

THE SECRET LIBRARY OF VECNA

THINGS YOU WEREN'T
MEANT TO KNOW

His name is rarely spoken for fear he might hear the speaker and punish him for his insolence. The careful refer to him only as "the Whispered One." When the dread name is uttered, it is usually in conjunction with a curse: "May Vecna take you!"

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Vecna is perhaps the most feared demigod in all the Planes. His passion for domination drove him to become the lich-emperor of the greatest evil domain on Oerth, then a demigod bent on destroying the other gods of the GREYHAWK® campaign. In his quest for power, Vecna unlocked the most fundamental secrets of magic and reality, knowledge beyond even that of many gods. But even an omniscient being can be foiled by his own ambition, and so did Vecna's control over Oerth slip through his withered fingers.

On the threshold of victory, Vecna found himself the victim of a power as deep and mysterious as himself: the mysterious dark powers that govern the Demiplane of Dread. Now, trapped within a single avatar and residing in his stronghold, Citadel Cavitus, Vecna plots. He alone has a complete understanding of the forces that have captured him and so many other evil beings, and he is certain that someday he will regain his freedom. While the minions of the Whispered One set his subtle plans into motion, he attends to two schemes: the war against his hated former lieutenant, Kas; and a search for artifacts and tomes that might be used to disrupt his carefully laid plans. The treasures are collected from Oerth, the Demiplane of Dread, and even worlds on which Vecna has never set foot, but where he nonetheless has found beings with dark spirits to do his bidding. Unlike other lords of darkness, Vecna is trapped only in body. He can still project his awareness to the farthest reaches of the Planes while imprisoned within his palace.

When his minions gather interesting items, Vecna has them brought to Cavitus for study. Vulnerable items are destroyed; the rest are stored in his private library, high in one of the palace's many towers.



NEW SPELL

SONG OF THE DEAD

(Necromancy)

(Song)

Level: 2

Range: 60 yards

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 5

Duration: Special

Area of Effect: 30' radius

Saving Throw: Neg.

To cast this spell, the wizard must play a specific, complex melody (written as part of the spell) on a specially prepared flute carved from the thighbone of a being that was once under the effect of an *animate dead* spell. Furthermore, the caster must make a successful Musical Instrument (flute) proficiency check to cast the spell.

All undead in the area of effect must make a successful saving throw vs. spell or else be transfixed, unable to take any action other than to sway gently with the rhythm of the melody. Non-intelligent undead suffer a -3 penalty to the roll, while those with Low Intelligence suffer a -2 penalty.

The undead remain under the influence of the spell as long as the caster plays the flute and they are within the spell's range. However, if any of the undead under the influence of the spell are attacked, the effect on all of them is broken, and all Non- and Low Intelligence undead attack the caster. When thus enraged, the undead are turned as though they had 1 Hit Die more than their actual level, and they attack with a +2 bonus.

FOR THE DUNGEON MASTER

Players should stop reading now. The rest of this article deals with information for DMs only. It supplements the information provided on Vecna in official RAVENLOFT® campaign material presented in *Domains of Dread*, *Vecna Reborn*, and the new adventure, *Die, Vecna, Die!* by describing some of the magical treasures that the Chained God has hidden away in his palace.

Any item described here can easily be modified for a DM's own campaign, even if it does not include Vecna.

THE LIBRARIES OF VECNA

There are two libraries in Vecna's palace. One is for use by his minions in general, while the other is for his private use and that of a select few lieutenants.

The first library is a large series of chambers located on the second floor of the palace. Here, undead scribes record the thoughts of the Whispered One as they are transmitted directly to their otherwise empty minds. Vecna's independent servants, both living and undead, move quietly among the shelves and display cases, searching for tomes or magical items that might be of assistance in completing the tasks they have been given. There are thousands of tablets, collections of scrolls, and leather-bound books in this room, as well as hundreds of magical items of varying power. The lore collected here comes from countless worlds. Although much of it is of an evil and perverse nature, it is a place that wizards, alchemists, and sages dream about. Given time, some tidbit of information on just about anything can be found in this carefully organized library.

The second library is located in one of the palace's many high towers. Only Vecna himself frequents this cramped chamber, and even his most trusted lieutenants must seek his direct permission to enter. Within the heavily warded room are a few dozen powerful magical items and artifacts, and almost a hundred texts recorded in a wide variety of media. This chamber resembles a museum or trophy room more than a library, with the items and texts sorted by culture and world of origin rather than topic. When in a contemplative mood, Vecna can be found here.

The following selection is representative of what a party might find within this storehouse of forbidden lore, should they manage to infiltrate it. This should be an extremely difficult task, as Vecna is known as the Lord of Secrets and Hidden Things for a reason.

SELECTED TOMES OF THE FORBIDDEN LIBRARY

There are ninety-seven texts of varying shapes and sizes in this library, ranging from fragments of engraved stone tablets to tomes made from the skins of celestials and fiends and scribed with the blood of innocents. Some contain magical secrets of long-dead cultures; some

contain fragments, or maybe even the entirety, of spells only imagined by most wizards; others might simply relate a myth that Vecna decided might someday lead an enemy to uncover secrets he wants to keep buried. Yet others are here simply because they amuse him, but he considers them too dangerous to leave in the main library.

The Book of Kings

This massive tome is 3 feet wide, 5 feet tall, and over 2 feet thick. Its covers are of gold-embossed leather, although the language in which the title is written has not been used for millennia. A *read magic* spell reveals the writing to mean *The Book of Kings*. The pages within, however, are always legible to any character who can read at least one language. The book radiates strong divination magic.

The book relates the complete history of whatever ruler a character turning its pages might think of. As soon as the would-be reader thinks of a ruler living or dead, the next page he or she turns to features a complete biography of that person, along with a portrait. The biography focuses particularly on dirty secrets or deeds the ruler wishes to keep hidden and weaknesses that those who would kill or pressure him might use, if any such exist. In game terms, the *Book of Kings* reveals to the reader all information that might be available on, for example, Vlad Drakov in the *Domains of Dread* sourcebook, along with whatever elaboration the DM cares to add.

If the reader thinks of someone who only appears to be a ruler but in truth is not (such as a puppet king who is in under the complete control of a ruling council), the book opens to a blank page. It functions only if the reader has a current, actual ruler in mind. Further, if the ruler in question is somehow protected from scrying, the pages likewise are blank.

"Ruler" applies to all-powerful leaders; the *Book of Kings* might, for example, reveal the head of a powerful thieves' guild, so long as that person does not answer to another power.

Using this book is dangerous. Whenever a character wishes to use it, she must make a successful saving throw vs. death magic or behave as if under the influence of a permanent *confusion* spell. A *remove curse* spell can lift the effect from the character.



Compendium Imortale Magica Malifica

The cover of this book features no writing or symbols. It is made of human skin stretched across a frame and spine of human bones. The pages within are vellum inscribed with human blood. It radiates faint magic, a preservative spell that protects it from the ravages of time. Further, the book carries a weak curse that causes any character of good alignment who touches it to suffer from bad luck for the next 7 days, suffering a -1 penalty to all saving throws. The dimensions of this gigantic book are 9 feet by 13 feet.

The book is written in the ancient language of the Suel and describes three different methods through which a spellcaster might transform into a lich—one path for wizards, one path for priests, and one path for bards. Each method requires the would-be lich to perform acts of horrendous evil in preparing a potion that aids the transformation, culminating in sacrifices that should turn the stomach of any sane character, good or evil.

In addition, the book contains *song of the dead*, a wizard spell once common among Suel spellcasters but which has long since passed into obscurity.

The Books of the Brethren

These twenty-one ancient tomes are covered by thin slate blocks with an unusual script upon them that no known magic (including the *comprehend language* spell) can interpret. Each is 18 inches wide and 42 inches tall. The title page of each volume is inscribed with a *sepia snake sigil* cast at 20th level. The pages of these tomes appear to be paper, but they are disconcertingly warm to the touch.

Between them, these volumes contain every spell presented in the *Wizard's Spell Compendium* and *Priest Spell Compendium* series, with the exception of spells unique to specific campaign settings or that are considered very rare, or spells granted only to specialty priests by a deity.

A reader must spend decades of intensive study before exhausting the secrets of these volumes. They are the perfect source of new spells that the DM might wish to introduce into a campaign,

NEW SPELL LIVING PAGES

(Alteration)

Level: 2

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 5 rounds

Duration: Special

Area of Effect: One book, scroll, or loose piece of paper

Saving Throw: None

This spell turns paper from a dead product of processed plants into a seemingly living, fleshy substance. The writing remains legible and the pages appear the same, but they feel warm when touched and, if a book so transformed is left open, the pages occasionally flutter and turn on their own.

The benefit of the spell is that paper affected by it makes saving throws as though it were leather, and the affected paper is not subject to the ravages of time or environment.

The magic is charged with the caster's own blood. When casting the spell, the wizard must read portions of the manuscript being enchanted while bleeding upon it for 5 points of damage. Upon completion of the spell, the blood is absorbed into the paper. The spell lasts for one decade per caster level, after which time it must be recharged with blood from any living spellcaster. One hit point worth of blood is required per item.

should a party manage to somehow carry them off. One of the unique wizard spells within the books is located on the last page of the seventeenth volume. It is *living pages*, and that spell is the source of the odd texture of the book's pages.

SELECTED ARTIFACTS AND MAGICAL ITEMS OF THE FORBIDDEN LIBRARY

Vecna keeps eleven artifacts in this private chamber, including the genuine Sword of Kas, a powerful weapon once wielded by one of the Whispered One's most faithful lieutenants, who later became his most hated betrayer. Here are those artifacts that Vecna counts as part of his collection:

The Crown of Burgess

This simply adorned platinum crown is 1½ inches wide, except for a 2-inch wide section set with a blue sapphire. It does



DECANTER OF SPIRITS

not radiate magic—in fact, it cannot be detected by any magical means, nor can its wearer. The crown was made to fit the head of a human male and is small enough to be hidden under a large hood, such as that on a monk's robe.

The Crown of Burgess was the head-dress of an ancient ruler, the only man in his time with the courage to stand against the unholy legions of Vecna. The monarch was executed in the courtyard of his own castle after his kingdom fell to Vecna's minions, as had all the surrounding domains before it. To mock the final king of Burgess, Vecna had the crown placed on the man's head before it was removed by the headsmen's axe. As the axe fell, Burgess swore his crown would come back to haunt Vecna and that a person wearing it would play a role in the Whispered One's doom.

As the king died, his crown took on magical properties. Whether a god heard the king's oath, or whether it was the spiritual energies released by the death of such a powerful man, the crown was imbued with a mysterious aura that has only grown stronger as the centuries have worn on. It is now an artifact, one of the few counter

measures to the Eye and Hand of Vecna and one of the few objects that can shield a mortal from Vecna's all-knowing sight.

POWERS

Constant: The wearer of the Crown of Burgess is completely immune to all scrying, Divination spells, spells, spell-like powers, innate abilities, and magical items that are used to locate an individual. Similarly, all items and equipment carried by the wearer are also protected from all of the above effects. Nothing less than a Greater Power can locate the character.

Further, if the Crown is worn by a character who grafts the Eye or the Hand onto his body, the character must make a daily saving throw vs. death magic to resist falling under the influence of the artifacts. Each passing day imposes a cumulative -1 penalty to the saving throw, and once it has been failed, the character suffers the full effect of the curses upon the Eye and the Hand.

Invoked: The wearer gains 50% magic resistance against all damaging spells. If the resistance fails, the character receives a saving throw if normally allowed.

Curse: Each time the invoked power is activated, there is a cumulative 2% chance the wearer becomes permanently ethereal, as if affected by the 3rd-level wizard spell *wraithform*. The Crown does not become ethereal with the wearer.

In addition, for each day the Crown is worn, the wearer receives a saving throw vs. death magic. If the saving throw fails, the wearer's alignment instantly shifts to chaotic neutral, and the victim becomes obsessed with finding and destroying Vecna. Further, if the character's Intelligence is 10 or less, he becomes convinced that his body is now a vessel for the spirit of the last king of Burgess, Welnaek IV. If the character's Intelligence is 11 or higher, he merely believes that the king's spirit is urging him on.

Neither effect can be reversed with anything less than a *wish*.

Suggested Means of Destruction

- The Crown must be shattered with a hammer held in the Hand of Vecna.
- The Crown must be placed on the skull of King Welnaek IV.
- The Crown must be worn for a thousand and one days by a monarch who died but came back to life.

Decanter of Spirits

The Decanter of Spirits is a crystal bottle with a square bottom that becomes rounded toward the top and narrows to a long, delicate neck that is closed with a diamond-shaped stopper. It appears to be half filled with a blush wine when discovered. The fluid is not wine but a deadly poison (Type F) that instantly kills any being who consumes it.

The Decanter of Spirits was created when a young Borcan noble woman poisoned her entire household so as to speed up her inheritance. Unfortunately for her, one of the victims was a Vistani woman who cursed her with her dying breath. Although the woman received her inheritance, the next time she unstopped the Decanter, the angry souls of her victims streaked out and dragged her soul into the Decanter.

Constant: The Decanter gives its owner resistance to level draining from undead attacks. Whenever an undead creature strikes the owner, the character can make a successful saving throw vs. death magic to avoid the level drain, but

other damage is applied normally. A saving throw must be made for each potential level loss. A hit by a spectre, for example, requires two separate saving throws.

Invoked: By withdrawing the stopper when within 30 feet of noncorporeal undead, the wielder can cause the creatures to be sucked into the bottle if they fail a saving throw vs. spell.

Once drawn into the Decanter, an undead creature can be commanded to come forth and attack a target of the character's choosing. The undead creature loses 1 Hit Die each time it is summoned, and the creature is irrevocably destroyed when it is reduced to 0 Hit Dice or when destroyed in combat. Up to twelve undead creatures can be trapped within the Decanter. The more undead creatures within it, the darker the liquid becomes. The undead never leave the bottle unless commanded. If the user knows what undead are trapped within the artifact, she can command specific spirits to come forth. Only one spirit can be released at a time, and if it survives combat, it returns to the Decanter.

Curse: Whenever the Decanter's ability to trap undead activates, the person carrying the artifact must make a successful saving throw vs. death magic. If the saving throw fails, the possessor is instantly turned into a wraith. The character retains the alignment and mind she had in life, and she is not rendered powerless by sunlight. Otherwise, she is subject all the other weaknesses and benefits of standard wraiths. However, when transformed characters kill through level draining, their victims do not rise as wraiths. Instead, their spirits are trapped within the Decanter of Spirits. Those so slain and trapped cannot be restored to life through any measure short of a *wish*. The Decanter of Spirits contains six spirits when first found.

Suggested Means of Destruction

- The artifact must be gifted to an ageless woman who poisoned her mother.
- The artifact must be shattered by a banshee's wail.
- The revenant of a murderer must throw the artifact against the wall of a righteous man's tomb.

Peace's Pin

This dark treasure appears like a tarnished silver hatpin with a mother-of-pearl head. Peace's Pin radiates magic of the Enchantment/Charm school.

A Barovian enchantress named Peace, who specialized in lending her talents to creating love potions and charms, created the pin centuries ago. She gradually became afraid that someone would turn her art against her and force her to be someone's lover through magical means. She spent months in the workshop to devise magical protection for herself.

Shortly after ensuring her own safety from magically induced passion, Peace fell in love with a handsome woodsman. However, she grew disturbed by the attention the woodsman paid to her apprentice and gradually came to believe the apprentice had used *charm* spells to steal her true love away. Peace eventually murdered them both in a jealous rage and was executed for the killings. Peace's fate has been mirrored by virtually everyone who has possessed the Pin since.

The Pin was believed to have been destroyed by the famous monster hunter Rudolph van Richten after he and a group of companions broke into the magical storehouse of King Azalin of Darkon and stole a number of magical items that were believed to be evil. In truth, the artifact was stolen by one of Van Richten's allies who gave it to his lover as a protective talisman. She eventually committed suicide after murdering him and her sister, and the Pin fell into the hands of the Order of the Guardians. Before they had a chance to hide it away, however, it passed into the possession of one of Vecna's servants who spirited it away to Cavitius.

Powers

When compared to most artifacts, the benefits from using the Pin are outweighed by the curse that follows. The only effects that are widely known are the protection from magical *charm* and the fact that the user eventually kills the object of his or her desire.

Constant: Makes the wearer immune to all Enchantment/Charm spells and spell-like effects, save for the natural charm abilities like those possessed by vampires, dryads, and others. (This

flaw is not evident in the item until the situation arises.)

Invoked: The user can become *invisible*, as if under the effects of the spell cast by a 10th-level wizard. This power is activated when the user pricks himself or another person with the Pin and draws blood. In truth, the character is subtly manipulated by whatever force imbued the Pin with its dark powers.

Curse: For each week the user possesses the Pin, he must make a saving throw vs. spell. If the saving throw fails, the character gradually comes to believe any person he is romantically involved with is cheating on him. At this time, the user will discover the invoked power of the item, by seemingly accidentally pricking himself with the Pin.

After three uses of the item's activated powers, the user gains the ability to assume *wraithform* twice per day, as though under the effect of the spell cast by a 20th-level wizard. This power replaces the ability to become *invisible*. The character must make a successful saving throw vs. spell after each use or fly into a homicidal rage, convinced that a person he loves or trusts is betraying him. The character then does his utmost to kill the perceived betrayer and his or her main ally. (These are always individuals the user either loves or is very close to.)

After nine uses, the user must make a successful saving throw vs. death magic or be instantly transformed into a spectre permanently. A saving throw must be made for each successive use, with the user instantly being transformed into a spectre when a roll is failed. The transformed character's first goal is to destroy the person he loves the most. A character so transformed cannot be restored to life by any means except through the intervention of a god.

Suggested Means of Destruction

- Must be kept under the pillow of a faithful spouse for three months.
- Must be kept in the pouch of a kender for a full year.
- Must be washed in the tears of a goddess of love.

Steve Miller is considered by many to be one of the grumpiest people writing roleplaying game material today. His most recent publication is the Die, Vecna, Die! mega-adventure, co-authored with Bruce R. Cordell.