

WARLOCK

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BABA YAGA

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BABA YAGA: A TANGLE OF MISTRUTHS

by Lou Anders

“How do I know that this story is true? Why, one who was there told it to me.”

—unknown

Much has been said and yet still little is truly known of the one they call Baba Yaga. She is the most terrifying of beldams, yet on occasion, she is also a dispenser of wisdom and a granter of favors. The Wild Old Woman is known to enjoy dining on young humanoids and has a special fondness for nibbling on gnome. And she is not above eating the tougher meat of, well, anyone else. Yet despite her well-documented appetites, there are those desperate enough to petition her for aid. Even so, the witch’s boons frequently come at costs higher than that which drove these unfortunates to solicit her in the first place.

What follows are some of the many strange and often contradictory bits of folklore—but also some scholarly efforts—that are devoted to Grandmother. Good luck gleanng any truths from them. They’re most likely fictions and misunderstandings, or at best half-truths, but you never know what small portion of detail may save your life at some point. (You can read more about Baba Yaga in *Midgard Worldbook* and *Warlock Grimoire 2*.)

Where on Midgard. Merely locating the Feywitch is no simple task. However, it is said that the truly despairing can *always* find their way to Grandmother. She enjoys striking bargains, after all, and Bony Legs, as she is sometimes known, never gives up a chance to add to her store of secrets, hidden knowledge being her favorite commodity. The rarer the secret one holds, the greater chance there is of stumbling upon Grandmother or even being sought out by her. But should someone be brave or foolish enough to look for her, then know that when she is not riding through the woods on the back of an enormous sow or flying through the air in her iron mortar, steering her way with a pestle and covering her tracks with a broom, Baba Yaga can most often be found dwelling in the heart of the Margreve Forest or upon a lonely stretch of the Rothenian Plain.

Baba Yaga’s dwelling is not hard to miss. Leaving the hut aside for a moment, the surrounding grounds are also distinctive. They are usually marked by a wooden fence capped at intervals by humanoid skulls, each

lit from lanterns within so that the light shines out of the eye sockets. As unnerving as this might be, it is made doubly so by the claims of those who have visited the hut and returned to tell the tale that there are always just enough empty posts awaiting new skulls to account precisely for the heads of those visiting. More so, the lanterns flicker, winking on and off as if in response to the presence of visitors. On occasion, the skulls have even been known to speak. But as remarkable as the fencing is, what it contains is far stranger.

The “dancing hut” of Baba Yaga stands on two enormous chicken legs and often struts around the yard. Above the giant fowl parts, reports of the hut’s appearance are varied. At times, the hut presents as a simple peasant’s hut, constructed of wooden logs and with no windows and featuring only a single door. At other times, it is a more elaborate cabin with a porch and several stories. Most chilling are the tales that swear that the hut is made not of wood but of humanoid bones. The illusionist Xaldri Lamblewomple—formerly of the Arcane Collegium until his mysterious disappearance of a year ago—in his ambitious and ill-considered treatise on Grandmother’s domicile, points out that the hut is reminiscent of a certain traditional Krakovan building that is constructed on a stump and used to bury the dead. Its lack of windows and its single door are to discourage both the living from disturbing the dead and the dead from disturbing the living. Lamblewomple argues that Grandmother takes on the symbolic role of a priestess who leads the cremation rites, suggesting there may be deep mythic significance in her proclivity to roast people in her ovens. Unfortunately, Lamblewomple is not available to expound further on his theories since the wizard’s current whereabouts are unknown.

But logs or bones, hut or resting place for the dead, all accounts agree that the

dancing hut will turn away from intruders, refusing them entry, unless they address it properly. One wishing to enter the hut must say, “Turn your back to the forest, your front to me.” If these words are spoken, and it must be stressed that they should be spoken *politely*, the hut will face the speaker and kneel, settling upon the ground. Access isn’t guaranteed by this though. There’s an even chance the door will be locked, and the door’s keyhole is a mouth full of razor-sharp teeth. But presuming the door is unlocked or the lock is picked without the loss of too many fingers, intruders who enter generally find themselves in the kitchen. The keyword is *generally*, for rooms do shift around in the interdimensional space within the hut—bigger on the inside than the outside—and the total number of rooms in undocumented. (For more specifics on Baba Yaga’s hut, see *Warlock Grimoire 2*.)

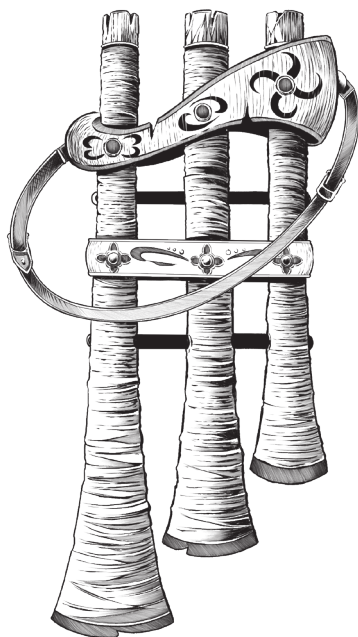
Entertaining Guests. Should Grandmother be at home, she is frequently reclined atop the freestanding stove for warmth. Sometimes she appears larger than an average woman, up to 15 feet tall when standing, and if encountered in this form, her legs may stretch from one side of the kitchen to the other. It should be pointed out, lest one be taken by surprise at the sight and give offense, that her nickname Bony Legs is not a reference to having skinny limbs. Rather, on occasion, one or both of Grandmother’s legs appears skeletal, either actual raw bone or skin stretched so tight as to depict the bones clearly. Should the bony leg (or legs) be on display, visitors are advised to ignore it and never call attention to it under any circumstances whatsoever.

Straight away, Baba Yaga will attempt to gain the upper hand in any ensuing conversation. She can unerringly smell what country a visitor hails from, and she usually points this out at the start to unsettle them with her knowledge. She frequently asks next, “Are you doing a deed or fleeing a deed? Are you here of your own will or by compulsion?” What

she makes of the answers to these questions is inconsistent and unpredictable. One should be cautioned that, while Baba Yaga enjoys bantering with her guests, she will frequently threaten to eat the overly curious. This may have something to do with the rumor that the Witch of the East ages an entire year whenever someone asks her a question. If that is so, then she is balancing her love of secrets and enthusiasm for haggling with her desire to not age overly. At any rate, she has a ravenous appetite, and all conversations with her are likely to include some mention of her appetites and her estimations of how well or poorly a visitor might taste.

Should Grandmother indeed decide to eat someone, it can be hard to dissuade her. However, Myrieem Yulan-Rhal, a Kariv herbalist and fortune teller, maintains that the Great Crone can be distracted if one can find and blow her magical horn, the *Tripple Horn of Baba Yaga*. This item is comprised of three horns of different lengths and with differently sized bell flares, bound together into one instrument. Yulan-Rhal instructs that one must blow the first horn softly, the second one louder, and the third louder still. Sounding the horns in the correct order summons ravens that surround and harry Baba Yaga, distracting her, and a firebird, which will emit a blinding ray of light to further facilitate the horn blower's escape. None of this, it should be noted, has been verified by anyone else. And why would she keep such an item just lying around? It would certainly need to be useful to her otherwise.

Should the horn prove unavailable or insufficient, would-be meals are occasionally said to find aid from the many servants of Baba Yaga that dwell in and about the hut, including an awakened cat and several dining and cooking utensils, among others. The utensils are believed to be polymorphed beings who have offended Baba Yaga in the past. The witch's own dentures, the famous iron teeth of Baba Yaga, have even been



known to be at odds with their mistress a time or two. Baba Yaga also keeps and breeds horses. The equines are the least potentially helpful of her servants, but they are worth noting as it is said they are so fast as to be able to cross the world in a day.

Friends of Grandmother. Of course, Grandmother has allies too, though some are unwilling and others unwitting. First among these are her horsemen, known as Bright Day, Red Sun, and Black Knight—or as Baba Yaga refers to them, “My Bright Dawn, my Red Sun, and my Dark Midnight”—and they are never seen together outside the confines of her property. Indeed, through some strange cosmological conjuring on Grandmother's part, the horsemen are each connected to a specific period of time, as measured by the sun. Bright Day is bound to and governs dawn to mid-day, Red Sun from mid-day to sundown, and Black Night from sundown until daybreak. As such, only one can exist on the material plane at a time. Whether the horsemen were at some point ordinary

humanoids who came under the witch's sway, or whether they are actual personifications of the day, is unclear. (See also **Baba Yaga's horsemen** in *Tome of Beasts*.)

The lich-like being known as Koschei the Deathless is another of Grandmother's favored servants. Once king of a long-forgotten land, Koschei feared death so much that he turned to bizarre rituals to sustain himself. Extracting his soul, he placed it in a pin which was placed inside an egg, itself inside a duck swallowed by a rabbit in the belly of a goat. Or some tales say that rabbit is sealed instead within an iron chest buried on Buyan, the mythical isle of the dead. Either way, so long as his soul resides in its home away from home, Koschei cannot ever truly die.

Koschei also rides an incredibly swift horse, and it is believed only Baba Yaga's steeds are fast enough to catch him, but surely that is insufficient to explain her power over him. The nature of Grandmother's hold over the immortal king isn't clear. It's possible she gifted him his horse. It's also possible she possesses his soul's receptacle—or at least knows where it is and how to claim his hidden soul. It is just as likely that she has merely allowed Koschei to *think* she knows. Whatever the case, Koschei serves Baba Yaga on occasion, though he is never overly enamored with being her servant.

The most numerous of Baba Yaga's servants are the hundreds of **vila** (see also *Tome of Beasts* and "Grandmother's Daughters: Secrets of the Vila" later in this issue of *Warlock*) that tend to congregate in the Margreve but can be found most anywhere. Baba Yaga refers to these fierce forest protectors as her daughters, though this is unlikely. Regardless, she treats them with a tenderness no other creature receives. For their part, the vila are generally willing to do her bidding, though at times individual vila have aided mortals in their attempts to escape Grandmother's appetites.

Price of a Deal. But should someone succeed in reaching Baba Yaga, in escaping both her stewpot and her minions, and in bargaining with the Queen of Hags, what does Baba Yaga want? What price does she set upon her knowledge or her gifts? If the petitioner knows something Grandmother doesn't, that will most assuredly be the cost for her aid. Otherwise, she is liable to ask for something seemingly innocuous, like a fingernail clipping or the memory of a lost love, but these things invariably serve to aid her in her twisting schemes. She might ask that someone deliver an apple to a young girl living alone in the forest or take a golden brooch to the River King or present a silver mirror to King Lucan of the Blood Kingdom. Grandmother loves to set tasks that seem innocent enough but prove nigh impossible. She might ask for someone to clean her kitchen, only to have it grow to enormous size or for its oven to belch out an avalanche of soot. She might request that her herd be corralled, only for the equines to gallop halfway across the world. On more than one occasion, Baba Yaga has insisted someone marry one of her daughters and then instructed her servants to murder the spouse-to-be the night before the wedding. (See also "Misto Ellel: The Thundering Town" and "Niemheim: Notes on Gnomish Diabolism" later in this issue of *Warlock* for more on those who have dealt with Baba Yaga and that remain in her constant orbit.)

There are also rare reports that a mystic named Jezibaba, sometimes called Granny Witch, is connected to Baba Yaga, perhaps even by ties of blood, but this remains all folklore, of course. Jezibaba lives in a hut similar to Baba Yaga's, but it is never made of bones, and it is typically found on the shores of a tranquil lake. Far gentler than Grandmother, Jezibaba is generally helpful to those who treat her with kindness and respect. The greatest of all herbalists, Jezibaba is often sought by those struggling with

fertility and healing. She has been known to take on apprentices, teaching them about the magical properties of plants. Jezibaba is usually accompanied by her children, the Jezinky, all of whom are djinn.

The Nature of Grandmother. As much as is known about the Feywitch, so little is understood about what exactly Baba Yaga is. Some believe Grandmother is a forgotten goddess of the Underworld. Others that she is a being from another world entirely, who only came to Midgard after millennia spent in other lands. Stranger yet is the assertion that Baba Yaga is not one but three separate beings, all named Baba Yaga. This supposition is supported by accounts of Baba Yaga appearing in multiple locations at the same time and by the rare visitor that believes they have encountered her and her two “sisters.” Whether these are actual sisters, doppelgangers, or the same person transposed in time is not clear. A horrible possibility must be entertained that the three Grandmothers might even be a dark mask of the Norns—or the Norns might be a more benevolent mask of Grandmother.

A seldom-told tale from the gnomes of Niemheim offers one possible glimpse at Grandmother’s origin. The story details how a powerful arch-devil sought to distill the essence of evil by cooking the twelve most wicked women in Midgard in a caldron. As the horrible concoction boiled, the devil absentmindedly spat in the mixture. Unfortunately, in so doing, he inadvertently added a bit of his own soul. This empowered the foul soup, and out hopped Grandmother. She slew and ate the devil immediately, and then the witch stole a mortar and pestle from the devil’s kitchen and flew away. While this tale is considered apocryphal by most, the idea of Baba Yaga entering the world fully

formed rings true. After all, while she may have sisters and daughters aplenty, it is hard to conceive of Grandmother ever having had a mother herself—or indeed being anything other than the terrible crone she is now. But take all matters pertaining to the Hag of Hags with more than a pinch of salt, and think on it again on the morrow, for as Baba Yaga herself is fond of saying, “There is more wisdom in the morning than in the evening.” The night walks the same road as dream. And if you have a dream of Baba Yaga, it is sure to be nightmare.

At Grandmother’s House

You are very likely to find something strange at Grandmother’s house.

BABA YAGA’S CAT

Tiny Beast, Chaotic Neutral

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 10 (4d4)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
3 (–4)	15 (+2)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)

Skills Perception +4, Stealth +4

Senses passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Sylvan; telepathy (see below)

Challenge 0 (10 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Feline Telepathy. Within the confines of Baba Yaga’s property, the cat can magically command any beast within 60 feet of it, using its limited telepathy.

Keen Smell. The cat has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

ACTIONS

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +0 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 1 slashing damage.

MISTO ELLEL: THE THUNDERING TOWN

by Sarah Madsen

The gulyay-gorod, or “wandering towns,” of the Rothenian Plain are a strange sight to behold. Whole settlements, safe behind sturdy walls, move across the landscape, drawn by horses or oxen or even stranger creatures. The arrival of such a wandering town can evoke wonder and fear in equal measure, as one never knows what the gulyay-gorod may bring. Misto Ellel is one of the most well-known of the wandering towns and is inhabited primarily by bandits, hunters, and mystics. The arrival of Misto Ellel brings the opportunity for trade and the risk of raids by the followers of the Horned Huntsman.

The Thundering Town. Nearly a mile wide, from a distance, Misto Ellel looks like a broad, squat hillside, floating across the horizon to an accompaniment of what some describe as the rumble of thunder, the roar of a massive waterfall, or the drumming of a rainstorm. At first, it is difficult to see what propels the town across the plains, for there are no horses or other beasts of burden harnessed to the moving structures. Up close, however, it becomes obvious: the city rides on the backs of hundreds of giant millipedes, their thousands of feet beating out a roar like a tempest on the hard earth. The marks of the city’s passing are obvious in the mile-wide

swath of trampled grasses, leaving a trail easy enough to follow for those bold enough to travel in the town’s wake. When at rest, the millipedes settle into the earth beneath the city’s foundation, allowing the town to settle nearly to ground level.

The town itself is made of the repurposed wagons favored by the Kariv, plus whatever additional materials the inhabitants have been able to scavenge, steal, or barter for along the way. Most of the homes and structures on the edge of the town are one story tall, all the better to hide behind the protective wall that rings the entire town, but the buildings gradually increase in height toward the center of the town. In the middle stands a four-story building comprised of several interlocking wagons, painted with bright colors and topped with a pointed cupola. This is the home of Tsuru the Bold, the matriarch of Misto Ellel.

Wild and the Fallen

Misto Ellel is home to many, but the population is made up primarily of outcasts from the Rothenian Kariv and centaur communities. Centaurs that don’t fit in well with their clans for whatever reason live on the outermost ring of Misto Ellel where



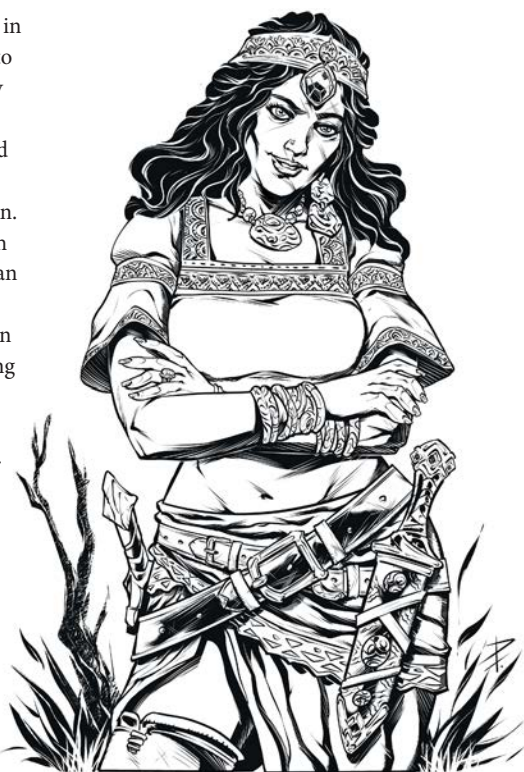
they can easily throw open the wide gates in the city's walls and surge onto the plains to ride and pillage. Kariv who were exiled by their families or find themselves shunned by the greater Kariv community often find their way to Misto Ellel, where Tsura the Bold welcomes all, regardless of reputation. Many members of the fallen families, such as the Heph, the Galati, and the Kalder, can be found within the walls of Misto Ellel, and any animosity between them is held in tight check, lest they find themselves facing Tsura's harsh judgement.

TSURA THE BOLD

Tsura the Bold, matriarch of Misto Ellel, is a Kariv, though which family she originally hailed from remains a mystery to most. Given her hold over Misto Ellel and her rumored ties with Baba Yaga, many believe her to be of the Kalder, though the Kalder in Misto Ellel deny any family ties with the wandering town's leader, and she steadfastly refutes any relation to any one family, insisting she's a leader for all.

A wide-shouldered but slender woman of some forty-odd years, Tsura wears layered skirts and is never seen without a saber on one hip and a curved, jeweled dagger on the other. She laughs easily but angers quickly, and she has little patience for those who would cause trouble in her town. Violence, theft, and raiding are acceptable outside the walls of Misto Ellel, but within, confrontations that escalate past a scuffle are quickly brought to heel. She does not expect everyone to get along all the time, but she treats Misto Ellel like the family she no longer has, and she despises infighting.

Tsura rose to power quickly after arriving in Misto Ellel about five years ago. Many attribute her accension to her claims to have outwitted Baba Yaga herself. Some say the fact that she still remains in power is the greatest support of her claim, for surely



Grandmother would never let such a wild and baseless assertion stand, yet others assert that if Tsura had indeed outwitted the witch, talking loudly of such an accomplishment would be the quickest way to earn Grandmother's ire. But despite arguments over the origins of her power, the fact remains that Tsura the Bold rules Misto Ellel, and none have yet seen fit to challenge her.

Deals with Baba Yaga. Tsura the Bold's claim about Baba Yaga can be considered true, when viewed in a certain light. From other angles, the deal she brokered with Grandmother would be considered foolish and will prove to be her inevitable downfall. The truth is that Tsura's power does spring from Baba Yaga's magics. The Kariv bartered with the witch, promising to give whatever offerings were necessary in exchange for rulership over Misto Ellel. Baba Yaga

demanded nothing in return except that Tsuru place a powerful relic, known as the *Eye of Baba Yaga*, at the highest point of the city where she could see in every direction at all times. The eye now resides in the cupola of Tsuru's home, affixed with chains and overlooking the town and the plains beyond. Only Baba Yaga knows exactly how far—and how much—she can see from such a vantage and what exactly the eye is capable of.

KARIV

Many Kariv make their homes within the walls of Misto Ellel, making up the majority of the population, followed close behind by the centaurs. Kariv that live in the wandering town may have left their own family, or they may belong to one of the more unscrupulous Kariv families, such as the Kalder, that find suspicion even amongst their own. The Kariv of Misto Ellel are not required to give up their family ties, nor their loyalty to their blood or oaths, but must agree to hold Tsuru's authority over all others.

Tsuru welcomes all types to Misto Ellel, but the Kariv in the town are certain that, if things should come to it, Tsuru would support them over the rest. Many of the non-Kariv share the same belief, and it is not unusual to find a Kariv taking advantage of a non-Kariv, both under the assumption that is how the arrangement should work. Whenever Tsuru discovers such an arrangement, she is quick to disabuse all parties of the notion that the Kariv have higher standing than others within her town.

WOTAN'S UNKINDNESS

Though wielding no official power in Misto Ellel, a cloister of runemasters—composed of spellcasters from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds (including a few ravenfolk) but all with an expertise in runes—commands everyone's respect, and Tsuru regularly seeks their counsel, especially regarding magical matters. The runemasters are responsible

for the magical protection and maintenance of the town, including summoning the giant millipedes (or really whatever form of transport is most called for) that carry it across the plain.

The runemasters have perfected their own form of magical automatic writing in which they create single-use rune scripts that allow anyone to benefit from rune magic, similar to using a potion. Their services aren't cheap, yet their skills and wares are high in demand to those with means.

ZAGHARI AND THE WILD CENTAURS

The wild centaurs of Misto Ellel are, almost to a one, worshipers of the Hunter. They have been forced from the more civilized centaur clans or left due to irreconcilable differences. Some young centaurs stumbled upon Misto Ellel when they embarked on their bandit years and may leave to return to their home clans when their time is up. The centaurs primarily live along the edge of town, chafing at being within the walls, and many prefer to ride ahead or alongside the when it's in motion. Special ramps with wheels have been rigged to many of the gates and can be lowered when the city is on the move, allowing the centaurs easy access in and out of the city. They hunt and raid throughout the day and night, whenever the mood takes them, and often returned bathed in blood.

There is no official leader of the wild centaurs within Misto Ellel—Tsuru claims leadership overall, regardless of race or ancestry—but if there was one, Zaghari would quickly claim that title. Zaghari is a roan-colored centaur with deep russet skin and black braids in his hair and tail. Zaghari is level-headed and patient, and he is renowned for his prowess in both battle and the hunt. When the centaurs have a dispute that they don't dare bring to Tsuru's attention, they go to Zaghari for advice and mediation. Several of the younger or more rash centaurs have claimed Zaghari could and should unseat



Tsura as ruler of Misto Ellel, but Zaghari is quick to hush any such talk. It is unknown whether he truly has no desire to rule the wandering town or if he's simply quietly

biding his time, but Tsura seems confident in her position and has yet to oust the centaur.

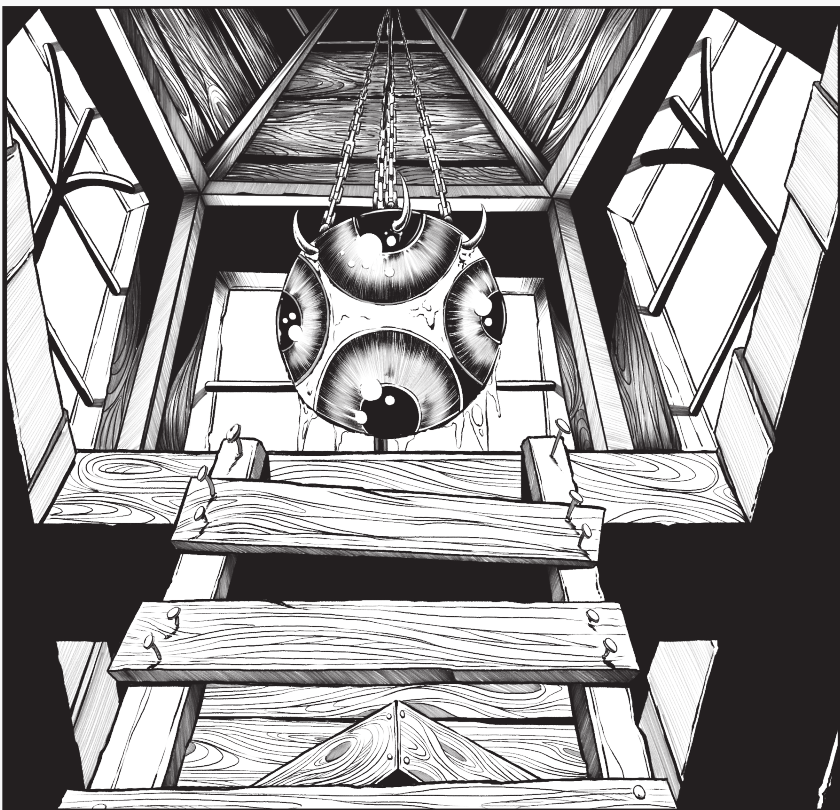
Centaur Lodges. The Centaurs of Misto Ellel gather regularly in longhouses known

THE EYE OF BABA YAGA

Suspended from the underside of the cupola in the center of Misto Ellel is an eye the size of a human fist. Pupils stare out from four sides, blending together like an hourglass where they meet, the irises around each a different color—brown, blue, green, and gold. Secured to the cupola by four hooks on chains, the eye allows Baba Yaga to see everything within Misto Ellel, even within homes and behind walls, and out into the surrounding area within a 1-mile radius. It is through the eye that Baba Yaga monitors Tsura, and the wandering nature of Misto Ellel

allows her to observe the countryside of the Rothenian Plain and the peoples within it.

The *Eye of Baba Yaga* has darkvision with a radius of a mile. If it is destroyed (AC 10, 10 hp), Baba Yaga knows who destroyed it and can pinpoint the location of the creature on any plane of existence at any time. Baba Yaga may cast *bestow curse* (9th-level spell slot) through the eye once a day with the following modification: instead of a range of touch, the target must be within the walls of Misto Ellel.



as centaur lodges. These buildings are often used for rituals to the Horned Huntsman, for cleaning, skinning, and tanning, or just for social gatherings around barrels of mead or ale. A few serve a second, more ceremonial purpose, and these are known as Blood Lodges to the followers of the Horned Huntsman, and those in the know find it no surprise that Zaghari leads here as herl of the Misto Ellet Lodges.

Misto Ellet's Economy

Misto Ellet's economy subsists on three primary pillars: trade, hunting, and bandit raids. Within the city, coin of all sorts passes hands, and barter is a common occurrence.

TRADE

Those who are brave enough to venture into the wandering town will find goods from across the Rothenian Plain, and many merchants whisper of the wonderful items that can be found within. Trading in Misto Ellet carries its risks though as a merchant is just as likely to find themselves robbed of all of their goods and coin before they even make it through the city gates. Many merchants hire protection before venturing out to the town, or they offer bribes to the centaur scouts, or what passes as a city guard, to ensure safe passage. A handful of traders have arrangements with Tsura herself, and the raiders and bandits of Misto Ellet know better than to even look at them askance.

However, with great risk comes great reward. Misto Ellet's wandering nature allows the townsfolk to trade with—and steal from—people of all types. Often, rare items end up within the shops and homes here, and the owner has little idea of what they truly have hanging on their wall or in their display case.

HUNTING AND RAIDING

Misto Ellet is, at heart, a city of hunters, bandits, and raiders. The wild centaurs and other worshipers of the Horned Huntsman within Misto Ellet carry out routine raids in his name, rarely leaving behind survivors. Tsura does her best to balance the bloodlust of the followers of the Master of the Hunt and the needs of the rest of the town, and she restricts the bloodiest hunts to when the moon is full. She attempts to channel their need for carnage to the slaughter of beasts and monsters, providing meat and protection to Misto Ellet as well as sating the urges of her most ferocious citizens. So far, the strategy seems to be working, though some of the younger, more hot-headed and impulsive followers chafe at her restrictions.

Other, more circumspect hunters also serve Misto Ellet, orbiting the wandering town in small hunting parties of two to ten. Any outsider who stumbles upon such a party and proves their worth as a hunter may find themselves in the party's good graces and may even find a willing escort to the town.

Raids on merchant caravans and local settlements are common when Misto Ellet is nearby, and many villages will fortify their security and double or triple the number of guards at the sound of rolling thunder on a clear day. Occasionally, these raiding parties can be bought off with bribes of gold or goods, but the spoils of a raid are always brought back and shared with the town—and Tsura.

Locations of Interest

The wandering town is filled with miscreants, criminals, and outcasts of all sorts and their families—grandparents, parents, spouses, siblings, children, grandchildren. Not everyone in town has a sordid past, but it's wise to tread lightly when inquiring into someone's history, for many are loathe to discuss their mistakes. Just as many, however, are proud of their actions and see themselves

as an underdog, a freedom fighter, or a revolutionary, unwilling to bend their will to those that would oppress them.

AXIS

The Axis is the local name for the four-story structure at the heart of Misto Ellet that functions as both the town hall and the home of Tsura the Bold. The structure is made up of several repurposed wagons and brightly colored canvas awnings, and it's topped with an open cupola that helps keep the entire structure ventilated. It is the largest structure in town, and one could easily see miles in every direction from its roof—a favorite perch for the ravens that always follow the town.

CASLAV'S CABINET OF CURIOSITIES

Caslav's Cabinet of Curiosities is a tiny shop near the edge of town, wedged between a centaur lodge and a slaughterhouse. Caslav's Cabinet of Curiosities is no bigger than

a wagon—and in fact its construction is simply a wagon with the wheels removed, the bottom flush against the ground. Inside, the walls have been covered with rough-cut shelving made from scavenged planks, and the shelves are cluttered with trinkets, junk, and sundry items.

The eponymous Caslav is a kobold of particularly diminutive size, and he stocks his shop with whatever items he can barter for when a trading caravan passes by or a raiding party returns to town—or the items he can scavenge from the remnants when the more influential merchants have had their pick. The items on Caslav's shelves are typically worthless garbage, but every now and then, the kobold gets lucky and scoops up a valuable (or magical) item that had been overlooked.

A selection of items for sale in Caslav's Cabinet of Curiosities can be found below.

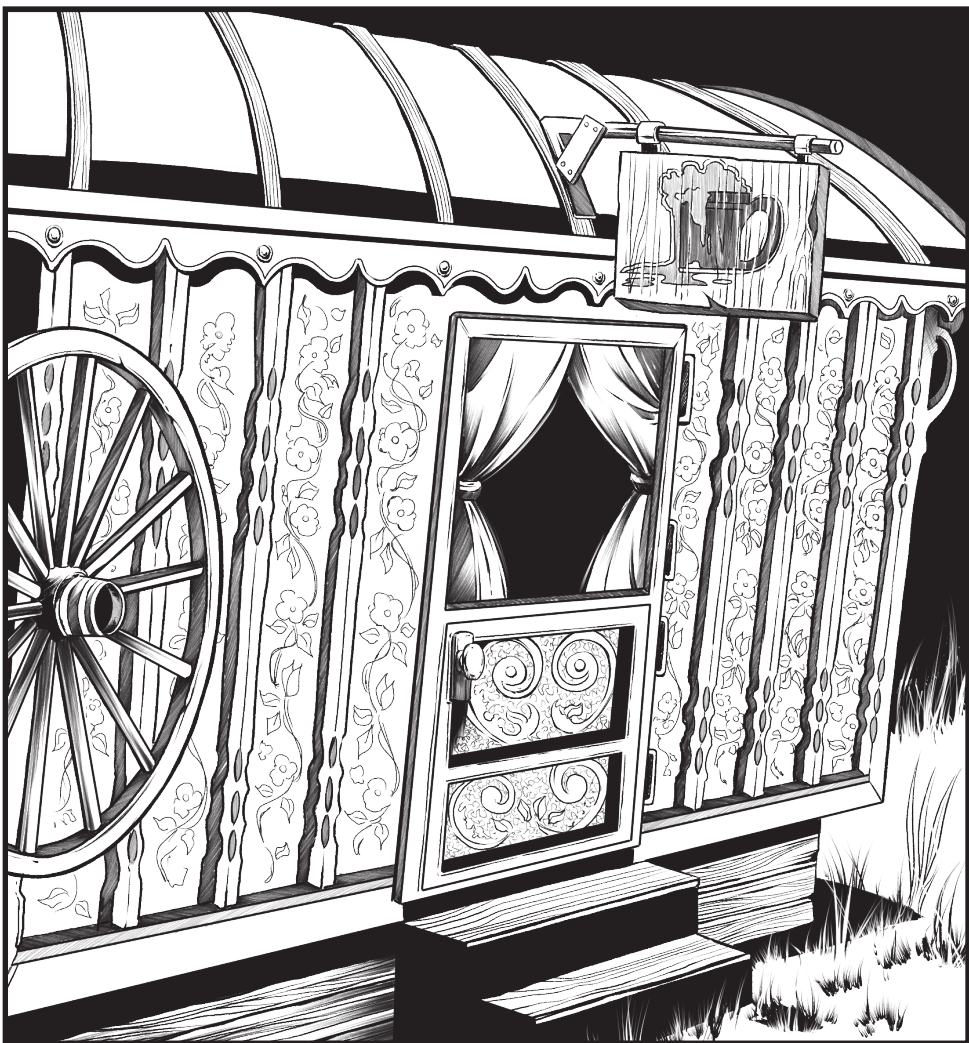
CASLAV'S CABINET OF CURIOSITIES INVENTORY

d12	ITEM	PRICE
1	A set of three six-sided sandstone dice with the pips filed off.	4 cp
2	A dented silver fork missing two tines.	4 sp
3	A scarred purple leather pouch.	1 sp
4	A dusty arrangement of silk roses in a silver metal basin.	8 gp
5	A length of fishing twine dotted with semiprecious pebbles.	3 sp
6	A simple brass hooded lantern that, when lit, projects a racy image of two figures embracing.	20 gp
7	A black and red brocade jacket sized to fit an ogre.	5 gp
8	Three white alabaster chess pieces—the queen, a pawn, and a rook—and one black pawn.	8 sp
9	A pale-blue rhomboid crystal. It is an <i>loun stone of strength</i> mistaken for a mundane gemstone.	1 gp (or 5,000 gp if he's told of its magic)
10	A pair of pink silk shoes with holes worn in the soles.	5 sp
11	A wooden puzzle box shaped like a fox. Caslav has never been able to open it. It rattles as if there's something inside. If opened with a successful DC 18 Intelligence check, two human baby teeth (incisors) can be found within.	5 gp
12	A leather dog collar with a tag that reads "Jeannie-Bell."	1 gp

WAGON WHEEL

The Wagon Wheel is a cramped tavern with food, drink, and one tiny room for rent above the kitchen (Misto Ellet doesn't get visitors often enough to warrant much in the way of lodgings). The exterior of the tavern is adorned with wagon wheels, and several hang from the low ceiling inside and serve as chandeliers, covered in candles and decades' worth of wax. The tables and benches are

all bolted to the wood floor, and niches are carved into the tabletops to help steady plates, bowls, and cups in the event of rough terrain while the town is on the move. Upstairs are the living quarters for the Kariv owner, Adrina "Drina" Amel, and her wife, Volca. The roof of the tavern is covered in coops where Drina and Volca breed raille, a tiny flightless bird that serves as the centerpiece for much of the tavern's cuisine.



GRANDMOTHER'S DAUGHTERS: SECRETS OF THE VILA

by Kelly Pawlik

The brave and foolhardy souls who attempt to catalog the life and deeds of Baba Yaga have often wondered at the relationship between her and her so-called daughters, the beguiling vila. As with many of the confusing and conflicting stories about Grandmother, there are numerous tales explaining the origin of her relationship with the vila, but the following tale is one of the more common ones.

The Fiend, the Fairy, and the Beldam

When she was younger, Baba Yaga had many dealings with that diabolical glutton Mammon. His coffers swelled with the treasures she paid him to gain access to the knowledge of the Eleven Hells and the hierarchies of arch-devils and demon lords. Mammon knew what the crone was gaining could be dangerous to other mortals, but what damage could a simple witch, even a powerful and long-lived one such as her, do to one as mighty as him? Satisfied with the growing pile of coins, gemstones, and trinkets in his treasury, he allowed the deal to stand as centuries drifted by.

Grandmother knew Mammon would eventually discover his folly in allowing her

such access to his vast body of knowledge. She anticipated his reaction and the trickery he would use to strip her of what she had gained, and she prepared herself for his wrath. The wily witch gathered favors, performing deeds for whomever might agree to her terms, be they a desperate pauper, a petty tyrant, or an exalted demigod.

Some unfathomable span of time later, while he performed an accounting of his holdings, Mammon realized just how much he had profited from Baba Yaga—and conversely, how much she had gained from him. He realized she had lived well beyond what he considered acceptable for a mere mortal. The fiend knew in his empty black chamber of a heart that the crone had used knowledge forbidden to mortals, knowledge learned from his own scriptoriums and libraries, to achieve her unbelievable age. She knew that his desire for wealth would blind him to the truth of her treachery. Worse still, she had built a loyal following of devotees, making her not unlike a deity in her own right, and she passed some of the knowledge she had stolen from him to her adherents to cement their loyalty to her. The hells shook as Mammon raged in his realization. But after a while, the fiend's temper cooled. He could repair this and show the overblown magician

what the cost was for attempting to deceive the lord of the Hells.

Mammon disguised himself as a simple peddler laden with goods both mundane and magical. He set up a blanket at a marketplace located at a crossroads on the plains at the foot of Demon Mountain, a mortal location close to the devil's husk of a heart. He cried out about his incredible wares to all who passed, and he cajoled them to spread the word.

Baba Yaga heard the tale of the peddler on the plains, about his stock of bottled worlds, genie-filled lamps, and elixirs of eternal youth, and she knew the time had come to put her preparations to action. She went to the market, taking a brief detour to call in a favor in the shadowed city of Corremel, where the fairy courts held sway. When she saw the peddler, she knew at once that she had been right. Mammon himself stood before her, nearly quaking with bitter mirth at the lesson he was going to teach her.

Grandmother perused the peddler's stock, asking questions about this bottle of iridescent pink liquid or that jar holding the eye of a dead god. The devil's patience thinned as she slowly looked over every single item he had brought with him. She made a sour face and turned to go.

"Where are you going?" the peddler asked.

"I don't see anything here I don't already have," she explained. "I am looking for something no one has ever seen before."

The peddler frowned. "I assure you that I have what you need. Describe what you want, and I will find it," he said, indicating to his bulging pack.

Baba Yaga pursed her lips, doubtful of his proclamation. She thought for a moment. "If you can do as you claim, I will give you everything I have in exchange."

Mammon's eyes shone with greed. He licked his lips and then repeated, "Describe what you want."

"I want a creature like a horse but a bit smaller. It must have four legs and brown fur dappled with white," Grandmother said.

The peddler opened his bag and dug around while murmuring. A moment later he pulled out a fawn and presented it.

"Here you are. Exactly as you wished," he said. His eyes burned like embers.

"That is just a deer," Baba Yaga dismissed and turned to go. "Obviously you were just telling me a story."

"No, no!" The peddler exclaimed. "I have what you want. Describe something else."

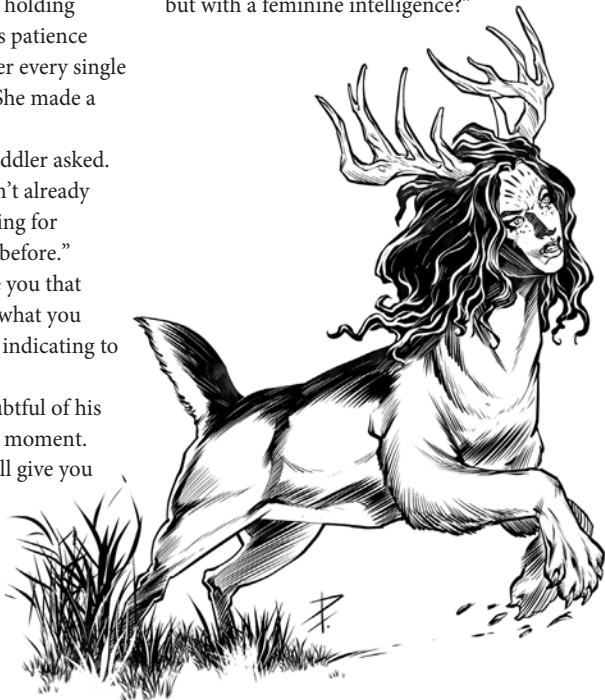
"How about a creature slightly larger than a mastiff but with shaggy gray fur," she inquired.

"Easily done." He dug in his pack and pulled out a wolf cub and presented it to her.

"That is a wolf. They are common in the forests not so far from here.

"Of course, they are. I see you are too canny for these simple creatures. Try something more interesting," the fiend commanded.

With a nonplussed look she tried again. "How about a feline as big as a mountain lion but with a feminine intelligence?"



The peddler's brows waggled as he drew forth a wampus cat, cursing from its human head. "I think it's time for you to pay up now," he stated.

"That is a wampus cat. I have seen them detailed on a scroll I saw on Totivillus's table," she stated, waving her hand in boredom.

The peddler clenched his fists. "How about something even more fascinating and new?" he asked, drawing a deerlike creature with the trunk, arms, and head of a human from the sack.

Baba Yaga shook her head as a little girl shouted, "That's an alseid. My mama says they roam the Margreve Forest."

"Fine," shouted Mammon. "Is there no one that create something new for this impossible-to-please woman?"

"It is not so difficult," said Sarastra, the Queen of Night and Magic, stepping from the growing crowd. "Though possibly that is not true for one with only the creativity granted to them by the hells," she finished.

Mammon ground his teeth but smiled as he said, "Milady, please demonstrate your skill."

"Can you make me a creature with antlers like a deer, hair as green as the grass in spring, skin like the wood of the beech tree, and eyes as grey as the ocean in autumn?" Baba Yaga asked the fey lady.

Sarastra threw three seeds on the ground, and each swiftly grew into a beautiful woman with features as Grandmother described.

"They are new and never seen before by the eyes of mortal or immortal," Sarastra said, gesturing at them. "And they are yours if you wish them." She then faded away to her home in the Shadow Realm.

Mammon's eyes crinkled as he grinned. "Have you seen these before?" he asked.

"No. I think I will call them vila." Baba Yaga replied.

"Call them what you will," the peddler spat back. "It is time for you to pay me now."

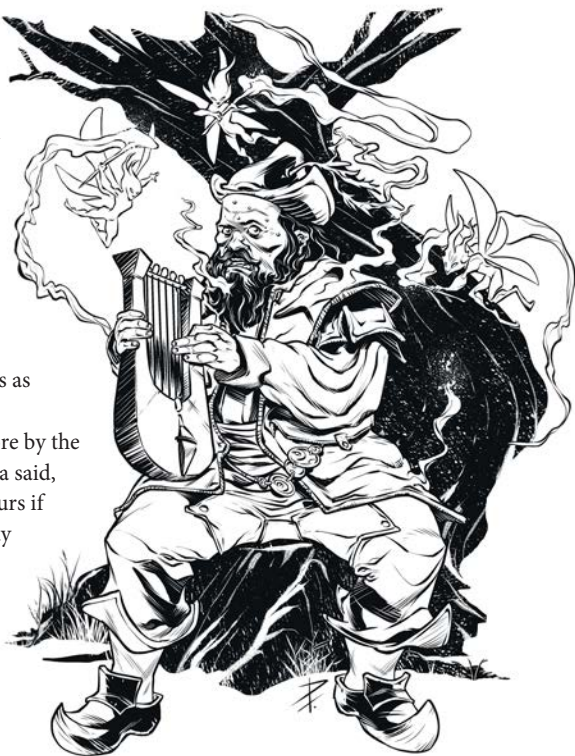
"Pay for what, peddler?" Grandmother asked him. "You claimed to have what I needed, but you did not. The Queen of Night and Magic made these vila."

Mammon gaped. The crone had tricked him again. "There will be a reckoning for this, witch." He disappeared in a burst of flame and the stench of brimstone.

"Perhaps," replied Baba Yaga, "but now I have granddaughters. Let us see what they can learn." And she took those first three vila and taught them all she knew.

Vila Boons

Whether they gained the ability from their association with Baba Yaga or from some other divine being or phenomenon, vila can grant favors to mortals. Most often, these are given as payment for a service a mortal has



VILA REQUESTS

d20	FAVOR REQUESTED
1	Make a promise to nurse an injured animal back to health.
2	Forswear the eating of venison for one year.
3	Lead a small herd of sheep to a nearby wolf pack.
4	Spend a month planting trees.
5	Agree to be a vila's protector for one month.
6	Plant a vegetable garden.
7	Drive all the loggers out of the vila's forest.
8	Promise to plant a pine tree on four different mountaintops.
9	Only wear clothing made of woven grasses.
10	Do not wield or wear iron for a fortnight.
11	Carry a message from the vila to one of the lords of the shadow fey.
12	Spend one hour dancing around a fire each night for one month.
13	Do not curse or swear for one year.
14	Wear only sandals on your feet for one month.
15	Free all the livestock owned by a grumpy old farmer.
16	Do not use fire for any purpose, mundane or magical, for one week.
17	Deliver the honey from a sacred beehive to an ill-tempered bear.
18	Sit unmoving on an uncomfortable stump for one day.
19	Agree to carry a horse's burden for one day.
20	Remain silent for a week.

performed for a vila, but a few magnanimous individuals occasionally grant a boon freely or on a whim. Some others use their boons in a more punitive fashion, where they act more as a curse to the recipient than as a benefit.

Vila boons always have a drawback. It isn't known whether they are able to grant favors that are open and free of complication or fey trickery, but the fact is that they never do. There is always a cost, and that cost must always be borne by the recipient of the boon.

Typical of all fey, the service required from a mortal to obtain a vila's boon often seems nonsensical or pointless to the petitioner, and the wording of the request itself can obfuscate the creature's true desire. Nonetheless, a vila adheres to the letter of any verbal agreement she makes with a mortal, and she always delivers the favor agreed upon if such an agreement was reached before the boon is granted. The table on the next page lists a number of potential favors a vila might ask for in exchange for a boon.

The vila boons listed herein consist of the boon's name, a description of the benefit gained by the recipient, and the drawback of the boon to be borne by the recipient. The drawback associated with each boon is a suggestion. If the drawback isn't fitting for your campaign or the character that received the boon, you should feel free to assess a different, more fitting one.

DANCING HUT

A vila allows you to borrow her dancing, chicken-legged hut. The hut can comfortably hold six Medium or smaller creatures and has a movement rate of 50 feet. As an action, the occupants of the hut can speak the name of the vila who loaned them the hut to instantly transport themselves up to 500 miles to a location one of them has visited before while the hut remains in the place. Speaking the vila's name again returns all the occupants to the interior of the hut. Once the hut has been used in this fashion, it can't be used again until dawn the next day.

Duration. One week or until you break your promise.

Drawback. Creatures that finish a long rest in the hut have disadvantage on the first attack roll, saving throw, or ability check they make on the following day.

GRANDMOTHER'S HONEY

You are given a small pot filled with fragrant honey. As an action, you can rub a handful of the honey on yourself to gain resistance to fire and lightning damage for 1 minute. Once you have used the honey, you can't do so again until dawn the next day. At the end of the duration, the pot crumbles, and any honey remaining crystalizes.

Duration. One month or until you break your promise.

Drawback. Bees, stinging insects, and **stirges** are attracted to you. **Giant wasps** and similar creatures have advantage on attack rolls against you.

HUMMINGBIRD HEART

For the duration, when you use your action to Dash, your movement is equal to three times your speed, after applying any modifiers, and you have advantage on Dexterity saving throws until the start of your next turn.

Duration. One day or until you break your promise.

Drawback. If you don't move on one of your turns, your movement is reduced to 20 feet until the turn after you move again.

NATURE GUT

For the duration, you can subsist on grass, leaves, bark, and moss and are immune to the dangerous or debilitating effects of plant-based foodstuffs, such as alcohol. As a bonus action, you can recover hit points as though you had expended a Hit Die. Once you have recovered hit points, you must finish a long rest before you can do so again.

Duration. One week or until you break your promise.

Drawback. Herbivores and omnivores, such as bears, focus their attention and attacks on you over other targets.

THUNDER TONGUE

For the duration, your voice is amplified to a volume that can be heard clearly for 1,000 feet, regardless of other noise in the area, such as hurricane winds, a collapsing tower, or a roaring dragon. If you cast a spell with verbal components, your allies are heartened by the sound of your voice and have advantage on saving throws until the beginning of your next turn.

Duration. One week or until you break your promise.

Drawback. Every creature within 500 feet of you that can hear, hears every word you speak, regardless of how quiet you think you are.

Wayward Daughters of Baba Yaga

Not all vila venerate, or even respect Baba Yaga. Some of them have gone so far as to band together with mortals to counter her machinations and wrest some of the old witch's power away from her. These groups focus their activities on divining where objects Grandmother will be drawn to are located and taking possession of them. Often, this means moving the item in question to the Shadow Realm or the Summer Lands, where the vila feel the native populations of fey can keep them safer than mortals can.

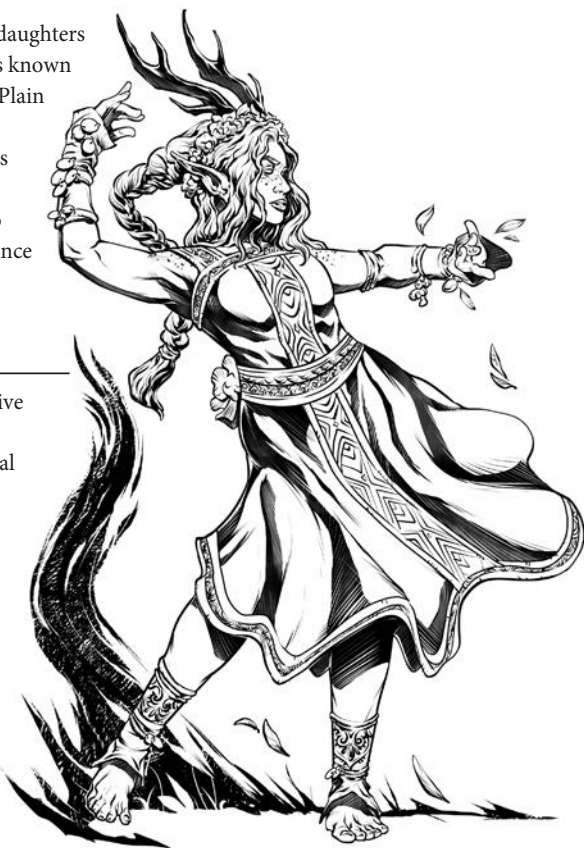
These groups don't officially have a name, though some of the members ironically refer to themselves as wayward daughters, for they don't feel like they are anyone's daughters. Each cell of wayward daughters is self-contained, rarely numbering more than a dozen members, though groups of them do occasionally intermingle with other groups, especially to pull off more dangerous undertakings. Groups seek outside assistance from time to time as well, hiring specialists as the need arises. As often as not, these specialists are paid in vila boons and magical items rather than coin.

The largest numbers of wayward daughters can be found in places Baba Yaga is known to frequent, such as the Rothenian Plain or the Margreve Forest. The Blood Kingdoms can also boast many cells as can the Grand Duchy of Dornig. Most other regions host one or two small cells that often require assistance in pulling off their operations.

JOINING THE WAYWARD DAUGHTERS

Wayward daughters are very selective about whom they allow into their tight-knit cells. A prospective mortal member might assist a cell with a dozen or more missions over a handful of years before they are offered full-time membership by the vila in charge. An ideal candidate for membership has few familial bonds or intimate friendships when they join, though they will likely build strong bonds with those of their cell.

Prospective members can expect to have their loyalty and wits tested at random intervals by the existing members of the group. As Baba Yaga is known to be a powerful witch, tests are aimed at ensuring a potential recruit can see through illusions, overcome enchantments, resist being transformed against their will, and endure any physical tortures they are subjected to. Wayward daughters that come from the mortal world need to be well rounded with strong physical skills, a reasonable body of knowledge, and the ability to interact with others without drawing attention to themselves. Despite their name, there is no bias with regard to gender amongst the wayward daughters, and any mortal that meets their exacting requirements can find admittance eventually.



WHAT IS EXPECTED OF A MEMBER

Wayward daughters must be subtle, swift, and sometimes ruthless. Operations requiring theft, destruction of personal property, and assassination are carried out with enough frequency that individuals who are overly concerned with matters of right and wrong or who have a very black and white view of morality have a hard time coping. The general methodology of a wayward daughter cell is to discover something, be it an object, person, or situation, that Grandmother Baba Yaga might take an interest in and remove it from her sphere of influence, no matter how that needs to be done.

After an operation, the cell leader expects that members will remain silent about it. The details are to remain secret and unspoken, except possibly to one another. Wayward daughters that can't maintain discretion are dealt with harshly. It isn't unheard of for a member who has run afoul of their own cell to have their memory permanently erased or to simply to be executed.

ALLIES AND ENEMIES

Not surprisingly, the biggest enemy of the wayward daughters is Baba Yaga herself. The canny old witch has more power and influence at her disposal than any cell of daughters can muster. Baba Yaga's agents are also a danger to the groups. Her adherents will stop at nothing to gain Grandmother's favor, and delivering a single member, let alone an entire cell, to her is a sure way to win ancient and forbidden knowledge.

Despite the fear that the wayward daughters have about Baba Yaga's attention, no known cells of them have ever been the subject of her aggression. It isn't known if the crone is aware of these so-called daughters of hers that work against her interests, but some of the vila leaders wonder if they aren't just working toward Baba Yaga's inscrutable goals somehow.

BENEFITS OF BEING A WAYWARD DAUGHTER

Given the difficulty of gaining membership, the benefits of joining a cell of wayward daughters are significant for mortals:

- If they are within 60 feet of another wayward daughter, a member can add their proficiency bonus to initiative checks.
- Members have advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks while on a mission for their cell.
- Members are immune to the Dance of the Luckless and Fascinate abilities of all vila.

- Members have advantage on saving throws to avoid being put to sleep or magically knocked unconscious.

WAYWARD DAUGHTER ADVENTURE HOOKS

Baba Yaga has agents and interests all over Midgard, so the wayward daughters can be found anywhere, working to curtail her power and influence. Consider the following hooks to involve them in your campaign:

- A beautiful, antlered woman approaches the party's leader and inquires if their services are available. She needs to recover the staff a cagey wizard stole from her—and if the wizard ends up dead in the process, so much the better.
- The party, while seeking a relic in a tomb, encounters a group of wayward daughters seeking the same artifact. The daughters are willing to use whatever means are necessary to fulfill their objective.
- One of Grandmother's agents hires the party to investigate a series of thefts in town. A cell of wayward daughters has been stealing magical trinkets to keep Baba Yaga from gaining control of them. Both groups are actually seeking an artifact they suspect to be in the town and the agent that hires the party is hoping they'll stumble into it first.

NIEMHEIM: NOTES ON GNOMISH DIABOLISM

by Wolfgang Baur

The gnomes of Niemheim are not the only gnomes of Midgard, but they are by far the best known. Mostly, this is because they are particularly dangerous and entirely willing to kidnap, murder, and steal as needed to protect their strange woodland realm.

These evil gnomes are justly infamous for their troubles with Baba Yaga and their tightly entwined relationship with the hells. And they are closely allied with the one they call the Master of Knives—better known elsewhere as the arch-devil Parzelon, the Lord of Secrets.

Recent Gnomish History

While most know the story that a gnomish prince named Vander Steingau broke a sworn blood oath to Baba Yaga 200 years ago, rather fewer know that Prince Steingau did so in order to steal magical power from Baba Yaga to fuel his own ambitions. He stole two items: one being the *Ebony Star*, a magical gemstone said to contain the soul of Baba Yaga's grandchild, and the other being a book of her secrets, sometimes called *Grandmother's Grimoire* or the *Oxtail Libram*, after the oxtail that the tanner left on the book's leather cover. Neither item is well known outside of gnomish arcanist circles.

To recover them, Baba Yaga sent her ala hags and strigoi, her vila, her psoglav, and her ravens to capture and question and destroy gnomes to punish them for Steingau's betrayal. The prince took the book and black gem to the Eleven Hells where Baba Yaga couldn't find him—and Niemheim suffered until King Redbeard made his pact with **Parzelon** (see *Creature Codex*).

IN SERVICE TO THE LORD OF SECRETS

Because Parzelon is the Lord of Secrets, he prizes secret knowledge highly and always seeks to acquire more, stealing them so that they are no one's but his. Thus, when Steingau raised such ire from Baba Yaga and made off with prized treasures, well, the possibility of protecting a few gnomes and gaining priceless information from Baba Yaga was rather irresistible.

As a result, Parzelon has expanded his cult widely among the Niemheim gnomes, though his name is not known to those who do not traffic in diabolism. The Lord of Secrets granted the gnomes spells to summon allies and to hide gnomish travel and activities from others. At the same time, Parzelon is cautious of devoting too much attention to Niemheim: he has rivals in Chernobog and Mammon, and each seeks the gnomes' devotion for

themselves. And while the gnomes are fearful, they are also clever, and their king seeks to end their reliance on infernal aid.

In practical terms, Parzelon sends various fiends to Niemheim (**spree demons**, see *Creature Codex*, **bearded devils**, and others) to protect the gnomes, and in return, the gnomes provide a steady supply of sacrifices and learn all the secrets they can with spies, arcane scrying, and outright theft from humans, undead, and Baba Yaga's allies—all while keeping his own name hidden insofar as possible. Most gnomes, even members of the Eleven Knives and affiliated tinkers and scouts, simply refer to him as Our Patron, the Master of Knives, King of the Eleven Havens, and similar circumlocutions. Their gratitude is quite real though, and stories tell of the “lost generation” of gnomish children, thousands and thousands of them, taken into Grandmother's stewpots and never seen again.

CULT OF CHERNOBOG AND THE DARK FIVE

The older faith among the gnomes included worship of Yarila and Porevit as well as Hecate and Rava—with some attention paid to Lada as gnomish goddess of healing, light, and luck. All of that worship though (except for Lada) is long gone, referred to as the Ancient Five but rarely. Lada alone retains some minor attention in temples otherwise given over to Chernobog, the Goat of the Woods, Mammon, Marena, and Parzelon: the Five Dark Protectors.

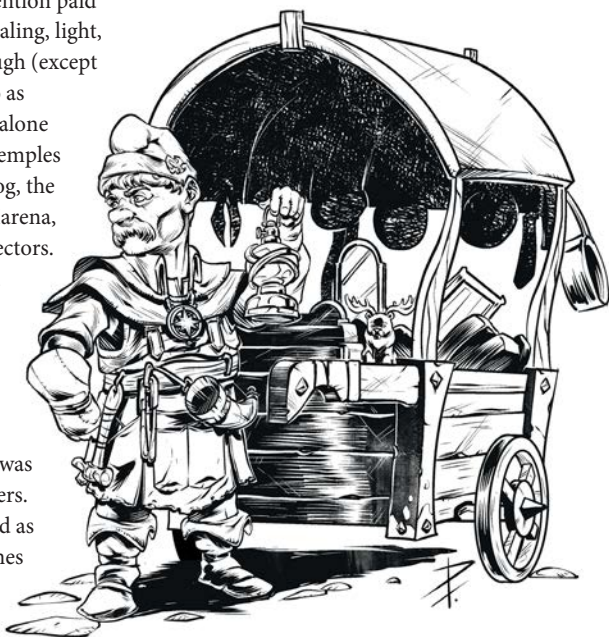
The faith of Chernobog, the god of night and murder, was always part of the darkness under the deep shade of the Wormwood Forest, but in times past, it was rooted out and extinguished by brave gnomish heroes. At best, it was a cult for bandits and necromancers. For 200 years though, it has served as a cloak of darkness over the gnomes of Niemheim, for Chernobog

was the gnomes' first protector—before the bargain with Parzelon was struck.

Now, there is a high priest of Chernobog in the city of Königsheim, with his hellspur cavaliers to carry out his orders, and his priesthood is in every village, ready to blind the eyes of Baba Yaga's servants—or indeed the eyes of the undead of Morgau or the centaurs of the Rothenian Plain. Unlike Parzelon, the priests of Chernobog require far less blood and sacrifice, only fervent prayers and the annual soul of a young gnome or human brought to the Black Spire of Chernobog in Königsheim at midwinter.

GNOMISH TINKER SCOUTS

The gnomes of Niemheim send out scouts, posed as bards, tinkers, pilgrims, cloth and leather merchants, and other generally beneficial persons, visiting Morgau, Zobeck, Vidim, Perunalia, and the Magdar Kingdom with goods to trade. What they are really seeking are sacrifices for Parzelon though, and most have a small wagon used to carry off abducted victims to the nearest forest grove for dispatch from this mortal world (see sidebar).



GNOMISH TINKER SCOUT

Small Humanoid (Gnome), Any Evil

Armor Class 13 (leather)

Hit Points 32 (5d6 + 15)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (–1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	12 (+1)	17 (+3)

Skills Deception +5, Perception +3, Persuasion +5, Stealth +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Abyssal, Common, Gnomish

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Knife Familiar. The tinker scout has a knife familiar (see below).

ACTIONS

Ritual Knife. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d4 + 2) slashing damage plus 7 (2d6) poison damage.

Spellcasting. The tinker scout casts one of the following spells, using Charisma as the spellcasting ability (spell save DC 13):

At will: *avert the eye**, *horn of Parzelon**, *spider climb*

3/day each: *bless*, *hat trick**

1/day: *haste*

(*) see below

KNIFE FAMILIAR

Tiny Construct, Unaligned

Armor Class 18 (natural)

Hit Points 14 (4d6)

Speed 0 ft., fly 40 ft. (hover)

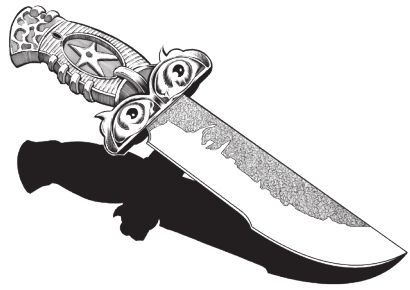
STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (–1)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	1 (–5)	5 (–3)	1 (–5)

Saving Throws Dex +6

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses blindsight 60 ft. (blind beyond this radius), passive Perception 7



Languages one language that its master knows; telepathy (with master only)

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP) **Proficiency Bonus** +2

Antimagic Susceptibility. The knife familiar is incapacitated while in the area of an antimagic field. If targeted by *dispel magic*, the knife familiar must succeed on a Constitution saving throw against the caster's spell save DC or fall unconscious for 1 minute.

False Appearance. While the knife familiar remains motionless and isn't flying, it is indistinguishable from a normal knife.

Telepathy. A knife familiar can speak telepathically to its master and tell them everything it has seen or done within roughly a one-week period. Its memory is fleeting, and it can't remember events more than a week ago.

ACTIONS

Diabolical Knife. *Melee Weapon Attack:* +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d4 + 4) slashing damage.

NINE SWORDS OF NIEMHEIM

The nine cities and towns of Niemheim are said to be linked to nine swords of the gnomish princes of old, blades forged by the finest gnomish bladesmiths, long before the pact of Redbeard and Parzelon and the corruption of the gnomes. Some say the blades were gifts of the elves, later corrupted by Parzelon, the Hunter, the Black Goat of the Woods, and other dark gods. A few believe that recovering these swords might grant the gnomes the favor of Mavros, the war god, and allow them to defend themselves, rather than relying on the hells for their protection. Certainly, King Redbeard thinks so and has sought to recover them.

Cult of Eleven Knives

The Eleven Knives is a cult of gnomes devoted to maintaining, strengthening, and expanding the deal made with Parzelon. Their public face is the charming blade and bon vivant Corvin Hallowell (LE **gnomish knife cultist**, see *Creature Codex*), their director and demon summoner is the slovenly but talented young Magda Venyn (LE gnome **mage**), and their ally and liaison to the hells is one Frexxis (**bearded devil**). Between the three of them, the cult is quiet and effective.

Working with dozens or hundreds of gnomish tinker scouts, the members of the cult find victims and sacrifice them to Parzelon with remarkable and bloodthirsty efficiency. **Bearded devils**, **spree demons** (see *Creature Codex*), and the occasional pair of twin gnomish **assassins** all keep the Eleven Knives on a bloody road. In exchange, the devils keep working to protect every gnomish village and town from all enemies.

BLOOD MAGIC & BLOOD FEEDERS

The Eleven Knives counts among its members one of the greatest blood mages in Midgard—the mother of blades herself, the Hand of Marena and the scourge of the faithless, Churaya Heart's Desire (LE gnome **blood mage**, see *Creature Codex*). She is said to force many of the cult's best blades, and she

enchants them with blood magic to make *blood feeder weapons* (see below), which cause wounds to continue bleeding—most of which are in the hands of the Eleven Knives.

Spells such as *blood armor*, *blood tide*, and *bloody smite* (see *Deep Magic* for these spells) are common tools among members of the knife cult.

BLOOD FEEDER WEAPON

Weapon (Any Piercing or Slashing), Very Rare

Damage from this weapon causes wounds that continue to bleed. When a creature takes damage from this magic weapon, it takes additional damage at the start of its next turn, equal to half the original damage inflicted. If the creature receives any amount of healing or makes a DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check before its next turn, it does not take this additional damage.

In addition, if you score a critical hit with this weapon, you heal a number of hit points equal to the damage dealt.

Gnomish Spellwork

These following spells are best known among the gnomes of Niemheim. A few have made their way into other hands or are known among tieflings and diabolists with ties to Chernobog, Parzelon, or the Eleven Hells.

PROPER SACRIFICES

The sacrifices sought by the spawn of Parzelon and their master in exchange for protection from Baba Yaga are steep but far less so than the decimation wrought by Baba Yaga when her cauldron was filled hourly with gnomish flesh, especially that of young gnomes. The sacrifices to Parzelon seem like a bargain in comparison: each month, 12 black goats, a handful of humans, and whatever vila, vampires, and darakhul the Eleven Knives and their tinker scouts can capture, trick, and bind as an offering. The offerings are kept out of sight of

the general population of Niemheim, who lead their lives in willful ignorance.

Each such sacrifice is made under the dark forest branches (ideally in the Wormwood itself but any grove will do) with a quick cut, leaving the victim's blood to seep out into the earth or onto a large stone, sometimes with a candle. Having the blessing of a gnomish scout or priest always helps, as does the assistance of an infernal familiar (see *find diabolical familiar* spell below) or an actual devil or **spawn of Parzelon** (see **Parzelon** in *Creature Codex*).

AVERT THE EYE

Illusion Cantrip | Bard, Druid, Sorcerer, Warlock, Wizard

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (a glass eye or marble)

Duration: Concentration, up to 3 rounds

By wrapping your hand around a small eyelike object, you become invisible until the spell ends. Anything you are wearing or carrying is invisible as long as it is on your person. The spell ends if you attack or cast another spell.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 1st level or higher, you can extend the duration by 1 round for each slot level (2 rounds at 1st and 3 rounds at 2nd).

CLOAK OF CHERNOBOG

3rd-Level Evocation | Cleric, Sorcerer, Warlock, Wizard

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 120 feet

Components: V, M (a hat of black bear fur, worn during casting)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

Magical darkness spreads from a point you choose within range to fill a 60-foot-radius sphere for the duration. The darkness spreads around corners. A creature with darkvision can't see through this darkness, and nonmagical light can't illuminate it. However, gnomes can see in this darkness normally. This spell is typically cast on the cloak of a priest of Chernobog leading an expedition.

If the point you choose is on an object you are holding or one that isn't being worn or carried, the darkness emanates from the object and moves with it.

If any of this spell's area overlaps an area of light created by a spell of 3rd level or lower, the spell that created the light is dispelled.

FIND DIABOLICAL FAMILIAR

2nd-Level Conjuration (Ritual) | Wizard

Casting Time: 1 hour

Range: 10 feet

Components: V, S, M (100 gp worth of charcoal, rich incense, and a written contract that must be consumed by fire in an iron brazier)

Duration: Instantaneous

This spell is identical to the *find familiar* spell, but it is used only by diabolists to summon fiendish, corrupted, or undead familiars. Instead of the usual spirits, you gain the services of one of the following:

d20	RESULT	CR
1–6	Lemure	0
7	Stirge	1/8
8	Dretch	1/4
9	Ghoul Bat (TOB2)	1/4
10	Kalke (TOB)	1/4
11	Corrupted Pixie (TOB2)	1/2
12	Fire Imp (CC)	1/2
13	Skin Bat (TOB)	1/2
14	Gumienniki (CC)	1
15	Imp	1
16	Quasit	1
17	Ink Devil (TOB)	2
18	Kuunganisha (CC)	2
19	Wind Demon (CC)	2
20	Bearded Devil	3

(CC) see *Creature Codex*, (TOB) see *Tome of Beasts*, (TOB2) see *Tome of Beasts 2*

Appearing in an unoccupied space within range, the familiar has its typical statistics. Your familiar acts independently of you, and it chooses whether or not to obey your commands—a spiteful familiar may work against you.

GNOMISH TONGUE

1st-Level Transmutation | Bard, Cleric, Druid, Sorcerer

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (a bit of fox fur)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

You have advantage on Deception and Persuasion checks and on saving throws against spells that do psychic damage or affect the mind, provided they have a verbal component.

HAT TRICK

1st-Level Transmutation | Wizard

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (a hat and a small silver triangle with hinges worth 50 gp)

Duration: 1 hour

You touch a hat and create an invisible entrance within it that opens to an extradimensional space that lasts until the spell ends. The extradimensional space can be reached by reaching into the hat. The space can hold one Medium or smaller creature and its carried goods, or up to 100 pounds of unliving material. The hat always weighs about 1 pound, regardless of its contents.

The hat cannot be pulled into itself. Attacks and spells can't cross through the entrance into or out of the extradimensional space, but a creature inside can see out of it through a small slit as wide as the hat. Anything inside the extradimensional space drops out when the spell ends or when the hat is destroyed.

Gnomish casters often crawl into their own hat to avoid detection or to be carried safely from town to town.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot greater than 1st, you extend the duration by 1 hour for each additional level, and the extradimensional space can hold one additional creature, or an additional 100 pounds.

HORN OF PARZELON

1st-Level Evocation | Bard, Cleric, Sorcerer, Warlock, Wizard

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self (10-foot radius)

Components: V, S, M (a hunting horn worth 200 gp, not consumed in the casting)

Duration: Instantaneous

You blow a hunting horn, creating a burst of noise that can be heard at a distance up to 3 miles away in open air or up to 900 feet in caverns or tunnels. Each creature in a 10-foot-radius sphere centered on you must make a Constitution saving throw, taking 1d8 thunder damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

Gnomes and evil-aligned creatures hearing the horn know that they are called by the arch-devil or his servants. They know the location and direction of the horn's casting and move toward it with preternatural speed. One or more creatures arrive at the caster's location within 2d6 rounds. The exact nature of the creature depends on the area where the spell was cast.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the damage increases by 1d8 for each slot level above 1st, and the distance increases by 1 mile, or 300 feet underground, per level.

LION OF PARZELON

5th-Level Conjuration | Cleric, Wizard

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: 90 feet

Components: V, S, M (blood and a knife)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

You call forth a **spree demon** (as per *Creature Codex*). Choose a space within range, and the demon appears in an unoccupied space within 10 feet of it. The demon disappears when it drops to 0 hit points or when the spell ends. The demon is friendly to you and your companions for the duration. Roll initiative for the demon,

which has its own turns. It obeys any verbal commands that you issue to it (no action required by you).

If you don't issue any commands to the demon, it attacks the nearest living creatures, including members of your party. If your concentration is broken, the demon doesn't disappear. Instead, you lose control of the demon, it becomes hostile toward you personally, and it might attack. An uncontrolled demon can't be dismissed by you, and it disappears 1 hour after you summoned it. The GM has the spree demon's statistics.

SUMMON SPAWN OF CHERNOBOG

4th-Level Conjuration | Cleric, Wizard

Casting Time: 1 minute

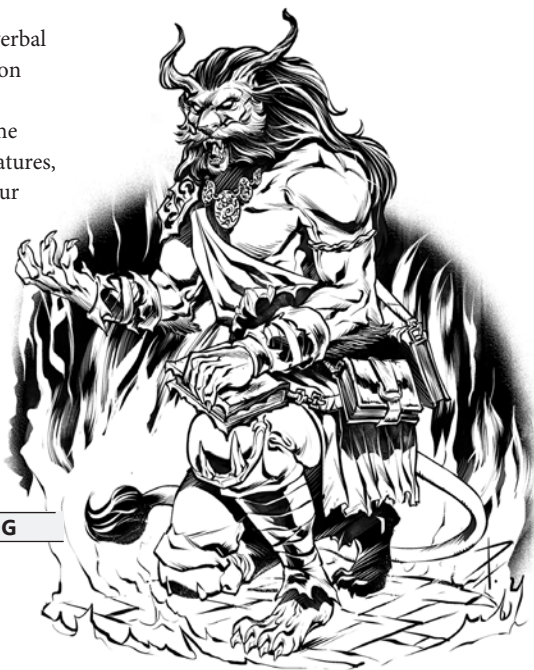
Range: 90 feet

Components: V, S, M (charcoal and a knife)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

You call forth a **spawn of Chernobog** (see *Creature Codex*). Choose a space within range, and the spawn appears in an unoccupied space within 10 feet of it. The spawn disappears when it drops to 0 hit points or when the spell ends. The spawn is friendly to you and your companions for the duration. Roll initiative for the spawn, which has its own turns. It obeys any verbal commands that you issue to it (no action required by you).

If you don't issue any commands to the spawn, it attacks the nearest living creatures if in darkness or twilight or disappears 1 round later if in sunlight or bright light. If your concentration is broken, the spawn doesn't disappear. Instead, you lose control of the spawn, it becomes hostile toward you personally, and it might attack. An uncontrolled spawn of Chernobog can't be dismissed by you, and it disappears 1 hour after you summoned it. The GM has the spawn of Chernobog's statistics.



WORD OF PARZELON

2nd-Level Divination (Ritual) | Cleric

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (blood from a bird)

Duration: Instantaneous

By splattering blood on a stone or in dust, you may receive a single-word answer from the arch-devil Parzelon about a specific person, place, or object within 5 miles or about a specific action you plan to take within the next 30 minutes. Roll on the following table, using your spellcasting modifier:

d20	RESULT
1	No response
2–6	Garbled word in a language not known to the caster
7–10	Answer is vague and potentially misleading
11–16	Answer is accurate, punny, or clever but not helpful
17–19	Answer is accurate and clear
20+	A precise and helpful answer

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