in place of the more mundane treasures. Hags can use them against heroes, of course.

Potion of lust

Despite its name, this potion affects more than the victim's libido. It enhances the extreme facts of the imbiber's personality, so that whatever indulgence is most enjoyed becomes irresistible. The victim eats until becoming sick, drinks alcohol until unconscious, etc. A character attempting to resist the effects of the potion must make a saving throw vs. spell, with a -2 penalty in every round spent not attempting to pursue the desired activity. If the saving throw is successful, the victim acts normally for 1d4 rounds, then must make another saving throw.

This potion is odorless and tasteless; it looks like brackish water until mixed with other liquids or used in the preparation of a meal. Each bottle holds 1d4 doses. Hags enjoy tricking their victims into drinking these potions, hoping to make their final moments as humiliating as possible. The effects of a *potion of lust* last for 1d6+2 turns.

Sea hag's talon

This appears to be a fairly unremarkable dagger. It registers as mildly enchanted when exposed to a *detect magic* spell, but otherwise it looks no different from the kind of short dagger that skilled weaponsmiths produce.

Closer examination, however, reveals that the dagger is actually made of a porous material unlike any the heroes have encountered before. The substance appears to be metal, yet it seems to gradually absorb liquids when placed in them.

One property of the *sea hag's talon* is that it can serve as a homing beacon to liquids. If dipped in a glass of red wine, the wielder would feel the dagger tugging ever so slightly toward red wine. (The tug is slight, and while it makes the talon useless as a throwing weapon, it does not impede its effectiveness as a melee weapon.) Thus, a *sea hag's talon* can be used as a divining rod should its wielder desire.

The weapon's second property gives sea hags a tremendous advantage in combat. Although the weapon does not normally have any attack or damage bonuses, when used in combat the *sea hag's talon* becomes more effective against opponents with each strike that draws blood. If the dagger absorbs some of a victim's blood, it homes in on the source of this liquid. With each strike that draws blood (removes hit points), a *sea hag's talon* receives a cumulative +1 bonus to hit on the rounds following. Thus, after the first strike that causes damage against a certain victim, the *sea hag's talon* provides +1 on attacks. After the second, the bonus is +2. After the third, the bonus is +3. A maximum bonus of +5 can be reached and maintained until the particular victim singled out by the weapon dies. However, this bonus applies only to the victim against which it was used, and not against anyone else, against whom the *sea hag's talon* has no combat bonuses.

Sea hag's talons are forged with iron and a rare mineral that can only be found at the bottom of certain remote waterways. The secret of forging the daggers is passed down from sea hag to sea hag, primarily as part of a covey.

Witch Items

Guardians

These items can take almost any form, but they are usually small statues or carvings, knickknacks indistinguishable from other belongings within a witch's or

warlock's home. *Guardians* are created by the head of the household. The enchantment takes three days of rituals to create. Although many witches and warlocks are familiar with the ritual to create a *guardian*, they typically only reveal it to warlock or witches who are starting a family.

A *guardian* uses elemental enchantments to add a layer of magical protection to a witch's or warlock's home, be it an elaborate manor or simple tent. It comes in one of four different forms, paralleling the four elements: air, earth, fire, and water. A *guardian* affects any creature who has malign intentions toward any resident of the home it is created to protect. Any such person who comes within 30 yards of a *guardian* must make a saving throw vs. wand or suffer the effects of the *guardian's* magic. A witch or warlock must be able to wield the appropriate elemental magic in order to create the *guardian* that matches the element.

Air guardian: Foes feel light-headed and dizzy while within range of the guardian. Intelligence and Wisdom are each temporarily decreased by 1d4 points.

Earth guardian: Foes feel heavy and lethargic. While within range of the Guardian, they act as though under the influence of a *slow* spell.

Fire guardian: Foes feel inexplicably edgy, almost paranoid. Their morale is decreased by 3, their Intelligence temporarily drops by 1d4, and, if the rules from *Domains of Dread* are in use, all fear checks are made with a -2 penalty. In contrast, their chance of being surprised is decreased by 1.

Water guardian: Foes feel tense and their attention keeps getting fixed on trivial details. Their Wisdom attributes are temporarily reduced by 1d4 points, and they suffer a -3 penalty to all initiative rolls and proficiency checks based on Intelligence and Wisdom scores.

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