

WORMSKIN

VOLUME I NUMBER 8
WINTER 2018

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Thanks to Tim Brannan for witch consultation.

Wormskin — Issue Eight

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the eighth issue of the world's most acclaimed Dolmenwood zine! In this issue, we dive headlong into the secrets of one of the wood's heretofore most enigmatic factions: the witches. The origins, organisation, supernatural powers, and goals of this sisterhood are unveiled, along with a selection of snippets from the tales of common folk in which the witches are discussed.

Subsequently, you will find two articles related to wilderness exploration in Dolmenwood: firstly, some optional rules and charts to add flavour to camping out in the wilds, among the bracken and toadstools; secondly, a d30 generator (in the time honoured *Wormskin* fashion) for odd and mysterious pools and other kinds of water features infused with the weird energies of Dolmenwood. (This latter table ties in with the rules for hex-crawling presented in *Wormskin* issue five, but may of course also be used alone.)

Finally, the issue is rounded out with a selection of fungal monsters that roam the forest, especially in the regions (to be discussed in a future publication) where trees and green plants have been replaced by moulds and fungi of all kinds.

— Gavin Norman (*moss master and Dolmenwood editor in chief*)

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THE SISTERS OF THE CHALICE AND THE MOON



Presented in this article are the secret history and lore of the sisterhood that has carried the practices of witchcraft in Dolmenwood down from ancient times. The information in this article, save for the last section, *Rumours*, is not common knowledge. It should thus be guarded by the referee and only revealed according to the players' explorations in Dolmenwood.

I. Origins

Mortal men and women first stepped under the hoary eaves of Dolmenwood some 2,000 years past. At that time, the forest was the sole domain of fairies (as discussed in *Wormskin* issue three), whose reaction to the mortal immigrants was various: grudging disdain, gleeful welcome, cruel domination. In addition to contact with the fairy rulers of the forest, however, certain mortals of especially sensitive nature became aware of the presence of older and more powerful entities lurking, semi-dormant, on the peripheries of the wood, long ignored by the elf lords in their vanity. Contact with these ancient entities occurred, at first, purely by happenstance: a wanderer in untouched glades would enter into a fleeting communion with a mind vastly potent, wholly alien, and yet intrinsically a part of the forest. Menfolk who had such encounters always reported them as horrific — a brush with monstrous powers inimical to man — but some women (especially those of Drune blood) perceived instead a sensual beauty and sought a deeper contact with these entities.

These early seekers awoke the ancient, sleepy spirits of the wood — known as *gwyrigons* or *wood-gods* — and came to know and love them, establishing an esoteric symbiosis between god and mortal. This was the foundation of witchcraft in Dolmenwood.

II. Establishment in Dolmenwood

The first women to commune with the gwyrigons were alone in their discovery. Their contact with the Other changed them, making them unlike their fellow wood-folk, who came to fear them. These early witches were then shunned, cast out from their woodland villages into the wild woods. For the average mortal, such an exile would, in those times, have been a death sentence — no one could survive alone in the untamed wilds of Dolmenwood. These women, however, beloved of the wood-gods, prospered in the eldritch tangle of the forest, dwelling as hermits and spending their days in ever deeper communion with their Otherworldly companion.

In time, as these isolated proto-witches encountered one another in the depths of the wood, a secret tradition of communion with the gwyrigons evolved. By the time the Brackenwolders arrived in Dolmenwood, the practice of witchcraft was well-established, though it always remained a mystery tradition into which only a chosen few were initiated.



III. The Gwyrigons

The gods of the witches are entities that have dwelt on the astral fringes of Dolmenwood since the dawn of time. They are seemingly a manifestation of the spirit of the forest itself (or, seen the other way around, the forest is perhaps a physical manifestation of the gwyrigons). Though it is impossible to truly comprehend the motivations of such entities, they in some way feed off of the connection that witches establish with them.

The witches count seven extant gwyrigons, seven who have passed away¹, and one with whom contact has been lost (see *Schemes and Goals*). 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, where the towers of the ancient fairy ruin pierce the canopy of the forest.
- ♦ **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.
- ♦ **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 wood-god can feel the pulse of its energy in the ground when walking barefoot. Limwdd's primary locus is in hex 1006 (see *Wormskin* issue 6).

It should be noted that the gwyrigons are neither good nor evil. Also, despite the allusions in the names that mortals give to them, they are neither male nor female. As powerful entities of the Otherwold, they are transcendent of such dualities.

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1 It is not clear, even in the lore of the witches, what it means for a wood-god to pass away. It is surmised that the lost gwyrigons are not actually deceased, but rather have drifted off into the Otherwold, perhaps like a seed from a tree may float on the wind to distant regions.