

Witches

A secretive sect of women bound into arcane communion with ancient gods.

FACTION OVERVIEW

Worship Secret Gods—the Gwyrigons

The witches of Dolmenwood worship ancient otherworldly entities known as the *Gwyrigons*. The presence of the Gwyrigons in Dolmenwood and the witches' worship of them are closely guarded secrets which a witch may never betray. Confessing to devil-worship is preferable.

Initiation and Marriage to a Gwyrigon

Upon initiation into the sisterhood, a witch is impregnated with the essence of a Gwyrigon to which she becomes symbiotically bound. Henceforth, the Gwyrigon is a constant presence in the witch's mind and body. The connection is akin to marriage (the witch is entitled a "bride" of the Gwyrigon), but also to motherhood and also to childhood.

A Symbiosis of Dreams, Sex, and Blood

Gwyrigons can access the dream-stuff, sexual energy, and menstrual blood of the witches to whom they are bound. These energies sustain them. The witch, in return, gains supernatural powers associated with the bound Gwyrigon.

Live for Many Centuries

A witch's symbiosis with a Gwyrigon brings about the extension of her mortal life and the reversal of the ravages of ageing. The folkloric stereotype of witches as eternally young is in fact true.

Remain Celibate and Childless

Sexual contact with others is strictly forbidden, as it would imperil a witch's connection with the Gwyrigon. It is for this reason that a witch may never marry or have children. Only on the night of the summer solstice, when witches cavort with avatars of the Gwyrigons and other spirits in their service, is this decree waived.

Never Speak of Dreams

A witch may never speak to others of her dreams, these being the sole domain of the Gwyrigon.

Witches Hide in All Spheres of Society

While some witches live as hermits, many dwell among other mortals, practicing their craft in secret. Unbeknown to those around her, any woman—from the lowliest scullery maid to the noblest lady—may be a witch.

The Witches' Cant

Witches speak a secret cant with which they can identify one another.

Spells of Beguilement and Hexing

In addition to the powers granted via symbiosis with a Gwyrigon, witches also guard a body of occult lore which is passed among members of the sisterhood. The spells of witches primarily take the form of charms and curses.

Psychedelics, Potions, and Witches' Brews

Witches are infamous for their use of psychedelic plants as a means of ritual divination and as primary ingredients in the brews and potions they concoct.

Corn-Dolls, Manikins, and Familiars

Witches frequently bind common animals as familiars and craft magically animated servitors to guard their lairs.

THE WITCHES' SCHEMES

Maintain the Secrecy of the Craft

The primary aim of the witches is to pass their craft on to future generations, ensuring that communion with the Gwyrigons continues. This leads to an attitude of protectionism, whereby their teachings and lore are to be kept safe from outsiders' eyes and influence and the Gwyrigons themselves are to be guarded against external attack or tampering.

The Birth of a Human-Gwyrigon Hybrid

The possibility of the birth of a half-human, half-Gwyrigon child—known as a *hoaghryn*—has been whispered of in witch lore since the beginnings of the sect. Witches who subscribe to this ideal use divination to locate the most auspicious girl-children to bring before the Gwyrigons. Some profess this hypothetical being as a messiah of sorts and view this quest as the true aim of witchcraft.

Recover the Mirrors of Embala

Obscure branches of witch lore refer to a lost Gwyrigon named Embala of the Husk, the lord of its kind in ancient times and mighty ruler of all Dolmenwood. Myth tells that Embala could only be directly contacted by the use of a set of three crystal mirrors of entrancing beauty. One of these mirrors is in the possession of the Queen of the Witches (hex 0806), but the other two are lost (see hexes TODO, 1103).



ENCLAVES OF THE WITCHES

The Locus of Ertta (0505)

On windswept nights, witches fly to the summit of the ruined tower upon the Isle of Yeth to commune with the Gwyrigyn Ertta.

The Snake Cave (0608)

Lair of the witch Grwith, mistress of snakes and High Priestess of southern Dolmenwood.

The Manse of Lady HaerOTH (0704)

Lady HaerOTH is the High Priestess of northern and western Dolmenwood.

The Palace of the Witch Queen (0806)

The Queen of All Witches dwells in a palace dug into the soft rock forming the bed of Lake Longmere. The location of the palace is known only to the three High Priestesses.

The Locus of Limwdd (1006)

A glade warded by witch magic, wherein contact with the the Gwyrigyn Limwdd is possible.

The Hall of Sleep (1304)

Abode of the witch Sadewyn, High Priestess of eastern Dolmenwood.

The Locus of Hasturiel (1404)

A gargantuan granite pylon of unknown provenance marks the primary locus of the Gwyrigyn Hasturiel.

MEMBERS AND ORGANISATION

The Gwyrigons

A loose affiliation of godlings that dwell on the astral fringes of Dolmenwood, feeding on the dream-stuff and sexual energy of witches. The Gwyrigons are neither good nor evil and, despite the allusions in the names that mortals give to them, they are neither male nor female—as powerful otherworldly entities, they are transcendent of such dualities.

Gwyrigons may be encountered in the vicinity of their loci (see below) only by mortals of an especially sensitive nature. Menfolk who come face to face with the physical manifestation of a Gwyrigon invariably report the encounter as horrific—a brush with monstrous powers inimical to humankind. Some women (especially those of Drune blood) perceive instead a sensual beauty and may come to seek a deeper contact with these entities.

The witches count seven extant Gwyrigons, seven who have passed away, and one with whom contact has been lost (see *The Witches' Schemes*, p60). Among the seven who live, three are primary:

Ertta the Devouring Mother: A sleepy power who has dominion over ageing, death, and decay. Ertta is associated with the sky and the winds and is most easily contacted on stormy days. Ertta's primary locus is in hex 0505, upon the Isle of Yeth (see pXXX).

Hasturiel Thrice-Crowned: Also known as “she from beyond”. Hasturiel has dominion over metamorphosis, vision, and speech and is associated with fire. Hasturiel's primary locus is in the gargantuan granite pylon in hex 1404 (see pXXX).

Limwdd the Quiet Brother: Has dominion over stasis, growth, and rejuvenation. Limwdd is associated with seeds and the depths of the earth. Witches bound to this Gwyrigon can feel the pulse of its energy in the ground when walking barefoot. Limwdd's primary locus is in hex 1006 (see pXXX).

Initiates

Those women who have been presented to a Gwyrigon during an initiation ritual are not regarded as true witches until the passing of 13 lunar cycles. During this time, Gwyrigon and woman come to know each other intimately, communing in dream and vision. Upon the night of the full moon marking the end of the woman's initiation, she will be formally accepted into the sisterhood as part of a coven. This final initiation rite takes the form of an occult marriage between mortal and Gwyrigon.

Brides of the Gwyrigons

Witches who have completed their initiation and been bound with a Gwyrigon are known as “brides” of the Gwyrigon in question. They make up the vast bulk of the sisterhood.

Covens

The primary means of organisation among witches is the coven: a group of up to thirteen (called a “witches' dozen”) witches in a local area. There is a coven in the immediate vicinity of each settlement in Dolmenwood and numerous smaller covens scattered throughout the wild areas of the forest.

Priestesses

Each coven is loosely governed by a Priestess who determines the dates and conditions of their gatherings.

High Priestesses and the High Coven

All of the covens of Dolmenwood are at least nominally under the command of the High Coven, which consists of three High Priestesses.

The Queen of All Witches

The High Coven is commanded in turn by the Queen of All Witches. The Queen is near-mythical in the minds of most witches—none outside of the High Coven have ever had direct contact with her.

TODO: Illustration

COVEN NAMES

d20	First Element	Second Element
1	Bleeding	Blade
2	Bloody	Chalice
3	Chiming	Circle
4	Cloaked	Crone
5	Coiled	Elm
6	Crooked	Hart
7	Drowned	Heart
8	Hatching	Holly
9	Hidden	Mandrake
10	Ivy-Crowned	Moon
11	Liminal	Night
12	Silent	Oak
13	Silver	Palm
14	Singing	Pentacle
15	Triple	Raven
16	Twinned	River
17	Veiled	Serpent
18	Virgin	Solstice
19	Wailing	Well
20	Whispering	Wyrms

CELENIA—THE QUEEN OF ALL WITCHES

An androgynous waif with cropped silver hair and eyes as blue as cold moonlight. Dresses in ethereal gowns of silver gauze. Appears around 20, but is actually 280 years old. Bound to Hasturriel Thrice-Crowned.

Demeanour (Neutral): Aloof, mercurial, quick to anger, does not suffer fools gladly.

Speech: Dreamy, old-fashioned, and formal. Woldish, Old Woldish, Sylvan, a smattering of High Elfish.

Desires: To find a High Priestess to replace Grwith (whose behaviour of late has been ever more bestial). To discover the arcane secrets of the sorceress Ygraine (see pXXX). To re-establish communion with Embala of the Husk (see *The Witches' Schemes*, p60).

Possessions: Crystal sword (traps the souls of all it slays). Giant clam shell (in which she gains glimpses of the future). One of the fabled Mirrors of Embala (see *The Witches' Schemes*, p60).

Servants: Swarms of silvery eels which can evade the ravenous Big Chook (see pXXX). 7 shades of the deeps. 7 witches (a bride of each of the Gwyrigons).

Location: Lives in a secret, submerged palace at the bottom of Lake Longmere, hex 0806 (pXXX).

Combat stats: TODO.

TODO: NPC portrait

TODO: Illustration

GRWITH—HIGH PRIESTESS OF THE SOUTH

A wild-eyed, stick-thin hermit with long black hair, gleaming green eyes, and dark, slightly scaly skin. Appears to be in her 30s, but is actually 220 years old. Bound to the lesser Gwyrigon Hashmareth, Lady of the Forked Tongue.

Demeanour (Chaotic): At times, she sleeps with distended belly, digesting a large meal. At times, she is hungry for flesh. Sometimes she is willing to share information about the region surrounding her lair.

Speech: Sinister and sibilant. Woldish, Old Woldish, Sylvan, the language of snakes.

Desires: To expel the Drune (whom she hates for their arrogance) from southern Dolmenwood. To feast on human flesh.

Possessions: Rod of serpentkind (enables her to charm and speak with snakes).

Servants: A dozen snakes, some of whom were hatched from eggs she laid.

Location: Lives in a cave in hex 0608 (pXXX).

Combat stats: TODO.

TODO: NPC portrait

LADY EMELDA HAEROTH—HIGH PRIESTESS OF THE NORTH AND WEST

A tall, elegant noblewoman, usually dressed in black lace, with listless blond hair, delicate complexion, and blue eyes. Appears around 40, but is actually 105 years old. Bound to Ertta the Devouring Mother.

Demeanour (Neutral): Reclusive and enigmatic. Does not welcome visitors.

Speech: Cold, graceful, and self-assured. Woldish, Old Woldish.

Desires: Information on the fate of the lost Mirrors of Embala (see *The Witches' Schemes*, p60)—believes that the Drune are keeping one of the mirrors at the centre of Chell (hex 0506). The head of the crookhorn Captain Snarkscorn (hex 0803, pXXX), whose ruffians encroach onto her lands.

Possessions: Magical tea-set (allows conversation with spirits of the deceased).

Servants: Witch-owl familiar, Hallohoo. 4 great guard dogs. Maids, cooks, footmen, etc.

Location: Lives in an isolated manse in hex 0704 (pXXX).

Combat stats: TODO.

TODO: NPC portrait

SADEWYN GALLBUCKET— HIGH PRIESTESS OF THE EAST

A buxom, rosy-cheeked lady's maid with curly brown hair and a merry twinkle in her eye. Appears around 50, but is actually 350 years old. Has dwelt for centuries among the nobles of House Guillefer, slipping between guises as required over the years. Bound to Hasturiel Thrice-Crowned.

Demeanour (Lawful): Merry, overly familiar. Feigned-dim-wittedness. Occasional flashes of wry wisdom.

Speech: Uneducated and coarse. Prone to rustic aphorism. Woldish, Old Woldish, Sylvan.

Desires: To discover the powers of the monolith in Odd. To awaken the nobles of House Guillefer and nudge them into mobilising against Atanuwe. Stirge-owl feathers (see hex 1005) for the magical cloak she is crafting.

Possessions: Enchanted embroidery needles (can place hexes remotely by embroidering a likeness of the victim). Partially crafted cloak of stirge-owl feathers (once complete, will allow her to move insubstantially).

Servants: The nightingales that nest in the grounds of the Hall of Sleep.

Location: Works as a lady's maid in the Hall of Sleep, hex 1304 (pXXX).

Combat stats: TODO.

TODO: NPC portrait

