

VECNA

GENESIS OF A LEGEND

A Dialogue and Critical Assessment

By Sam Weiss and Gary Holian

VECNA: GENESIS OF A LEGEND

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Introduction

Vecna has no doubt become the most famous character in the published D&D multiverse, in no small part due to his inclusion as a popular named villain in the *Stranger Things* streaming series. However, it is also due to his increasing role as the ultimate villain in the game - dethroning such stalwarts as Strahd von Zarovich, Lord Soth, Lolth and various other fiends. Wizards of the Coast is capitalizing on the interest in the lich by releasing a module aimed at epic characters called *Vecna: Eve of Ruin*. These efforts, regardless of their intent, will have the effect of further unmooring the character from his true origins in the World of Greyhawk Setting.

We are a pair of D&D freelancers whose efforts over the years have often touched upon the nature of Vecna and his role on Oerth, the home of the World of Greyhawk Setting. As an act of cultural preservation this document seeks to recount and extend the origins of the character in the trajectory that we feel would have been most likely. We will provide insights into how we have used Vecna

in our campaigns, and some of the secrets and legends around his artifacts, cult, and personage.



First Impressions

Sam: I do not recall exactly when or why I became so interested in Vecna. My first piece at the Canonfire.com website on the Hand and Eye is dated February 2004, so I expect it began as an outgrowth of my Sheldomar Valley Timeline, which grew from my desire to

reconcile contradictions and holes in the canon references I had found for Keoland for use with Living Greyhawk. Vecna is rather relevant to the history of the Sheldomar, in addition to the impact he has had on all of the Flanaess and D&D in general. I do know that discussions with Gary in the first months of 2023 and his expressed desire for a Greyhawk focused and specific document are the reason for me returning to Vecna now, after nearly 20 years. As it goes, it was Vecna that prompted me to join the Discord servers when Rick “Duicarthan” Miller prodded me to offer my insights in the wake of Vecna’s appearance on *Stranger Things*. Perhaps that is yet another scheme of the Master of Secrets.

Gary: I recall reading about the artifacts attributed to Vecna in the *Dungeon Master’s Guide* early in the 1980s. The homage to Jack Vance was obvious and amusing. I thought that the artifacts were a cool legend to sprinkle in as background, but I would never actually use them in a campaign for their seriously cursed nature would be too overpowering. Then in 1990 a module was released that would change everything - it was called *Vecna Lives!* (yes, even the exclamation point was intriguing). It was an adventure, heavily steeped in new lore, which posited the return of Vecna as a fully fledged character and no longer just the name behind a pair of artifacts. Author, Dave “Zeb” Cook, created a web of history around the character, including self-contradictory references, far-fetched

events attributed to Vecna, and turned him into a demigod. It was heady stuff, much more lore laden than the works that we typically got in first edition, but second edition heralded an age of the “celebrity NPC dungeon”. The book and its implications were much debated in the nascent online Greyhawk Fandom which soon developed on the internet. Eight years after its release, I was given the opportunity to work on the *Living Greyhawk Gazetteer*, along with my co-authors. As the writer in charge of the Sheldomar Valley subject matter, I was forced to grapple with the lore around Vecna and make some decisions which would guide the development of Vecna in the setting thereafter - work that Sam Weiss, in particular, was able to build on. I decided the moment and location of both his Occluded Empire and death, the discovery of and disposition of his artifacts, and his place in the World of Greyhawk Setting. Vecna grew from a legend to the embodiment of fear - no longer a distant threat, but a tangible one that reached into the heart of the setting. Was that a good thing? I’m not so sure. As a formless boogeyman, the entity behind the Hand and Eye artifacts, he was anything you wanted him to be. But as the walking embodiment of evil his presence teetered between the horrific and the comic.

Sam: The inspiration for this document comes from many sources, a portion of which will be elaborated on here in the first section which covers the canonical appearances and references to Vecna and his artifacts. There

were others who influenced me, and I would like to give credit to them all.

Brian Blume created the Hand and Eye of Vecna and Sword of Kas back in the days of Original D&D, where they are first mentioned in the *Eldritch Wizardry* supplement.

David “Zeb” Cook expanded on the Hand in the AD&D 2nd edition *Dungeon Master’s Guide*, then produced a major expansion of the story along with the apotheosis of Vecna in the adventure *Vecna Lives!*, followed later by entries on both in the *Book of Artifacts*. This material, particularly from *Vecna Lives!*, provides the main basis for the history I developed.

Monte Cook wrote *Vecna Reborn*, and Bruce R Cordell and Steven Miller wrote *Die Vecna Die!*. Two Planescape NPCs, Autochon the Bellringer from *Uncaged – Faces of Sigil* by Ray Vallese, and Ely Cromlich, from *The Factol’s Manifesto* by Dori Jean Hein, Tim Beach, and J.M. Salsbury, featured in *Die Vecna Die!*, and while I do not include them I would recommend them as very interesting characters to supplement an adventure including the cult of Vecna.

Tracy and Laura Hickman created Azalin the Lich in *Ravenloft II: The House On Gryphon Hill*, and Gene DeWeese wrote the novel *King of the Dead* which detailed the history of Firan Zal’honan on Oerth before he became Azalin.

Richard Baker, James Jacobs, and Steve Winter wrote *Lords of Madness*, the sole later source referenced. Y’chak the Violet Flame appears there as an entity acknowledged by the aboleth, and referencing Lovecraft as inspiration.



Significant material for Vecna has appeared since those products, particularly the “Core Beliefs” article in *Dragon* #348 by Sean K. Reynolds and myself.

Noel Graham, who went by “Watcher” on the mailing lists back in the day, was a significant encouragement to me as I started writing articles and history, and the source of the concept of the Hand and Eye migrating in a circle around the Flanaess.

Eric Menge was a regional admin for Geoff during the Living Greyhawk campaign and later fellow assistant editor for Core adventures, author and co-developer of several Core adventures and the final City of Greyhawk adventure series, and writer of the “Greyhawk Grumbler” web supplements for that series and several “Mysterious Places” web articles for Living Greyhawk. He is the source of the alternate origin of Vecna involving the Old Faith druids and the Green Man. I have long loved it, and have included my version of it in this history.

Finally, there is Gary Holian, my co-author. As noted, Gary expressed a desire for a more explicitly Greyhawk version, and I replied I had already the outline of it in my mind. As we discussed it, revisiting details after 20 years, it quickly became obvious that we agreed on virtually every detail of how bits and pieces could fit into other lore. As well, it was his idea to use Y’chak as the cause of the destruction of the House of Malhel in Keoland. Although I ran with that and expanded it to suggest he was the “Serpent” who first appears in Vecna Reborn. Our discussions helped fill out additional bits of lore to include, and drove me to write it all down.

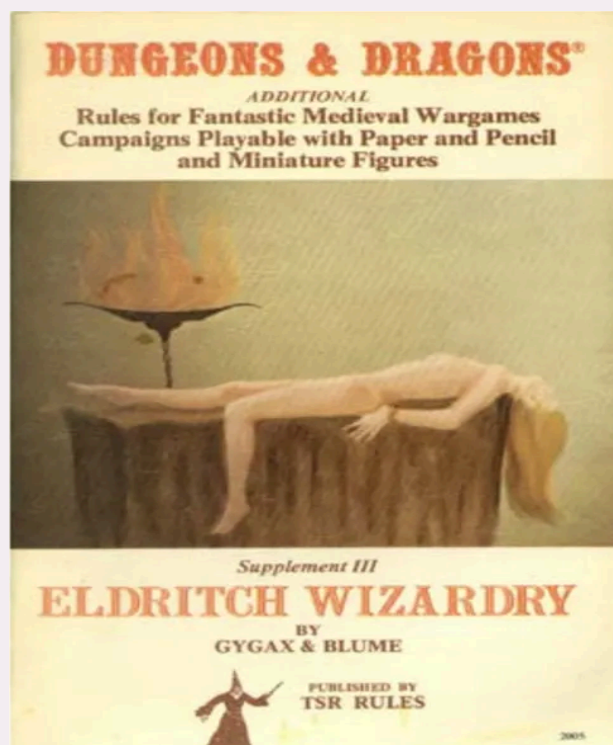
With that, welcome to the story of Vecna, - a tale of war, secrets, and betrayal in the quest for power and dominion.

Gary: I am happy to join Sam on this work. Deepening the lore on Vecna in the World of

Greyhawk is a fun exercise and given the recent interest in the character, likely to pay off for the many Greyhawk DM’s who wish to use him in their campaigns. I second Sam’s list of influences and look forward to relating some of my ideas.

The Published History

Vecna first appears in the *Eldritch Wizardry* supplement, where his Hand and Eye are among the Artifacts and Relics listed as treasure. They were created by Brian Blume. The lore is minimal, noting that they belonged to a lich who imbued them with power that survived his death.



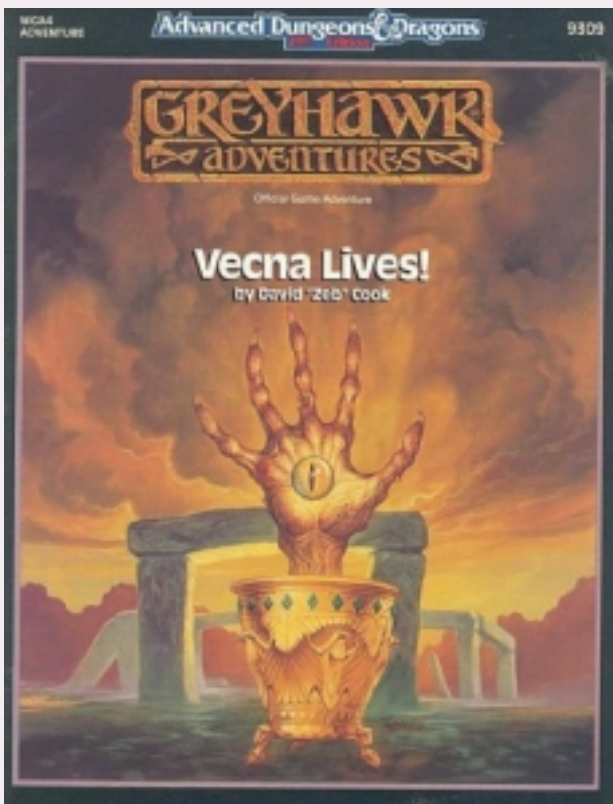
The next appearance of the relics is in the AD&D 1st edition *Dungeon Master's Guide*, which adds that Vecna's phantom may still roam the Prime Material Plane, and that his name is rarely spoken, especially among strangers, as a result. The legend takes one step further from the shadows, but Vecna is still not realized as an NPC.

In *Vecna Lives!* (David "Zeb" Cook, 1990), Vecna finally appears in addition to his Hand and Eye, and a background is created for him in the World of Greyhawk. More accurately, a bunch of legends about him are presented, explicitly noting *"The following information about Vecna is a collection of truth, contradiction, and misinformation. It's not meant to give a precise background of this mighty arch-lich. Instead, it represents the confusing picture the*

player characters are likely to gain if they research Vecna's history."

(*Vecna Lives! (VL!)*, page 6)

When he lived is ambiguous, before the Great Migrations, before the Baklunish-Suloise War, *"perhaps even before the ascendancy of the Suloise Empire itself."* Likewise his location is not pinned down. He may be from *"beyond the great mountains to the west"*, his tower may have risen *"from the very depths of the Nyr Dyv "*, he may even have had *"dominion extended over another plane"*. His conquests and destruction were extensive - *"Old tales from the Duchy of Urnst even claim Vecna was responsible for the creation of the Bright Desert!"* Later lore (*"VL!"*, page 22) notes that the Neheli of Keoland fought Vecna and Kas, presumably in the Sheldomar Valley. This would clearly place Vecna's realm there and not further west, with the end of it at or around the time of the Twin Cataclysms. It introduces the events of the Insurrection of the Yaheetes in the Dreadwood, Vecna the Second at Tyrus *"believed"* to be on the Pomarj Coast, the Gnomelord of Blemu, and the Paladin-King of Miro - although presumably in the Flanaess like the others. No dates are given for any of these. Finally it mentions Halmadar the Cruel, the last wielder of the relics and who possessed both of them, and who ruled north of Nyr Dyv in the Shield Lands although entombed to the south of that lake. In addition to this background, however unreliable it may be, there is a 1-1/2 page appendix describing the cult of Vecna, along



with 1 page on Vecna's statistics as a demipower.

Gary: There is no doubt that Zeb Cook's seminal work *Vecna Lives!* was the first to open the door to Vecna as an actual character in D&D Campaigns, not just a bogeyman (though I think the matter is more powerful and mythic in nature). Any use of Vecna in the 1980s as a character was most likely dubious, or idiosyncratic to a creative DM. The Hand and Eye were the only published keys to encountering his malign influence. When I began working on the *Living Greyhawk Gazetteer* in 1998, I was faced with the decision of what to do with the character. Some of the legends presented had to be true, while others false. They could not all be true and hold together as a consistent narrative. I decided that the "Chronicle of Secret Times" by Uhas of Neheli, one of the fictitious works about Vecna's last days mentioned in the module, would be the key to the truth. Therefore, I looked through the eyes of the Neheli refugees of the Suel Imperium and how they encountered Vecna's Occluded Empire in the Sheldomar Valley. They would have witnessed his fall and seeming death, and their sorcerous agents, who would later come to be known as the Silent Ones, would be the first to recover his Hand and Eye from the ruins of the Rotted Tower.

Sam: In the AD&D 2E *Dungeon Masters Guide (DMG)* (Design: David "Zeb" Cook, 1992) the Hand is one of the artifacts listed. Additional

history is added here, presumably more accurate than suggested in *Vecna Lives!*. The Insurrection of the Yaheetes is timed to 136 years after the passing of Vecna. The leader is named Paddin the Vain, and he only had the Hand. Hamoch of Tyrus is listed as a ruler, and a fisherman named Gisel discovered the Hand but never used it. Several decades later his brother killed him, and was killed in turn by an outlaw named Mace. Mace claimed the Hand and made himself ruler of Tyrus for 100 years until he was assassinated. The Paladin-King of Miro is said to be "well-documented", but a location for Miro is still not given, and the Hand is said to have "appeared briefly in widely scattered lands" although such are "unsubstantiated". (2E DMG, page 91)

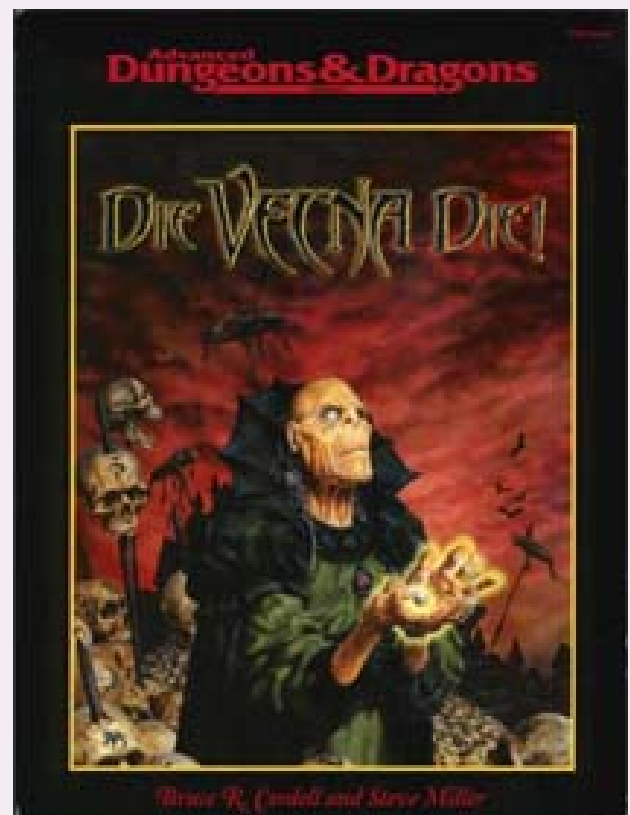
In *The Book of Artifacts (BoA)* (Design: David "Zeb" Cook, 1993, additional designers listed) much of this information is repeated, although with a minor error of stating the Insurrection of the Yaheetes was crushed by the "Emperor of the Malachite Throne", which is connected to the Great Kingdom and nowhere near the Dreadwood. There is also the addition that the Eye was used in the "extermination of the house of Hyeric, once the ruling dynasty in Nyronde" (*BoA*, page 35) which is a further connection to the Great Kingdom and surrounds, in the eastern Flanaess.



Next is *Vecna Reborn* (Monte Cook, 1993). Following the end of *Vecna Lives!* Vecna has become imprisoned in Ravenloft. One bit of lore is added: “the Serpent”, who Vecna talks to, and who mentions the “Ancient Brethren”, who might be the ancestors of Vecna or the Serpent (the sentence structure is somewhat unclear) that learned secrets of magic from the Serpent long ago. The adventure also features the introduction of undead as the highest ranking servants of Vecna. This seems to me to be rather different from the presentation in *Vecna Lives!*, and it effectively changes Vecna from a power of magic and secrets into one of necromancy and undead.

Gary: I did not like the module *Vecna Reborn*, for it seemed like an excuse to promote the

Ravenloft setting by using Vecna as a MacGuffin. He was largely taken away from Greyhawk and transplanted to the Mists of Ravenloft. As a demigod he would seem to me to be beyond the power of such things as the Mists. However, despite that connection the module did reveal more lore about the rise of Vecna and the power behind his ascension - the Serpent. Instead of magical secrets, Vecna’s religion was pushed in the direction of undead and necromancy.



Sam: The last of the early era of Vecna modules is *Die Vecna Die!* (Bruce R Cordell & Steven Miller, 1993). The Serpent features prominently in this adventure, and the Ancient Brethren are mentioned again, although now the Serpent is said to be a

member of them as is the Lady of Pain. This identification of the Lady of Pain is a near total contradiction of all prior Planescape material on her, which made it clear that her origin was an absolute mystery of the setting and something never to be defined. The adventure also features the Language Primeval from other Cordell products, and the True Ghouls of Wolfgang Baur.

Gary: Vecna returns, this time to prop up the Planescape Setting. Other than the amusing title (clearly a call back to *Vecna Lives!*), I don't find this module particularly interesting from the standpoint of a Greyhawk fan. As I don't use a lot of that Planescape lore in my D&D multiverse, it doesn't affect my material much. I could make an argument that Vecna, a nascent godling, would expand his influence to the multiverse so this could be seen as entirely in keeping with the character. At this point in the late 90s Vecna was becoming an iconic villain, not just for the world of Greyhawk but the entire D&D multiverse. *Die Vecna Die!* does combine a lot of the cooler Cordell and Baur elements with Vecna as Sam noted above.

Gary: In 2002 Vecna returned in a treatment presented in comic form called "Vecna: Hand of the Revenant" (Modi Thorsson & Kevin McCann, 2002). The lurid work purports to tell the tale of Vecna's origins and early life, including his birth in the Flanaess in the city of Fleeth which he would return to destroy in the comic years later. It references other

characters important to Vecna's life such as his mother, Kas, Acererak, and the Serpent.



Unfortunately it was not widely circulated and copies are hard to obtain, so it has become something of a collector's item. However, it is useful to the budding Vecnologist.

Vecna: Hand of the Revenant was an interesting way to convey additional lore about the lich-god, this time in the form of a comic book complete with evocative art and a lore laden plot. Unfortunately the work was not well advertised, especially to the people most likely to be its fans (the World of Greyhawk community). It flopped, and so there would never be any more issues. We wouldn't get much additional Vecna lore, outside of a few Dragon articles, for many years to come.

Hand of the Revenant deepened the lore of his origin story, making his culture unmistakably Flan. This is very important, as Greyhawk was created as a very diverse and multicultural setting with the Flan a crucial part of it. The Flan are the first known natives of the land called the Flanaess, and are a dark skinned race with their own deep culture including magical and religious tradition.

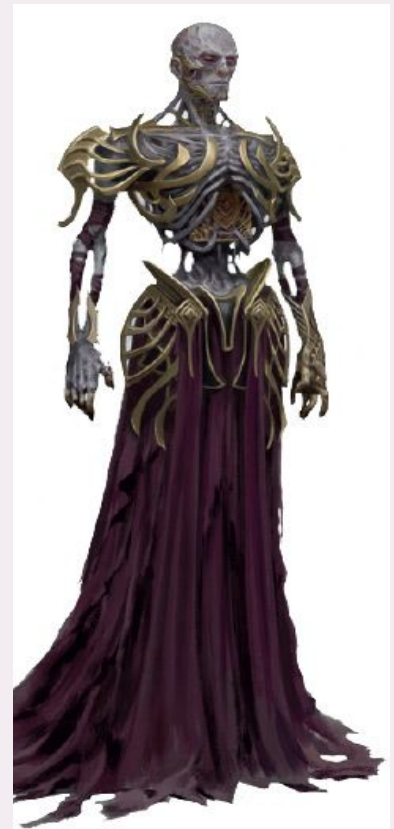
We are now threatened with the Vecna presented in *Eve of Ruin* (2024) by Wizards of the Coast:

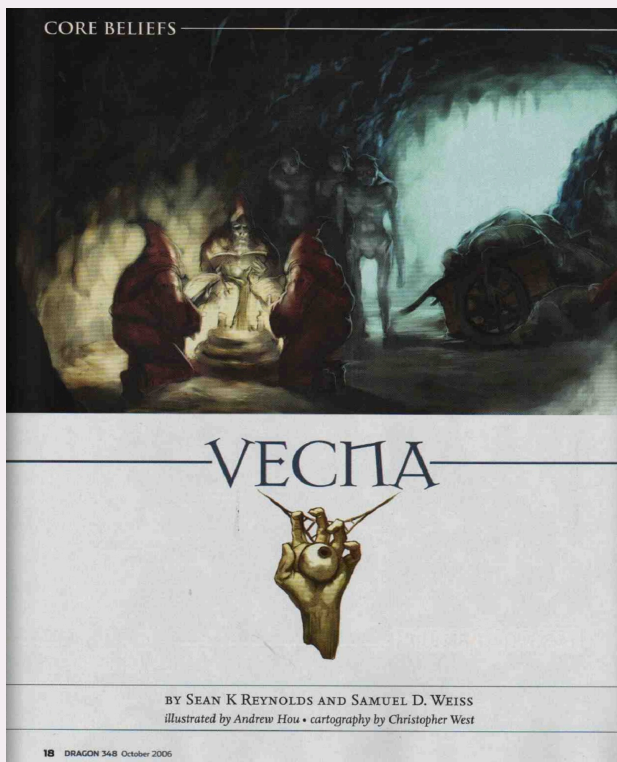


If this is how the mortal Vecna is being represented in the latest official release, it is a disappointing change in the character's cultural origins. The lore never represented him as a character of European characteristics.

His culture was that of a bronze-age society composed of people of color, and devoid of all the Renaissance-plus era details and flourishes. This change to the character is ironic, for it is everything that Wizards of the Coast accuses the authors of the past to be guilty of. Yet they find themselves perpetuating those same stereotypes.

A word on the design of the lich in 5th edition. This version of Vecna gives me bio-mechanical vibes. He looks like something better suited to the universe of the Terminator franchise than to D&D. The pain, the secret knowledge, and the sense of menace has largely been drained from the design in favor of something that is lifeless and mannikin-like.





Sam: The final bit of Vecna lore from 3.5th edition is the “Core Beliefs” article in *Dragon* #348. As noted, I am co-author of that piece with Sean K. Reynolds. While not everything I submitted was included, I think there is useful lore to be gleaned from it, and it collects and incorporates material from *Vecna Reborn* and *Die Vecna, Die* into the core story of Vecna. It must be noted that it presents Vecna and his cult with a strong focus on undead, which was how Vecna was being used at the time.

Additional material on Vecna appears in 4th and 5th edition sources. While I have scanned a few of the free offerings, I have not read the main releases in depth so I cannot and will not try to review them for good or ill.

Gary: That has rarely stopped someone from opining in the past, but good on you Sam.

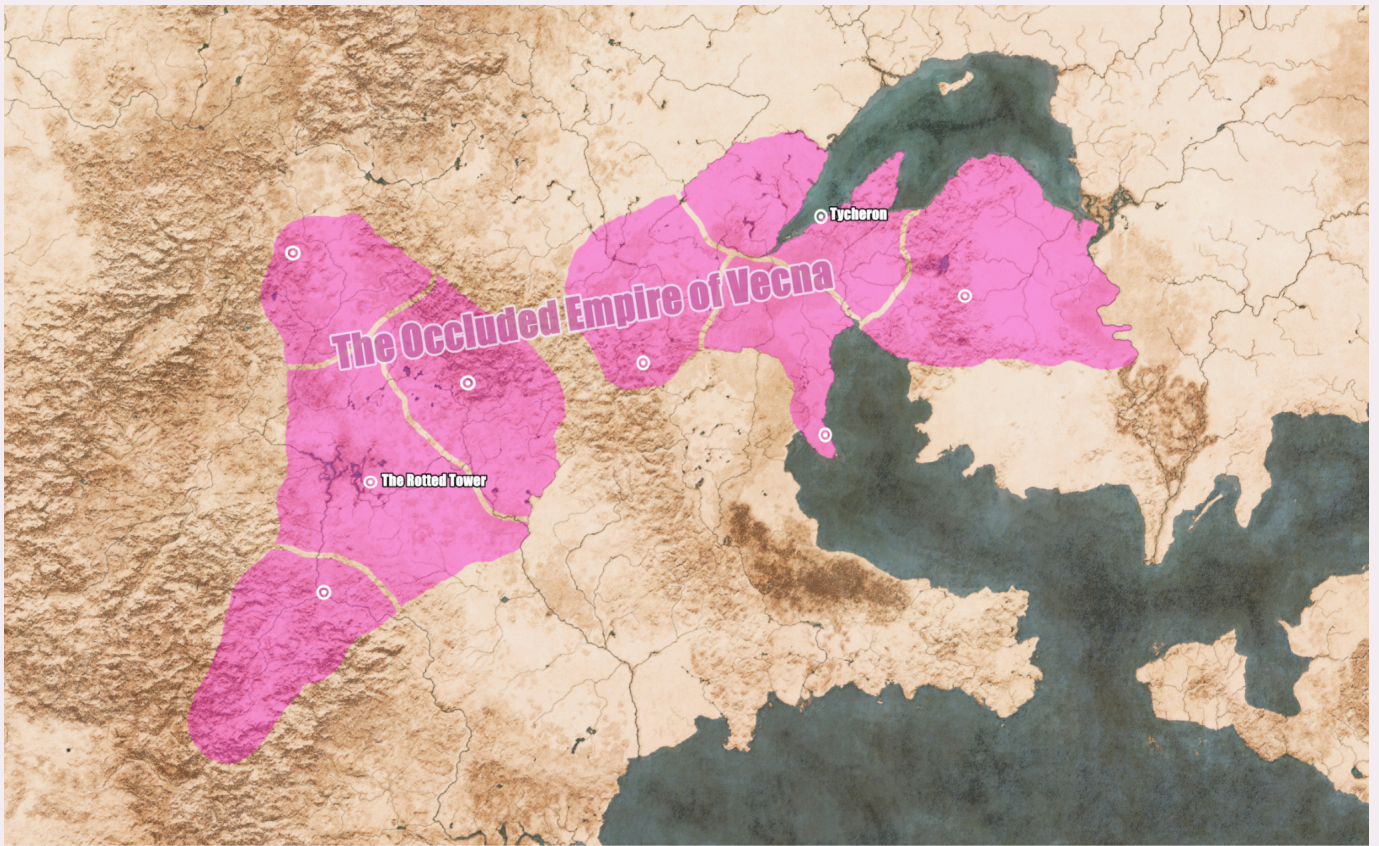
Suffice to say, the Core Beliefs article should be on any Vecna/Greyhawk fan’s short list.

Who is Vecna?

So who is this character that has featured so much, both within the history of the game and lately extending his influence into other media? The following is our best assessment of where Vecna stands in D&D, particularly in the World of Greyhawk.

Gary: Vecna was once a lich, perhaps one of the first. How he became a lich is never exactly specified. It appears to have something to do with the Serpent, a being who taught him the secret, although other theories abound. Vecna became a warlord and a tyrant, and ruled over an empire of largely bronze-aged Flan people which stretched from the Crysalmist mountains to the Nyr Dyv. It was a sprawling land, administered primarily by lieutenants such as Kas, with regional capitals such as Tycheron on the Nyr Dyv. There were other citadels controlled by other lieutenants, comprising the “Eight Legs of the Spider”, but their names are largely lost to time. However, the ruins of these places might still be discovered and explored.

At the heart of this spider-web sat Vecna himself, who ruled primarily from the Rotted Tower in the Rushmoors. The lich was so



secretive that he could sometimes go years, or even decades, without being seen in person.

For nearly a thousand years his malign rule was opposed by an alliance of Elves, Dwarves, other demi-humans and Flan aligned with the Old Faith. The empire eventually fell, a few decades after the Twin Cataclysms brought countless refugees into the Flanaess, and particularly the Sheldomar Valley. Kas became convinced or was seduced into turning against his master. Vecna was killed in the ensuing battle at the Rotted Tower, but over the centuries after his demise he ascended to godhood. How this was accomplished we do not know, but it may have something to do with the power of the artifacts that he left behind, which were discovered in the smoking

ruins where he fell. He probably became a demigod after the reign of Vecna II.

Vecna has risen from demi-god status from sometime around 580 CY to lesser god in the “present day” of the World of Greyhawk (592-598 CY). Vecna is the power of secrets, dark magic, and evil intrigue. He is generally assumed to be one of the primary authors of the **Book of Vile Darkness**.

His cult has infiltrated the Flanaess on a level that rivals, perhaps even exceeds, that of the notorious Scarlet Brotherhood. He is even named in *Age of Worms* as a member of the Ebon Triad of evil powers. As most PCs will interact with Vecna through his cult, we first turn our attention to those who serve the Whispered One.

Introduction to the Cult of Vecna

The following presents the Cult of Vecna as it was described in *Vecna Lives!*. Given the nature of cults in general and that of Vecna in particular, local examples likely vary wildly, and these should be taken as general guidelines and not absolute rules. Vecna prizes secrets above absolute order.

The Cult of Vecna

Those who serve Vecna are divided into several discrete ranks, each with specific duties and responsibilities.

The Spawn of Vecna

The lowest rank within the cult are the common people who believe in Vecna. By serving the Whispered One they hope to gain favored status when the Occluded Empire once again rules the Flanaess. Though the Spawn have no special ability at gathering secrets, other than sharing what they see and hear with their leaders or any particular standing to benefit from them, it is their worship that empowers Vecna and fuels his ascension through the divine ranks. As such, it is the command of Vecna that they be protected. Not out of any concern for their well-being, but concern for his; and out of a sense of ownership – they are Vecna's, and none may harm that which belongs to him. In a twisted sense Vecna is even more dependent

on souls than a traditional lich for his sustenance and might.

The Blood of Vecna

Next in status are those warriors that serve Vecna. They are the protectors of the Spawn and guardians of the higher ranks. The Blood have been promised positions as the aristocracy within Vecna's new empire, where they will rule over the conquered. Their name comes from the ancient Flan tradition of using body paint. These warriors dye their faces red when executing cult business, a symbol of their eagerness to die in the service of Vecna.

The Fingers of Vecna

Above the brute warriors are the stealthy spies, rogues, infiltrators, and assassins who serve the cult. They gather most of the secrets the higher ranks use, work as the bagmen for collecting payments and distributing bribes, and serve as the blunt instruments that terrorize enemies of the cult. Like the Blood they paint themselves when on cult business, in their case their fingers - a symbol of their willingness to get their hands dirty.

The Teeth of Vecna

The middle ranks of the cult are the arcane casters who serve the cult. Their primary tasks are creating items and spells for use by cult members, but the magic power they wield is a fearsome weapon when unleashed against enemies. They dye their teeth red to symbolize

the “bite” of their spells when employed in such tasks, although they take care to hide the stains afterwards lest they reveal their cult membership.

The Memories of Vecna

These dual-classed cleric-mages are responsible for keeping the name and worship of Vecna ever-present in the lower ranks. They have much power, but are steeped in treachery - plotting against each other in struggles for precedence as much if not more than they connive to subvert and control outsiders for the glory of Vecna. The only thing that keeps their treachery in line is fear of discovery and exposure, inevitably followed by harsh punishment from their superiors. Unlike the lower ranks they do not stain themselves with red dye. Instead they wear red robes with embroidered patterns and designs, often highly abstract and of complex geometric design. They will often go to great lengths to disguise these symbols, using highly stylized versions of hands and eyes, and incorporating them into other designs to be able to carry and use them openly without challenge.

The Thoughts of Vecna

The leader of any particular cult cell carries the title of Thought. In principle this is the most powerful cleric-mage in any cell. However, such a person is more likely merely the best at the infighting among the Memories, with the greatest collection of

secrets useful for blackmail of rivals, inferiors, and outsiders. Thoughts wear red robes with lightning bolt designs, setting them apart from the Memories.

The Heart of Vecna

The Heart is the leader of the Cult of Vecna, and at last report this was Diraq Malcinex of Ket. As devastatingly beautiful as she is stunningly brutal and efficient, she is a threat to any who would challenge her position or oppose the will of Vecna. Only Nolhast the Unforgiven exceeds her in might, and he is quite content to leave her unchallenged. The Heart wears a simple red robe as a symbol of her position.

The Voice of Vecna

This is a title granted to an aspect of Vecna when he chooses to manifest one. It holds precedence over the Heart for as long as it walks the Oerth.

The Hand and The Eye

Not properly members of the cult, these are not the legendary relics of Vecna but two constructs similar to golems manufactured by the cult as their ultimate blunt instruments. The two are barely restrained, particularly the Hand, and the cult maintains a store of words of power used to control them through pain.

Gary: The Cult of Vecna is a great vehicle for introducing Vecna as a villain in your

campaign because it allows your players to run up against a group of lower level operatives dedicated to Vecna. The cult is something they can handle at lower levels, yet still dip their toes into the font of ancient horror he represents.

The Relics

The Hand and the Eye of Vecna feature prominently in the legends that constitute the Tale of Vecna. Stricken from his body when he was betrayed by Kas, the two are truly characters in their own right.

The ordinary powers of the Hand and Eye have been covered in numerous sources and, while they are often contradictory, they are not the most important element of them. Similar to the phylactery of a lich, the two contain a portion of the psyche of Vecna. They are aware and work to further the Whispered One's goals, subverting those who dare to employ them. Those bearing them for too long will begin to believe they are Vecna, like Halmadar the Cruel, and will ultimately be possessed by them, as was Mace who openly proclaimed himself Vecna II.

There is another secret regarding the relics of Vecna, disturbing in its simplicity. That is, there is a third relic. It is not another body part as regularly featured in various, often humorous, tales. It is that item associated with

the overthrow of Vecna and the creation of the Hand and Eye – the Sword of Kas. The Sword is the first true pseudo-phylactery of Vecna, created to assist his escape from his body and begin his ascension. This is why the Sword is powerless to harm Vecna – it simply will not harm its source.

At least according to a few passages within ancient papers hidden in the Silent Tower, lost in the library of Nolhast the Unforgiven, and scraps of surviving writings of Vecna II in Tyrus.

Gary: So in my Vecna lore, the Silent Ones of Keoland (sorcerers who guarded the secrets of the Mages of Power and Suel Imperium, but also of any new and dangerous magic they encountered) were the first to collect the artifacts known as the Hand and Eye. Since they are very secretive, we do not know what other pieces of Vecna they might still have hidden in their great tower outside of Niolo Dra, perhaps even a third body part.

Introduction to the Tale of Vecna

The following material is presented in the spirit of the background from *Vecna Lives!* It is intended to be a mixture of fact and legend. Several entries include conflicting versions of the tale. Others are wildly over the top. This is deliberate. While the authors have their own preferences for which versions are true, it is

left to individual DMs to decide which version they prefer, or to use what is presented as inspiration for developing their own versions of the various incidents or creating additional ones. Further, the most outrageous elements are intended to inspire disbelief, particularly in the sections that are “true”. This is not only an aspect of how Vecna and his cult works, but also inherent to the legends that should surround any artifact or relic.

Sam: The following timeline contains significant reimaginings of the history, particularly in regards to House Neheli in Keoland and House Rax in the Great Kingdom. These are quite shocking to Gary, and far from fully endorsed by him. Readers should feel free to consider them additional false and misleading legends, though I quite enjoy them.

Gary: In Sam’s defense, the lore is far from settled and there is much room for a DM to customize the background to their taste and preferences. What you are presented with here is the surmise of a very experienced Greyhawk DM, and should provide excellent food for thought and a jumping off point to tell your own tales of the past of the World of Greyhawk.

The Tale of Vecna

c. -1,250 CY

Vecna is born in what is now the Gran March, a member of a small, settled Flan tribe of agriculturalists. His family is of moderate status and he becomes a warrior.

c. -1,230 CY

Vecna has become an accomplished warrior and minor spellcaster. His clan’s homeland is invaded, first by Flan pastoralists from the upper Volverdyva river valley who have been driven off by raiders, then by the horde of Kell (gnolls) that the Flan were fleeing. Vecna is selected by the local archdruid to be invested with the Green Man to become king and warlord, and lead the fight against the invaders.

c. -1,230--1,220 CY

Vecna battles the invaders, ultimately defeating them. The war wears on Vecna, and he becomes crueler and harsher in response to the brutal savagery of the Kell.

Sometime during this period Vecna is first contacted by Y’chak, an entity of the Far Realms often called the Violet Flame, that seeks to expunge everything natural on the Prime Material Plane. Calling itself the “Serpent” it whispers secrets of power to Vecna, aiding in his victories and leading him to discover an ancient tome in a forgotten language, written by a member of a race that has since disappeared from the Flanaess -

possibly the Torhoon or even one of the Wind Dukes of Aaqa. Vecna is able to decipher it with magic and the help of the Serpent. Vecna studies it, learning wizard magic, and advancing rapidly.

The Serpent warns Vecna that after he wins he will be slain according to tradition, and shows him a ritual in the book that will enable him to survive and gain the full power of the Green Man for himself.

c. -1,220 CY

Vecna triumphs over the invaders and the time for his ritual death and the rebirth of the Green Man comes. Vecna uses the ritual given to him by Y'chak but something goes wrong; instead of stealing the power and becoming a demipower, the ritual kills the Green Man and traps the essence in Vecna's corpse. While not the same process as creating a lich, it has a similar effect and Vecna is now undead.

c. -1,200--1,000 CY

The local druids are outraged and try to kill Vecna. Vecna still commands the loyalty of his army and is able to drive them back. The threat he poses is not fully recognized, and the conflict remains a local one for some time.

As Vecna's power grows, he controls most of what will become the Gran March and Bissel, winning the loyalty of the people despite his cruelty. The Old Faith of the Sheldomar valley turn their attention to him and the war

spreads. This eventually brings the Olvenfolk into the conflict, though the rulers of the Faerie Realm of Celene across the Lortmil Mountain fail to appreciate the seriousness at first.

c. -1,000--500 CY

Vecna continues to be triumphant, and his influence spreads down the Javan as far as the uppermost portions of the Good Hills in what is now central Keoland. Although Vecna does not conquer and rule everything, the Flan tribes of the area now pay tribute to keep him at bay.

The war with the Olve escalates, and they barely hold onto the east bank of the Sheldomar River against his assaults. Finally recognizing the scope of the threat, Celene mobilizes fully against Vecna but is unable to push Vecna's forces back from the Sheldomar. Eventually the Faerie Realm of Luna in the Volverdyva valley sends troops to aid their kinsfolk in Celene. Vecna defeats their initial force, cutting off the Olve of the Bramblewood.

A further conflict breaks out along the Volverdyva. Once a subject state of Heraan (the fabled Isles of Woe), Tycheron has endured - contesting with Celene and Luna. Tycheron attempts to expand up the Volverdyva River where the Flan have become tributary to Vecna. War breaks out and Vecna is victorious

when Kas betrays Tycheron. Vecna rewards him by making him his favored lieutenant.

During this period Vecna learns two secrets. First, that Y'chak's ritual did not fail – it did exactly what it was supposed to do. Second, Y'chak purposely misled him. It was not to make Vecna supreme, merely to make him more powerful so he could spread chaos and destruction and weaken the Flanaess thus enabling Y'chak to consume it all. Vecna begins making plans to avoid this fate.

Kas the Bloody Handed

Although many reports claim Kas is Flan, he is not. He is a Hobniz, specifically a Tallfellow with significant Olven blood. He is taller and has a much longer lifespan than ordinary Hobniz, which explains his long service to Vecna without being undead. In addition, his health was maintained and extended by certain magical effects, and enhanced further by the Sword of Kas.

c. -500--400 CY

Vecna sets his plan in motion. Leaving Kas to defend his empire, Vecna goes into seclusion and creates the Sword of Kas. It contains a fragment of Vecna's will, and is almost a true lich phylactery.

c. -450--400 CY

The Aerdi, Nehri, and some smaller Oeridian tribes migrate through the Fals Gap from the

ruins of the Baklunish Empire. Kas is busy fighting the Olve, Old Faith, and Firstcomers (of the Suel) in the Sheldomar valley and cannot stop them. When Kas notices other tribes following, he is able to turn and stop them with great slaughter.

Vecna gives the Sword to Kas as a reward, but says he will deal with the next wave of Oeridians himself. These are the Keogh.

-395 CY

The Suel refugees of House Neheli and Secunforth begin migrating up the Sheldomar River, pushing aside Flan resistance and overrunning Firstcomer settlements as they search for a place to settle down and establish themselves. As they travel further north they begin encountering servants of Vecna. Thinking they are nothing more than a Flan fighting society, they drive them off.

-384 CY

The Neheli and Secunforth reach the upper arc of the Sheldomar, and are met by a delegation from Vecna led by Kas the Bloody Handed who commands them to appear before Vecna for judgment. When the delegation is sent, they bear witness to the destruction of Fleeth, - a tribe of Flan that stopped paying tribute to Vecna. Stunned by the display of power and cruelty the leaders of the Neheli submit to Vecna, agreeing to be his agents in

subduing the various Suel Houses that Slerotin brought to the Sheldomar.

-383 CY

Vecna greets the Keogh with sweet words, saying he only wants peace with the Oeridian people moving across his lands. Vecna says the previous group of Oerids were violent and destructive, and that is the only reason Kas fought them. He asks what the Keogh want and when they explain they are looking for a new homeland, Vecna gleefully directs them to the south - promising warm meadows for their horses and flocks, but warning them of the danger of the Suel Firstcomers.

-373 CY

Vecna does the same with the next group, this time directing them to “his lands” along the Volverdyva.

These developments worry Kas. Despite his heritage and the power of the Sword of Kas in sustaining him, he is starting to feel the effects of age and weakening physically. The Sword encourages these concerns, telling Kas that Vecna is displeased with his brutality, and is looking for a replacement among the Oeridian newcomers who will be his new enforcers, with the Neheli as his lieutenants.

-340 CY

Vecna then announces a grand ritual to free himself of the “curse” the druids afflicted him with when he stole the Green Man. The Sword of Kas is able to convince Kas that he must strike now or Vecna will become too powerful. At the height of the ritual Kas attacks, severing Vecna’s hand and striking out an eye. Although the Sword is suddenly powerless, Kas is able to survive Vecna’s counterattacks and finally slays him. This is all according to Vecna’s plan. The ritual he was performing was to free himself from the Green Man and the downside of the first ritual. The final component was a sacrifice – of Vecna himself, and Kas has fulfilled that part. The Green Man is freed to restore the land and be reborn, aiding Geoff to maintain its independence for the next several centuries. Vecna, although fully dead, is freed to receive the worship of his followers, starting him on the path of apotheosis. His last act is to consign Kas to Citadel Cavitius, where he remains imprisoned until 581 CY when Halmadar is freed and Vecna returns. Vecna’s Hand and Eye become relics, imbued with a portion of Vecna like the Sword of Kas – almost true phylacteries, but a bit more.

The Malhel

-383 to 364 CY

As the Suel who had come to the Sheldomar with Slerotin expanded, the Neheli led the push north. In their wake came the Malhel. It was the Malhel who first established good

relations with the Olve of the Silverwood, which at the time spread across both banks of the Sheldomar and was connected to the Axewood. They founded what would become the cities of Nirole Dra and Kewlbanks. The Neheli, having encountered Vecna and submitted to him, turned on the Malhel and, with aid from the Linth to the south and Keogh troops, defeated the Malhel and claimed Nirole Dra. The Malhel retreated to sanctuaries within the Silverwood, as the Neheli turned on the Linth and the Kingdom of Keoland was formed.

-334 to -301 CY

Following the overthrow of Vecna, the Hand and Eye of Vecna and the Sword of Kas were discovered in the ruins of his tower by mages of the Silent Ones working with the Neheli King Nyhan I. Six years later, the Malhel saw the opportunity for revenge and attacked the Lonely Tower. The defenses of the tower did not activate to stop them. Why the defenses failed is a mystery. Some speculate the Hand and Eye had subverted members of the Silent Ones to lower them. Others suspect that the Tower itself was somehow aware of the threat the Hand and Eye posed and allowed the Malhel access. Whatever the reason, the Malhel made off with a great amount of lore and many items including the Hand and Eye (The Sword of Kas would disappear under equally mysterious circumstances several centuries later). The Malhel fled south, pursued by the Silent Ones and royal forces,

before disappearing into the trackless vastness of the Dreadwood. They may have been aided by the Olve of the Dreadwood, kin to the Silverwood allies of the Malhel. There, safe from retribution for the moment, the Malhel raised the Tower of Valadis.

Unfortunately for all, the Malhel succumbed to corruption after their defeat by the Neheli. Their leader, Raszildor, was contacted by Y'chak the Violet Flame who, having been abandoned by Vecna, sought to use the Malhel instead. Raszildor and the other seers of the Malhel pursued unspeakable lore in Valadis, using the lore of Vecna stolen from the Lonely Tower and taught even worse secrets by the avatar of Y'chak. Finally, thirty years later they performed an abominable ritual to open a portal to summon allies from the Far Realm to assist them in further vengeance against the Neheli and all of Keoland. Instead of allies they unleashed a full avatar of Y'chak who consumed Raszildor, the seers, and ultimately all of the Malhel present in and near Valadis. Only a final effort by the dying mages managed to corrupt the portal, closing it before Y'chak could complete his manifestation and beginning an age of horror. The tower remains, a continuing source of foulness that has grown to pervade all of the Dreadwood to this day.

-277 to -204 CY

Fewer than one hundred Malhel were far enough from Valadis to avoid being consumed. They were middling members and servants of no significant power who scattered, managing to insinuate themselves into local communities while abandoning any memory of their former House. All save one - an apprentice at the time, he still possessed the potential of a great seer. He fled west into what is now the Yeomanry, and after a quarter century of planning revealed himself and usurped control of that land. His name was Asberdies, and for seven decades ruled the land with atrocity and terror before finally being overthrown.

The chief servant of Asberdies was Nolhast, damned as the Unforgiven for his own cruelties in a reign of evil. There is a record of a Nolhast in the family annals of the Linth, and many suspect that is who he is - a renegade and traitor who left to find a master worthy of his evil and intellect. Nolhast was a scholar even then, researching lore and deciphering secrets. Asberdies was quick to see the potential in him, and set him to researching some of the surviving lore from Valadis. Nolhast staged a daring raid into Valadis, evading the informal patrols established since the destruction of the Malhel, and came away with the Hand and Eye. He studied them, learning much of their secrets. Asberdies rejected employing them himself, which no doubt led to his being overthrown, although it saved him from the

domination of the relics. With the fall of Asberdies Nolhast fled, taking the Hand and Eye with him to continue his investigations.

Paddin the Vain and the Insurrection of the Yaheetes

-203 to -162 CY

Following the overthrow of Asberdies in what is now the Yeomanry his lieutenant, Nolhast the Unforgiven, escaped with the Hand and Eye which he had been researching for his master. Although Nolhast never used either himself, his research into their potential put him in contact with Vecna's spirit and he became a willing follower. Seeking to determine more about the abilities of the relics and spread the cult of his new patron, Nolhast traveled back to the Dreadwood. The tower of Valadis was now heavily guarded and warded, and he was unable to gain entry there to search for new lore. While Nolhast was exploring he encountered the Yaheetes, a minor Flan tribe of the northern and eastern Dreadwood. The lands of the Yaheetes were within the territory claimed by House Rhola for their Duchy of Gradsul. They were not oppressed as they had been under the Firstcomer House expelled a century earlier. But the status of the Yaheetes was notably lower, as the Sellarks who controlled the House at that time thought little of those Flan who needed the arms of House Rhola to liberate them.

Nolhast found Paddin, a Hobniz. Previously a respected clan leader among the Yaheetes, the baron appointed to manage the district treated Paddin as a mere village headman of no special significance. Accounts differ at this point; some assert that Paddin had been a warrior who had lost a hand when younger, possibly fighting for King Mandros - something that if true would explain the disdain a Rhola noble would show him - and that Paddin accepted the Hand from Nolhast to be whole again. Most versions say that, aside from the loss of status, Paddin was more severely affected by the loss of the luxuries he previously enjoyed. This he maimed himself in order to affix the Hand and access its powers - to regain his status and enjoy his previous acclaim and comfort.

At first Paddin did just that. The most basic powers of the Hand enabled him to clear significant areas to support the new farms the Rhola preferred. The wealth of his village soared as the people shifted from hunting to farming the new estates, and Paddin was quick to claim his share. A few accidental gestures revealed more powers of the Hand, and through judicious use of them Paddin eliminated the more inquisitive and annoying agents of the baron. The continued use of those powers resulted in Paddin's domination by the portion of Vecna's spirit that remained within the Hand. At that point, Paddin turned from indulging himself to planning domination. Instead of protecting the Flan and

Hobniz from the Rhola nobles, at least as he saw it, Paddin began eliminating his rivals among the Yaheetes, securing greater and greater status in the councils of the clan, and slowly building a secret army. Ten years after first claiming the Hand, Paddin believed he was ready and the rebellion began with a strike on the king of Keoland himself.

Luschan II was visiting Endereisen, at the time the stronghold of the Sellarks, for a celebration of the victory over Asberdies, which not coincidentally also marked when the Hand was "freed" to begin its work. The plan went off nearly perfectly, and Paddin himself slew the king with the power of the Hand. The only flaw in the plan was that Luschan's son and heir, Malv II, then just the Duke of Gradsul, had been delayed in arriving for a day. As word of the attack and death of Luschan II spread, Malv was able to escape to Nirole Dra and secure election as the new king.

At first the war was treated by the Court of the Land as a mere internal problem for the Duke of Gradsul to resolve for himself with his own forces. Within a year the Court accepted it was a much more serious problem. Paddin's forces slaughtered whole villages with no distinction between Suel, whether settlers and administrators, or Flan of rival tribes and the few Yaheetes who had not already submitted to Paddin. He also sent them beyond the borders of the Duchy of Gradsul, raiding the lands of House Linth and attacking the Keogh in Sedenna. These forces carried out raids of

extreme brutality, with savage tortures and foul violations with victims screaming for days before they expired from the abuse, and the bodies left to be discovered by relief forces arriving too late to do more than bury what remains could be found.

Paddin's forces retained the initiative for five long, unspeakable years, the list of massacres and atrocities growing all the time. It was only when a major incursion was stopped by a mixed force of Keogh cavalry with Good Hills Noniz and Hobniz a few miles from Granforth, followed by a Rhola strike at one of his strongholds 50 miles from Daerwald, that things began to change. After those battles Paddin's forces were on the defensive, and the armies of the Court slowly pressed them back to the Dreadwood. As they advanced, the few Yaheetes who did not fight to the death or manage to flee were killed in retaliation for the atrocities their kinsmen had inflicted. Though most official records declare these were lawful executions, carried out with all proper legal forms, the scope of the killings and private records of noble families reveal that more than a few were nearly as brutal as which the Yaheetes had inflicted on their victims.

It took ten bloody years to break the power of the Yaheetes in the field, but the campaign was still not over. Paddin remained alive, and those Yaheetes still with him were the most fanatically dedicated. The Yaheetes continued to resist, fighting within the Dreadwood,

staging terror raids, and finding ever more depraved ways to kill victims in an attempt to terrify and demoralize the forces working to root them out. An entire generation was spent exterminating the last remnants of these forces, with hundreds of square miles of the Dreadwood defoliated to remove their hiding places. Paddin himself would not survive to the end. Ten years into the final phase of the war, the Hand failed him during an otherwise minor engagement at one of his redoubts. The only one who noticed was Nolhast, who was observing Paddin closely the entire time while taking notes on the powers of the Hand. Nolhast was as shocked as Paddin when the Hand failed in the middle of the fight but, while Paddin shrieked insults at the Hand, Nolhast acted. Nolhast cut the Hand from Paddin's arm and fled with it, while an Olv of the Dreadwalkers, cooperating with one of Malv's detachments as the battle approached the exclusion zone around Valadis, slew Paddin.

The final five years of the war, bringing the tally to thirty years of destruction, were fought as Paddin's corpse moldered in an unmarked grave, and the last vestiges of the Yaheetes were expunged from the Oerth. The Barony of Raya would be established on the lands of the Yaheetes, with new homesteaders brought in to replace the former inhabitants. Nolhast escaped and would test the relics again, this time in Tyrus.

At least that is what Uhas of Neheli wrote in the “Chronicle of Secret Times”. Other versions of the tale exist. In a forgotten vault in Gradsul, a set of crumbling scrolls tells a distinctly different tale. In these scrolls Paddin the Vain was a Neheli prince who thought he should be king instead of Luschan II. He never possessed the Hand or anything like it. That was a story agreed between the heads of the Rhola and Neheli after the war ended, and Paddin’s body was found. The Neheli would pay a high blood price, and the Rhola would keep the identity of Paddin secret to avoid a civil war.

Yet another version of the tale is in the “Dragon-Scale Tome”. According to this version the Yaheetes were rebels in the Grandwood, not the Dreadwood, and it was Overking Almor I who defeated them. The story is confused, apparently conflating the Grandwood with the Adri Forest, as much of the fighting occurs along the Trask River. This is of course where House Naelax defeated the Tirasqi Necromancers to establish the North Province, and this version appears written to divert credit for that victory from House Naelax to House Cranden.

As with all legends involving the Hand and Eye, it is likely all three of these are a mixture of fact and fiction, with the last being particularly unlikely. Readers are cautioned not to take any such tales as wholly factual, as the least falsehood could spell doom for any who believe it.

In the aftermath, stories of the Hand spread within the noble families of Keoland. Accounts of battles had been recorded and were studied by the family heirs and the apprentices of the House mages. Questions were asked openly about the Neheli and the early days of the kingdom, and more questions were asked in secret. Such secrets are the domain of Vecna.

Vecna II and the Empire of Tyrus

~-161 CY to -63 CY

Gisel the Fisher was supposed to be Vecna II. Having lost his hand the year before, and with his family slowly starving as he struggled to work his nets, he must have seemed a perfect choice to embrace the power of the Hand. Yet after Gisel pulled it in with his catch, he set it over his hearth as another curious yet worthless thing drawn from the sea and forgot about it. The Hand sat there for decades until it subverted Gisel’s brother, Tareg, who resorted to fratricide to claim it. Tareg intended to maim himself in order to use it to gain his fortune in the nearby city of Tyrus. Instead he died on the road, and an outlaw named Mace claimed it. Mace had lost his hand for theft years before, and did not hesitate to attach the Hand and claim its power.

The Hand must have been pleased with Mace’s ambition as it did not immediately crush his mind. Instead, it left Mace to achieve

vengeance against the one who had maimed him – Hamoch, Despot of Tyrus. Mace led his gang to the gates of the city, where he cast them down with a single gesture of the Hand. As he entered the city Hamoch’s guards fled in fear while Mace rode to the palace, his gang parading behind him. Hamoch barricaded the palace, and to storm it would be fatal to Mace’s small gang. Mace simply smiled and waited outside. The screams began the next morning. By the end of the week those inside were desperately tearing at their own fortifications in an attempt to escape, but Mace had his gang drive the now subservient populace to pile up debris to block the doors and windows, preventing escape. For thirty days Hamoch, his family, and his most faithful retainers struggled to escape, their howls of anguish growing in intensity, echoing through the city. Then they stopped, and for three days Mace waited before ordering the palace unsealed. Inside, the decaying corpses showed signs of an agonizing death, their twisted limbs marked with pustulant boils. Mace’s followers were revolted by the sight, and protested when their liege spent the night in Hamoch’s own bedchamber. In the morning, Mace commanded the captain of the city guard to seize his followers and have them torn to pieces in the city square for their lack of faith.

For the next half century Mace expanded his new realm, from the Jewel River in the west to the Woolly Bay and Selintan River in the east, threatening Celene and the Peaks of Haven,

and sending bandits to raid the Oeridian Kingdom of Nehron across the Cairn Hills. The cost of this kingdom was significant; Mace ruled with unflinching cruelty. The least offense was punishable with an agonizing death by public torture, with the offender’s family required to assist in the violation of the offender, while friends and neighbors had to watch or face a similar death. Enemies fought to the death, as surrender meant not the usual slow death of being worked to death in the mines, but an agonizing death in the arenas or consignment to the experimentation tables of Mace’s apprentices. All of this gave Tyrus the infamous appellation of the Slaughterhouse of the Western Shores, yet none of the surrounding nations would move against it - fearful of drawing the wrath of the mad tyrant.

At this juncture, and at the height of Mace’s power, the Hand took control. The populace was summoned for another of his public announcements that typically meant someone would die screaming. There they received the dread announcement that Vecna II now reigned, and that the King of Keoland had already died by his command. The cowed populace cheered, as any other response would only bring death to them, but they all knew it would mean war with a nation many of them had been driven from a century before.

The Keoish were joined by the Dwurrow of the Peaks of Haven, who were as eager to add the Drachensgrabs Hills to their realm as they were to end a menace they knew was coming

for them as well. The Druidic Circle of the Silverwood joined as well, for Vecna was an anathema to their faith, and he had nearly expunged the Flan of that realm from the Oerth before he was first destroyed. Even Denowin of the Silverwood Olve participated, although his troops fought in the Rushmoors against cultists of Vecna there who threatened the Oytwood Olve.

The war was brutal. The Keoish remembered the Yaheetes from the previous century and did not hold back. Armed and unarmed enemies were slaughtered as troops could not be spared to guard them, and the treachery of those serving Vecna II and the likelihood of escape or betrayal was too great to risk even if there were enough guards available. The forces of Vecna II were even more savage - taking prisoners only for use in blood sacrifices to power destructive magics, and sending infiltrators to spread death and terror in the home territories of the invaders. For a decade the hills were bathed in blood as the armies of Keoland and its allies battled toward Tyrus, slowly worn away as the forces of Vecna II fought with fanatical determination - some out of loyalty, but most merely to save their families from the consequences of disloyalty. That fanaticism was proving stronger, and the invading armies faltered even as they spotted the walls of Tyrus.

And then Vecna II was dead. An assassin, said to be a Yemishite from the Baklunish lands of the distant west, struck him down. The Hand

refused to act to save Mace, who was freed long enough to know of the betrayal by the Hand yet too late to do anything to prevent the assassin. Mace's aged body, the same age as Hamoch was when his throat and heart gave out from screaming from the agony of the plague Mace had unleashed, was too slow to react as the blade severed his spine and he fell to the floor. Mace's servants fled, unwilling to approach his body as he bled out. Only one would approach his body, and only to cut the Hand from it, adding yet one more pain and indignity to his end.

Nolhast left the city as the defending armies broke and the victorious forces of Keoland stormed the city - burning and looting, cleansing it of all traces of Vecna. He sailed across the straits to Onnwal with the Hand, eager to unleash its evil there.

Primaria "Prim" Lafanel and the Battle of a Fortnight's Length

c. -150 to -110 CY

The least well known of the bearers of the Relics, and one of only two to bear the Eye, was Prim Lafanel. His unexplained disappearance after using the Eye to bring ruin to the House of Hyeric at the Battle of a Fortnight's Length is only the last element in his disappearance from history.

Primaria Lafanel was born as the first Ur-Flan Tyrants proclaimed the Thaumatrocracy of Heraan on the now sunken Isles of Woe in the

Nyr Dyv. He was one of those rare Gray Olve with pale golden hair and amber eyes that signifies ancient Sidhe heritage and immortality. He learned warfare battling the Kell of the Flanmi plains, and studied magic with the Sidhe of Menowood. He rose high in the Court, and all expected him to unlock the powers and rise to become a LeShay. He advocated against allying with Queen Ehliissa when she founded the Nightingale Realm, and declared himself proved right when her husband became Acererak the Devourer and corrupted the southern portion of the Menowood into the Vast Swamp. He cautioned against alliance with the Suel when they arrived, and recommended destroying the Aerdi before they could establish themselves. Each time the Court ignored his advice, and it was the last that wrought his doom and that of many others.

During the early days of the Cranden conquest of Ehliissa, he battled the warlord Tuerny. Later he fought Lum the Mad and Leuk-O of the Aerdi as they drove the Suel from what is now Sunndi. During one of those battles he lost his eye. He then decided that, if his fellow Olve would not heed his advice, then he would seek others who would. He defected to the Kingdom of Aerdy, and over the next decades rose high in their councils as they subdued the south and prepared to move against Nehron.

It was at this time that Nolhast approached him with the Eye. Nolhast promised the Eye would grant Prim the power he wanted, the

power he deserved, and make him greater than Lum and Leuk-O combined with their strange artifacts. Prim, aging and seeking something to enable him to claim his full birthright as a Sidhe lord, accepted the gift thus releasing the Eye on Oerth.

When the Battle of a Fortnight's Length began Lum and Leuk-O were in the forefront of the army, scattering the forces of Nehron and its allies. Rather than fight in the front lines as expected, Prim stalked on the fringes using the powers of the Eye to hunt the opposing leaders. Prim struck down the Rhelt of Tenh and the Regent of Rhøedin-käl'hess (the realm of House Maure that is now Urnst) along with their captains, but it was among the Nehri that he would wreak the most destruction. Prim slew the king of Nehron along with the king's closest relatives, all but exterminating the ancient House of Hyeric that had ruled the Nehri since before the Migrations. It was while slaying the King's youngest son who was serving as a squire that Prim brought ruin on himself, for an Olve of the Faerie Realm of the Stars, allies of Nehron, was the Prince's bodyguard and that noble Olve died trying to save his young charge. That act of kinslaying broke Prim's mind and he ran insane on the battlefield, slaughtering friend and foe alike. Before Lum and Leuk-O could arrive to stop him, Nolhast intervened and removed Prim from the battlefield. Nolhast stripped the Eye from the deranged Olve, who had already severed his own hand in a mad attempt to

transform himself into Vecna. Nolhast consigned the deranged remnant of Prim to the prison of Citadel Cavitius, and secured the Eye.

Prim Lafanel disappeared from history, and the legends began. According to some, Prim expunged the House of Hyeric that day. Others say that the king's wife gave birth a week later, and the infant was crowned king of Nehron before Grand Prince Almor arrived at Womtham to claim the realm. The most common histories say that Almor relented at the last moment and spared the child, an act of mercy that would end with House Cranden supplanted by House Rax. Others insist such tales are pure nonsense - invented by Cranden and Naelax to discredit House Rax and portray them as foreigners. Likewise the Crandens denounce any suggestion that Grand Prince Almor employed an Olve, and utterly reject the assertion that a relic as foul as the Eye of Vecna was involved. Such is all the invention of the Rax to sustain their usurpation of the Cranden. The chaos that followed the Turmoil Between Crowns destroyed enough records, both incidentally and deliberately, that no reliable records exist to support any of these stories in Aerdy hands. Whatever Olven records might exist in Sunndi have not been seen by Humans in all the centuries since they were written. All that remains is a broken and mad figure stalking the halls of Citadel Cavitius, claiming to be Vecna, unable to die.

c. -100 to -46 CY

Pleased with the performance of the Eye in Nehron, Nolhast took it south to the conquered kingdom of Ahlissa hoping to recreate his success with the Yaheetes there. He was disappointed to find the Flan more hedonistic than demonically corrupt, but did discover willing subjects among the Suloise who lived further south. The names of these wielders - as the Eye passed between five separate bearers in a series of bloody betrayals - are unrecorded. The Eye was key in prolonging the long and brutal campaigns of the Kingdom of Aerdy as it conquered the regions that became Idee, Irongate, and Onnwal.

The Gnomelord of the Blemu and the Bone March

83 to 101 CY

(Special thanks to Paul "Artharn the Cleric" Jurdeckza for the practical joke involving the Hand.)

Perhaps the most peculiar of the wielders of the Hand was the Gnomelord of the Blemu. It is not because he was a Noniz but because he was also Keraptis, the legendary tyrant behind White Plume Mountain.

The Gnomelord's story begins before the rise of Vecna, when a King of the Dwurrow stripped the name from a clan of Noniz and declared them outlaws for their unholy breeding experiments. Ostensibly intended to

create superior mining and guardian beasts, they instead produced twisted chimerical abominations. They are the one who created creatures like the owlbear and tyrg that stalk the wilds. Their worst sacrilege was breeding themselves, creating the twisted behemoths called Spriggans. Fleeing across the surface to escape death, these Noniz barely made the passage from their home in the Barrier Peaks across the Fals Gap and slipped through the Kron Hills and Gnarley Forest. When the outcasts lingered in the Cairn Hills to investigate the ancient tombs located there, warbands from Heraan and Celene attacked - each thinking the Noniz were some new creation or ally of the other. The clan would have been extinguished but for the sudden appearance of a Flan wizard, who rescued them. Warily, the Noniz and the wizard approached each other. After brief negotiations the Noniz acknowledged a debt and the wizard, Keraptis, admitted to requiring guards and allies. They sealed their pact with the sacrifice of the survivors of the warbands to various fiends, and the new partners continued their journey east to the Rakers. There they split, the wizard going north with an honor guard and escort to seize control of his home city of Tostenhca, the Noniz continuing to the Blemu Hills where they burrowed underground to continue their vile practices.

In time, the people of Tostenhca rose up and expelled Keraptis for demanding a tithe of

their children. After wandering for three centuries, including visiting the Noniz to refresh his escort, Keraptis settled into White Plume Mountain. There he slayed the last Elder Hierophant who lived there, and ruined Tostenhca with a curse. For centuries Keraptis sought the secret of eternal life to cheat the several archfiends he had sold himself to in his quest for immortality, ignoring the outside world and focusing on his experiments. When the Aerdi of the Great Kingdom began expanding across the prairies in the first century, Keraptis realized his sanctum was threatened. While he could easily destroy the Aerdi, it would be more trouble than it was worth, and he made plans to leave. Shortly before he abandoned the Oerth he sent a Spriggan, one of his most trusted bodyguards, to carry a backup of his last experiment to his allies and the kinfolk of his bodyguard in the Blemu Hills. A simple scroll, it bore a parasitic copy of Keraptis that could implant itself in the mind of any who sought the magic of the scroll. With a warning not to use the scroll except in the direst of circumstances, Keraptis was gone.

As the Spriggan made his way across the Flinty Hills, hiding from the decent Noniz who would have killed him on sight, Nolhast sensed the power of the scroll he carried. Wondering which was stronger, the fragment of Keraptis in the scroll or the portion of Vecna in the Hand, Nolhast contacted the Spriggan one night offering the hospitality of

his campfire. Over a shared meal, Nolhast told the Spriggan of the Hand and the mighty powers it held then wished him a good night and retired to bed. By morning the Spriggan had slit the throat of the innocent man Nolhast had possessed and stolen the box containing the Hand. By the next night, the Spriggan had cut off his own hand and claimed the relic while Nolhast watched from a distance and smiled.

With the Hand, the Spriggan crossed the final fifty leagues and found that his clan was nearly extinct. Other Noniz and Dwurrow had come to the Flanaess following the Twin Cataclysms and settled the mineral rich Flinty and Blemu Hills. House Naelax of the Great Kingdom had destroyed the Tirasqi Necromancers, the only other Ur-Flan allies the clan had made. By now the Hand had learned of the scroll, and at its urging the Spriggan opened and read it. Thus the Gnomelord was born sometime around 60 CY.

Empowered with significant magical ability by the parasitic clone of Keraptis now residing in his head, the Gnomelord rallied his few surviving kinsfolk, bred new abominations, and began subjugating nearby Noniz holds. With them he began extending his control over the Fruzti who had settled the fields north of the hills. From all he took tribute in the form of victims suborned by a variant of the scroll, subsuming their minds and gaining greater arcane power. The Gnomelord also spread his own version of the tale of the Hand,

telling how he could attach and remove it at will, restoring his original hand. He then left dismembered hands where greedy subordinates, envious rivals, and vengeful victims could find them and maim themselves seeking to steal the power of the Hand.

For half a century the legends of the Gnomelord kept the Herzog of the North Province paralyzed with fear and afraid to take action, even as the raids of the Fruzti on the coast every spring grew greater and more destructive. Some versions of the tale say that the Herzog was one of the victims of the Gnomelord's grand practical joke with the Hand, adding to his fear and loathing of the creature. In any event, by 100 CY Overking Manshen was at the end of his patience with the Herzog and began planning to deal with the Gnomelord and the Fruzti himself. He had an army mustered, and in 107 CY the troops crossed the Teesar Torrent and entered the Blemu Hills. By chance, an advance force came across the holt where the victims of the Gnomelord powered the Keraptis parasite. The commander had them slaughtered, instantly stripping the Gnomelord of the greater portion of his magical powers and leaving him unable to stem the tide of the advance. Sensing his weakness the Hand failed him, and within a month the Gnomelord was dead.

A detachment sent by the Holy Censor of Medegia claimed the Hand from the Gnomelord's corpse, and sent it to Mentrey where Pholtan inquisitors could study it and

keep it safe. Centuries later the Paladin-King of Miro would take it from its reliquary and save the Flanaess.

Of course there are those who say the tale of the Gnomelord is just so much nonsense. Keraptis and Vecna both possessing the same creature at the same time? Moreover a Noniz, or rather a Spriggan, of all things as the subject of the dual possession? Surely anyone can see that is pure nonsense. The Gnomelord did exist - he was merely an ordinary Noniz who defeated House Naelax and the Legions of Hextor. These versions say the Herzog met his match fighting the Noniz and Hillmen of the Blemu Hills, and that he made up the fanciful story of two ancient Ur-Flan wizards and their relics to cover his cowardice.

Still others say the tale is the invention of the heralds of House Torquann, who made up the story to enhance the conquest of the Bone March and the triumph of Caldni Vir at the Battle of Shamblefields - incidentally jabbing their rivals in House Naelax.

149 to 168 CY

Taking the Eye south, Nolhast found a particularly appealing pirate captain on Duxchan Island eager to increase his personal power at any cost. Within a decade he commanded a fleet that stalked the Solnor Coast. Within another few years it had grown to be such a great threat that Overking Erhart II resolved to annex the island chain and end

the threat forever. With the power of the Asperdi Sea Barons this was achieved, and once again Nolhast retrieved the Eye as the erstwhile pirate king went down with his flagship at the Battle of Ganode Bay.

198 to 397 CY

After significant consideration, Nolhast placed the Eye where it would be discovered by a minor Naelax prince. The choice proved to be an exceptionally good one. Despite his minor status, the prince had a powerful will and the ability to resist the influence of the Eye to make himself a tyrant immediately. Instead, he began a long, slow, scheme to subvert House Rax. It is perhaps no mere coincidence that Selvor the Younger first made his prophecy of an Age of Great Sorrow when this prince claimed the Eye.

His first manipulation involved arranging the death of Lord Nidramon, Knight Commander of the Knight Protectors of the Great Kingdom. He next arranged for certain items of particular wealth to find their way into the hands of Prince Zelcor, enabling him to purchase the throne from Prince Malev after the death of Overking Jiranen. He would then move to Eastfair, where he spent a great deal of time at a school of magic run by the wizard Quantarius. After Toran II succeeded to the throne, he paid a number of imperial advisors to recommend replacing the Holy Censor with

a Patriarch of Zilchus. He then traveled far to the west, where select bribes planted the idea in the court of the Sultan of using nomads from beyond Mur to deal with the Paynim tribes raiding Zeif. Returning to the Great Kingdom he induced Andrellus, a debauched but influential scion of House Rax, to go west where he founded Johrase; and Latavius, a minor baron, who would follow and settle Rookroost. Following the defeat of the Paladin King of Miro, he would travel to Nyronnd where he spread tales of the decadence of the Rax in Rel Mord, and to Tenh with stories of their sneering superiority among the haughty Flan nobility. He would repeat this in the north, traveling to the land of the Fruztii and Schnai, reminding the jarls of their expulsion from the pleasant lands of the Bone March. He then returned to Eastfair and insinuated himself among the advisors of the Herzog, suggesting they employ the Euroz of the Rakers as spear fodder to expand their control of the Adri Forest. He also made arrangements for Ivid I to become the heir of the Herzog of the North Province. This was his last act before Nolhast stepped in and informed the Eye it was time for the last stage of the plan, at which time it withdrew its powers and allowed Nolhast to pluck it from the unknown Naelax prince.

The Paladin-King of Miro and the Origin of the Pale

292 to 336 CY

Of all the bearers of the Hand and Eye of Vecna the most curious, and perhaps the most tragic, was the Paladin-King of Miro. His story twists through the major events of the collapse of the Great Kingdom, and directed the fate of what had been the Viceroyalty of Nyronnd. His name has been lost to history. All that is left is the story.

The Holy Censor of Medegia laid the foundation of the Paladin-King's story when he claimed the Hand from the body of the Gnomelord of the Blemu at the start of the 2nd century. Declaring that Pholtus would protect his servants from the evil, the Holy Censor secured the foul object in a reliquary and secreted it away within the temple in Mentrey. One hundred and fifty years later Overking Toran II removed the High Priest of Pholtus from the office of Holy Censor, replacing him with the High Priest of Zilchus. Outraged, the clergy of Pholtus declared it a sign of corruption, and many of them and their faithful left the heartlands of the Great Kingdom for the Viceroyalty of Nyronnd. It seems almost too outrageous to suggest, but the records are clear that it was a mere two years after this event that Thrommel began his rebellion and separated the Viceroyalty of Ferrond from the Great Kingdom as the Kingdom of Furyondy.

In Nyronnd the schism began that would split the Pholtans east of Nyr Dyv into the violently hostile sects of the current day. It began as some criticized the attitude towards the law that Overking Toran II cited when removing the faith from its position as Holy Censor. They said that, rather than use such positions to enforce Pholtan doctrine, they should instead focus on how the law could better serve the people. Another faction reacted violently and declared that the law of Pholtus must be the law of the land, or the decadence that was rotting the Great Kingdom and the chaos of the rebellion in Furyondy would spread. As the arguments grew more heated, the leaders of this second faction declared they would prove themselves and headed for the Duchy of Tenh with their followers. There, they declared, they would convert the heathen Flan, establish the faith of Pholtus, and build a nation that would be a beacon of purity to save the Great Kingdom from itself. What they found was a land much cooler than the warm fields of Medegia, beset by Eiger (Flan: ogres) from the mountains and Trulent (Flan: trolls) from the swamps. Filled with the hardy Tenha people, who had long followed the way of Allitur and had little time for haughty priests from the south presuming to lecture them on how to live properly. The arrogance of their leaders was the reason the Duke of Tenh ordered them to remain south of the Yol River. That land soon gained the name “the Pale” for the boundary set by the duke.

By 300 CY Furyondy was secure in its independence, and the Great Kingdom was spiraling into decadence. The chaos of the rebellion was spreading into the Northern Reaches, and the Arapahi were raiding the borders of Furyondy and Nyronnd alike. In the far west the final actor of the tale entered the stage, as the Sultan of Zeif invited the Brazen Horde to deal with the wild Paynims. Their arrival drove the Relentless Horde north, first through the Baklunish lands then into the Northern Reaches. The settlement in the Pale was barely holding on, the fanaticism of the pilgrims only capable of taking them so far. Then, back in Nyronnd, a faithful paladin of the orthodox faith found the ancient reliquary containing the Hand in the effects of the recently deceased Prelate of the faith. What drove him to claim it is a secret lost to history with his name. A crumbling document buried in the archives of Shining White suggests that he may have sought to destroy the relic, somehow convinced he was the man whose purity would be able to cleanse it and free the Oerth from its taint. Other writings in the forbidden section of the archives in Wintershiven assert it was the hubris of the old sect that led the paladin to claim the relic, hoping he could use it to destroy those heretics in the Pale. The doctrine in Dimre, perhaps the best maintained but least reliable, declare he was the first to know that true Goodness in service to Pholtus could only be achieved by walking in darkness. Whatever the

reason, he affixed the relic to his arm and the next act began.

What knowledge the paladin gained is unknown. What he did with the insight he gained is known. Gathering a band of the faithful, he traveled to Nevond Nevnend and confronted the duke. He proclaimed the duke had failed – his people, the Great Kingdom, and Pholtus. He declared the duke deposed and exiled until the duke learned humility and the purpose of noble title. Until then, the duchy would be in the hands of someone capable of all three. Further, as the Overking and Viceroy had failed in their obligations, Tenh was no longer subject to them. Revealing the ancient crown of Tostenhca -how he acquired it is as great a mystery as his name - he proclaimed himself the Paladin-King of Miro, the Land of Peace. The duke's guards attempted to cut down the usurper, but with a gesture from the Hand they were themselves slain. The duke stuttered an apology before fleeing with his family to Rel Mord, and the Paladin-King ordered them given safe passage and left unmolested. Within a week word had spread throughout the duchy of the new order, and nobles and clergy alike rushed to pledge their fealty. Many did so because they chafed at the four centuries of submission to Aerdy. Others bent the knee because they sought personal aggrandizement in the new order. Then there were those too cowardly to resist and who sought only to keep what they already had.

Two names remain prominent among them. Andrellus Rax was a debauched scion of the House of Rax. He had purchased a fief along the Artonsamay River and was turning it into a feeble mockery of the court of Rauxes when the Paladin-King seized power. His conversion to the faith of Pholtus to save his new realm marked him as the chief among the sycophants, although he did close the worst spots in Kinemeet for a time. Latavius, a bankrupt Nehri nobleman who had turned to banditry, was chief among those seeking advancement. The small village of Rookroost that he had built to support his gang grew to a town within a few years, and became one of the strongest holdings of the new kingdom.

The most strident among those in favor of throwing off the Aerdy yoke were the wild Grosskopf clans of the Bluff Hills. Though many suspected them of foul relations with the Euroz (Flan: orcs) of the Rakers, none could deny their fanatical support for the new king. As for the southern lands, while the schismatic prelates of Pholtus at first welcomed news that one of theirs had taken control, they soon discovered he was as vehemently opposed to them as his fellows back in Nyronde were. Pholtan churches burned across the Pale, along with those priests too slow to flee. Lay servants received “mercy” and were merely crucified beside the burning fanes. As for the ordinary folk of the congregations they had the choice of impalement or impressment, and eerie forests sprouted across the land. After

subduing dissenters within the duchy, the Paladin-King turned to restoring order in the Northern Reaches by bringing recalcitrant barons as far as the Ritensa River into line. In Furyondy, they prepared for an attack even as their main army was marching to its doom on the Opicm River.

As for the Great Kingdom and Viceroyalty of Nyronnd, at first they thought of negotiating with the Paladin-King. Especially as he appeared to be restoring order west of the Artonsamay River, something they had been unable to do. Only when the Paladin-King turned back from invading Furyondy did they finally raise armies to restore the faithful duke of Tenh to his seat and the duchy to pay taxes, after a quarter century of feckless diplomacy and desultory skirmishing. At least the forces that Nyronnd raised were an army - comprised of the professional troops of Nyronnd and Urnst, bolstered by contingents of Olve and Dwurrow from the forests and Flinty Hills, and some mercenaries hired from the wild clans of the Abbor Alz and Cairn Hills. Those of the Great Kingdom were a collection of parade troops from nobles who thought it a game to go on crusade, sprinkled with effective but brutal regulars led by Hextorian clerics from the North Province, the tough but unreliable mercenaries purchased by House Darmen and Medegia, and the green peasant levies of House Cranden's South Province.

The three armies met at Midmeadow. The Nyronndese and Urnstian regulars held the

center all day, while the North Province Hextorians drove forward on the left and nearly broke the savage Grosskopf clansmen. On the right, the Rax show troops collapsed and took the Cranden levies with them as they fled. The Darmen and Medegian mercenaries barely held against the Palite levies, when the Paladin-King appeared on the field. The Paladin-King had taken his cavalry on a wide flanking route and crossed the Artonsamay River at Stoink. Their sudden appearance took the opposing armies by surprise. They drove into the forces of the North Province and slaughtered them. Seeing this, the mercenaries broke leaving the Nyronndese and Urnstians encircled. The Paladin-King paused the attack as the sun began to set, and approached the Nyronndal lines. The Paladin-King raised his helm and revealed that he had acquired and implanted the Eye. The few among the defenders who recognized the significance had mere moments to appreciate the significance before the Paladin-King unleashed the combined power of the Hand and Eye on them, which shattered their formation. The Paladin-King then turned his back as his troops closed in and finished them off.

The survivors staggered back to Rel Mord and summoned what levies remained to await the conquering armies, but they never arrived. Their salvation came in the form of the Relentless Horde, and they were saved from the Horde by the Paladin-King. Kha-Khan Ogobanuk's tumans had broken the Arapahi

and their scouts were approaching the Bluff Hills. The Paladin-King turned his army north, arriving days before the Kha-Khan. Resting and readying his troops, the Paladin-King again executed a brilliant battle plan sending the Kha-Khan fleeing back west with the remains of his forces. Nevertheless, something of this triumph offended the Hand and Eye and, as the Paladin-King watched his enemies flee, they abandoned him. One of the levies from the Pale who had pledged service to save his life approached the Paladin-King at that moment and was inspired to strike. Some versions of the tale say that the simple short sword he wielded was in fact the legendary Sword of Kas, striking at its Master once again. Whatever weapon he used, the Paladin-King was dead.

The Kingdom of Miro collapsed following the death of its only king. In its wake, it left the so-called Kingdom of Johrase, the Plarate of Rookroost, the Barony of Grosskopf and the Fellands, and the rival Pholtan Theocracies of the Pale and Dimre. The survivors within the Pale south of the Yol River established the first of those theocracies, and now staged their own inquisition against heretics and loyal alike. Those who had embraced the Paladin-King created the latter theocracy, dedicated to walking in darkness to see the light.

The Viceroyalty of Nyronnd would survive only a decade longer. The viceroy, at the behest of his nobles, declared Nyronnd independent as Ferrond had done a century ago. The duke of

Urnst, having heard of the disaster at Midmeadow, waited only until he had rebuilt his forces to repudiate both kingdom and viceroyalty. The duke of Tenh, having regained barely half of his former realm with no sign of assistance in recovering the rest or perhaps having received the insight the Paladin-King had directed him to search for during his exile, was vehement in his denunciation of his vassalage. When the new king of Nyronnd attempted to subdue the duchies who rebelled against him as well as the Overking, another round of war tore apart the region. Somewhere in this chaos the Hand and Eye disappeared from the vault in the main temple of Dimre where the Paladin-King's followers had installed them.

At least that is one story. In another version the Paladin-King never attached the Hand of Vecna. He did seize it from where the Council of Nine kept it in Wintershiven. However, he did not steal it. He took it on direct orders from Pholtus, who had foreseen the Theocrats would abuse the Hand, and so directed the Paladin-King to remove the temptation. Pholtus likewise foresaw the coming of the Relentless Horde, and directed the Paladin-King to seize control of Tenh to ready the forces to stop the invaders. Andrellus of Rax was not the most debauched scion of Rax, but the last noble one who traveled north to pledge service to the Paladin-King, along with his friend Baron Latavius. The two served the Paladin-King nobly in the battle against the

Relentless Horde. The tales of their corruption are just as much an invention as the tales of the Paladin-King using the Hand. The Council of Nine made them up after the death of the Paladin-King, who was a true saint of Pholtus. Later the heretics of Dimre would corrupt his story even further, portraying him as someone who walked in the shadow of evil to serve their own purposes. As for the Theocrats of the Pale and Dimre, none realizes that they serve the plans of Pholtus as well. Pholtus means them as cautions against tyranny for the people of the Flanaess, but too many profit from their doctrines to turn back.

Of course, there is yet another story. In this version, the Paladin-King is merely what his people called the Duke of Tenh. He suppressed the schismatics of the Pale, subdued Andrellus and Latavius, defeated the Relentless Horde and, most critically, led the rebellion against the Overking. It was this last that caused Timonas of Jalpa to expound upon the false tales being spread and defame the Paladin-King by associating him with the Hand. In so doing he provided an excuse for Overking Portillan, asserting that the only reason the Paladin-King's rebellion was not stopped was because of the Hand, and that the Hand was even responsible for inciting the rebellion of Nyronnd.

On the other hand perhaps the truth is spread about between all three stories. As with every tale of the Hand and Eye, for every truth in a story there are likely two lies, and those who

would read such are warned not to trust everything they read.

Halmadar and the Return of Vecna

430 to 465 CY

In 430 CY Nolhast connived for the bandit lord Halmadar to come into possession of first the Eye and then the Hand. The resonance between the two revealed their potential to Halmadar, who carved his own flesh to be able to claim their power. With them he swiftly expanded his holdings, and within a dozen years built a stronghold on the site of what became Molag. After another score of years Halmadar has established rule over well over half of what was later Horned Society, as well as half of the Bandit Kingdoms, and his forces regularly raided Furyondy and threatened to overrun the Shield Lands. Halmadar's own followers, fearing for their lives as the Hand and Eye took control and he descended into madness, drugged and immured him in a tomb in the Kron Hills, purging his name from all records in an attempt to forget him and cover up their own crimes in support of him. Evil cults remained and spread in Halmadar's former kingdom, and a small but pernicious cult of the Maimed Lord was planted in the City of Greyhawk itself.

Vecna Lives!

581 CY

Halmadar remained there in his sepulcher with the Hand and Eye for over a century, until it was discovered by wizard associates of Mordenkainen who were slain on awakening him. The release of Halmadar alerted Nolhast, who passed the information along to Vecna, who had finally gathered enough power to manifest an aspect on Oerth. Vecna tracked down Halmadar and reclaimed his relics. Although Vecna's scheme to become the sole greater power of Oerth was thwarted by adventurers and he was ensnared in the Demiplane of Dread, Vecna's completed his apotheosis and was now a demipower.

Vecna Reborn and Die Vecna, Die

581 to 591 CY

Vecna was trapped in the Demiplane of Dread for a decade until his plan for escape came to fruition. It included another scheme to rise in status and power, and take over Sigil in the process. Thwarted yet again by adventurers, he acquired enough might to become a lesser power and remain free of the Demiplane of Dread.

It should be noted here that Vecna has apparently been defeated multiple times. He was slain by Kas, imprisoned on the Demiplane of Dread, and expelled from Sigil, and yet each time he has emerged greater in

power. After Kas slew him, instead of a mere lich Vecna was on the path to being a demipower. Exiled from Oerth and imprisoned, Vecna reconnected with his relics. Barred from Sigil, Vecna rose in divine rank and those relics are free to wreak havoc and spread his will. Stopped repeatedly yet always increasing in might – a few more such “defeats and the multiverse may well be undone. Perhaps that is the greatest secret Vecna has uncovered so far – how to fail upwards. If so, the threat he poses is indeed greater than any mortal or power imagines.

Vecna and Nolhast

Vecna

And then there is Vecna. The Arch-Lich. The Whispered One. The Maimed Lord. The Master of Secrets. To Vecna, everyone below him is a tool to be used until it is worn out and then discarded or expended as needed. Though Vecna will smile and call them “faithful servants”, and grant them fanciful titles and names, ultimately they mean nothing to him beyond what advantage he gains from them. The protectiveness Vecna expresses for them is no more than the possessiveness of a gamer for his dice collection – they are his to use and expend, and no one else, man or fiend or power, may dare to touch them and go unpunished. That Vecna opposes Y'chak is an extension of this. Vecna has claimed the

multiverse for his own and no entity, however mighty and alien, can be permitted to ruin it. As for the current powers of Oerth, Vecna understands much from his apotheosis and rise, and is content to let them endure – provided they accept their diminished status under his eventual rule. It is the least they will owe him for saving them from Y’chak. Well, at least those he does not consign to oblivion in the process of achieving victory. They should be honored to be allowed to make such a sacrifice for him. Such is the will and judgment of Vecna.

Nolhast the Unforgiven

As can be gleaned from the above history, Nolhast is over 900 years old. He is a powerful wizard, likely able to hold his own against any of the mighty wizards of the Flanaess, and the chief agent of Vecna on Oerth.

Nolhast is the son of an Oerid-Flan mother and a Suel-Olve father. At the time of his birth such mixed heritage would have marked him as an outcast, but Nolhast is one of those leucistic Suel who are nearly pure white in skin and hair and often mistaken for albinos. This allowed him to pass as a pure Suel despite his slightly odd ears and atypical facial features. Nolhast secured an apprenticeship with a loremaster, focusing on the history of magic rather than raw power. It was this knowledge that enabled him to secure a position with Asberdies, and later led him to

declare allegiance to Vecna whose portfolios are magic and secrets.

Nolhast has survived so long due to a transformation he effected from lore he uncovered during his research to learn more about the Hand and Eye. While studying them Nolhast traveled the Outer Planes, visiting the metropolis of Sigil. There he learned of two groups – the Prolongers and the Incantifers. Both had found ways to extend their lives that did not involve undeath - the Prolongers by stealing life energy from others; the Incantifers by consuming arcane magic. Nolhast found a way to combine the two into something greater. Nolhast can not only absorb magic from spells cast on him and from charged items like scrolls and wands, he can also drain permanent items much like jermlaine do, and can further drain the ability to use arcane magic from people. This is similar to the energy drain of undead, but only removes caster levels not complete life force. With this stolen energy Nolhast heals himself and does not age, and can further expand his own ability to use magic allowing him to cast many more spells per day than most wizards. As a side effect of this Nolhast’s eyes are pools of liquid silver, with no iris, although without any impairment of his sight. Nolhast disguises this with an illusion when dealing with others – he sees no reason to give away any clues as to his nature. Similarly he will often disguise himself entirely, using both magical and mundane means.

While Nolhast is the most powerful servant of Vecna, he has also learned to imitate his master's secrecy. Rather than hold a position at the head of the Cult of Vecna, Nolhast works from the shadows manipulating people and events, and gathering information.

Further, he prefers to work in rural areas, gathering legends, rumors, and stories from hedge wizards in exchange for bits and pieces of minor lore. In the process he feeds on those casters, leaving them dependent on him for assistance in maintaining their positions. With the information he gathers Nolhast has assembled a vast library on the magic items of the Flanaess, including the locations, defenses, powers, curses, and weaknesses of numerous artifacts. This library is mobile, stored on mimirs – skull-shaped items that record and recite lore for their owners, another tool he discovered while in Sigil. He does not seek these artifacts out, knowing quite well how dangerous they are to their users. Indeed he often gives out hints as to their locations to rivals and enemies, diverting them to dangerous quests that end in their doom. Thus allowing Nolhast to gather yet more information about the items while protecting himself. Should Vecna ever require one or more of these artifacts for some plan, Nolhast has the information ready for his master.

Or does he?

Does Nolhast truly exist? Or is he just another legend that has grown up to explain how the Hand and Eye have plagued the Flanaess,

spreading woe and leaving a taint of evil everywhere they appear? Especially the history of the unnamed Naelax prince who possessed the Eye for two centuries. The tales of that are a series of nearly absurd correlations and coincidences.

Did this prince know that Sir Bendor would be chosen as the replacement to head the Knight Protectors of the Great Kingdom rather than Lord Kargoth? Could the prince know Lord Kargoth would turn to Demogorgon as a result of the snub? Had the prince planned that Zelcor would connive at the death of Herzog Atirr Movanich of the North Province? Could the prince expect his own House of Naelax would be restored in the North Province? Did the prince meet and train the young Firan Zal'honan while in Eastfair? Could the prince have anticipated the loss of the See of Medegia would lead to the Paladin King of Miro claiming the Hand for himself a year later? Would the prince have foreseen the Relentless Horde being driven into the northern steppes and how that would provoke independence in Ferrond? Would the prince realize he was building the foundation of the Bandit Kingdoms? Did the prince think the Tenha would raise a force sufficient to defeat the army of the Great Kingdom at the Battle of Redspan? Could the prince somehow know the junior branch of Rax-Nyrond would declare independence at the same time as the jarls of the Fruztii and Schnai would unite and march south? Did the prince plan to set the

humanoids of the Rakers on the road to overrunning the Bone March a century and a half before they did? Is it possible the prince knew the Rax were about to fail and Ivid would triumph in the Turmoil Between Crowns?

Such a string of successes is too incredible to accept, even if aided by Nolhast in the shadows and guided by the will of Vecna as it prepared for its apotheosis.

For that matter, are the Hand and Eye real? Or is every wizard who has had a hand burned and withered in magical experimentation, and every warlord who has lost an eye in battle, been accused of bearing an evil relic in the histories written by their enemies?

Is the whole thing just an accumulation of stories meant to scare would-be heroes at night, or send them off on deadly snipe hunts for mystical items to defeat an otherwise mundane warlord?

Maybe it is a grand lie of Syrul.

Or a deception of Asmodeus who is often said to be one of the "Ancient Brethren", kin to the Serpent who instructed Vecna.

Perhaps it is an allegory and warning of Wee Jas or Boccob - a caution to those who wield magic.

What is the truth of Vecna?

According to one of his cultists, it is something the Powers of the Multiverse are

hiding out of fear that Vecna will overthrow them when he discovers it.

And perhaps it is a truth that will undo whoever discovers it.

VECNA IN A CAMPAIGN

Vecna should never appear in a campaign. Ever. Even running the published adventures should be avoided, except perhaps as limited flashbacks. Why? Because doing so completely wrecks the mystery. Vecna should be a dark rumor, a threat, a distraction, a deceit used by other villains, an enabler. He is the ultimate boogeyman. Vecna should never be a common villain, or even an uncommon climax. Such an active participant is not the Vecna developed and written about here.

It harkens back to the early days when the books containing the pantheons appeared, and the saying "If it has stats, it can be killed" originated. That ended with Waldorf conquering the multiverse, imprisoning the pantheons under his castle, and requesting everyone send him their character sheets so he can tally up his treasure and xp. It was a joke among gamers then and it should remain one now.

Worse, he becomes a cheap comic book supervillain with ultimate plot armor and vulnerability, reused until the ridiculous ways it is defeated compete with the ludicrous ways it survives, degenerating into absurd repetition.

Yes, fighting demon lords and such has been a “thing” almost as long as the game has been around. However, when the game began those creatures were simply unique 10th level monsters. When they gained divine status they were supposed to be above such things though they still had stats. As such, the killable versions were retconned as mere “avatars” that could still serve as spear fodder. When 3E came along they became 30th level monsters putting them beyond the capabilities of ordinary parties, but there were ways around that including lesser “aspects” for 10th level PCs. That ended with aspects of multiple demon lords, or even multiple aspects of a single demon lord, showing up to be killed in the course of a campaign, adventure, or even in a single encounter.

While I certainly cannot stop anyone reading this from using Vecna in such a manner (I am too poor to hire the Dice Police), I can and do strongly advise you against such an indulgence. A cult of Vecna is a fine enemy, but even then should not be the primary focus of a campaign. One or two to sell the secrets of the PCs to the real villains who use them to prepare counters to everything the PCs can do is a fine threat. Maybe a cultist is the only

source of vital information the PCs need and they must deal with a not-so-lesser-of-two-evils. Perhaps the cult and the PCs have the same enemy – especially after the cult plants information for the PCs to find. Or anything similar, where the cultists are manipulators rather than combatants. Vecna and his cult are about secrets, not brawls. Use them that way, and you will get a lot more out of them and this article.

And leave the grand combats to the demon lords.