

SECTION

YAZATA: The Persian Gods

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Cyrus
stood in front
of the heavy wrought-iron
gate set into the stone wall. Through the

bars he could see a garden of trees and bushes laden with ripe fruits. Dozens of men and women ranged through the garden, harvesting the bounty with exaggerated care. One man accidentally grasped a bunch of grapes instead of the vine and shrieked in horror as several of the grapes burst in his hand. Cyrus watched as the hand spasmed, the flesh wrinkling and becoming discolored as if it had suddenly aged decades.

"This is the place. She's supposed to be here," he muttered to himself, grabbing the bars of the gate. Arm and shoulder flexed with impossible strength as Cyrus tore the gate off its hinges and flung it behind him. Every eye in the garden turned toward the shriek of tortured metal to see the black-haired man charging in through the gaping hole where the gate once stood.

"Where is your master? Where is the Green Deev?" he roared, grabbing two nearest workers and flinging them across the garden. Cyrus silently prayed he could intimidate them instead of trying to fight them all.

"I am here, child of Mithra." The voiced echoed through the garden, a gravelly baritone that seemed to vibrate inside Cyrus's skull. A tree shook and a hulking figure, easily eight feet tall, stepped out from behind it. Covered in a thick green pelt, the Green Deev walked between the trees, plucking various fruits and continuing to talk as he did so.

"Can you feel yourself dying from the inside out? It must be sad to be so constrained by time. Even the divine ichor in you cannot fight aging." The giant turned

a
wicked
smile on Cyrus.

"You look old and worn."

The Green Deev suddenly threw a grapefruit at the young Scion. Cyrus hesitated for the briefest of moments as his brain put together the memory of the burst grapes and the worker's aged hand flashing through his mind. He dove to the side, letting the grapefruit spatter against the stone wall. The others in the garden took their cue from the monster and began to launch their pickings at Cyrus.

The Green Deev walked away, calling over his shoulder toward Cyrus, "You know, I'm going to enjoy seeing this luscious produce in the markets. Can you imagine everyone's horror when they begin to rot from the inside out? The younger ones might even survive. A few, however, will awaken to their heritage."

Cyrus dashed quickly through the hail of produce and made for one of the Green Deev's lackeys. Just as he was about to reach his target, he caught sight of a peach heading directly for the side of his head. Flinging himself backwards, he prayed he would be fast enough to avoid it. He landed hard on his back and the peach smacked wetly into the ground a few feet from him.

Rolling to his feet, he heard a poorly restrained giggle.

He looked around and saw the Green Deev's followers all moving in slow motion, looks of horror dawning on their faces. Cyrus almost laughed himself as the slow motion extended even to the objects they were throwing.

"Great timing, Trish. Couldn't you have shown up earlier?" he asked as the two of them swept through the slowed workers.

“Don’t
complain! I have
other duties aside from taking
care of you, you know. Now, where is the
Green Deev?” Trish asked as she threw a right hook that
knocked out the last of the followers.

“It looks like he’s already running away. They never seem too keen to
stick around once you show up.” Looking past her, Cyrus watched as a
bird with bright green plumage took off into the sky.

She shot him a wry glance, rolling her eyes. She walked over a nearby
grapevine, reaching out toward the fruits with an eager hand.

“Don’t touch those!” Cyrus yelled, leaping over to stop her. Unfortunately,
he wasn’t nearly as quick as she was, and he could only stare in dismay
as some grapes popped in her palm. Then he gasped in shock as her hand
showed no signs of aging. “I thought those things aged you!”

“They do. I just happen to not have to worry about such things. A
gift from my father; he said he wanted me to always be this beautiful!”
Trish made a playful twirl before returning a thoughtful gaze to the trees
before her. “This garden needs to be cleansed.”

“Fire, then?” Cyrus asked.

“No! There is a more elegant and considerate method.” Trish closed
her eyes and felt for the titanspawn-created disease within the garden.
Slowly, summoning her power, she reached out and began to kill off the
supernatural infection, one plant at a time.

“Fire would be faster, you know,” he objected.

Her eyes remained closed in concentration, but she replied,

“The world is important, and all its many
pieces - animals, plants, and people -
are part of the world.”

The Yazata

The Persian Gods

The Yazata (“worthy of worship”) are the Gods of ancient Persia and its neighbors, of the peoples of the Iranian plateaus and steppes. The Yazata are poets and warriors, generals and bureaucrats, and emphasize truth, righteousness, valor, art, and beneficence. They draw out those traits in their people and, more directly, in their Scions. The Scions of the Yazata have been an active force in combating titanspawn and subverting their schemes.

History

The actual origins of the Yazata are lost to time. If the Yazata themselves recall their early beginnings, they’re not sharing. The most unambiguous thing that can be said of them is that they likely originated in the same time and in the same area as the Devas of India. In fact, references to deities from both pantheons occur in some of the oldest holy books of each, the Avesta and the Rigveda.

As the story goes, thousands of years ago, a man the Greeks called Zoroaster made himself known. He taught his followers of Ahura Mazda, a God of light and truth, and Ahriman, a creature of darkness, evil and lies. He preached of these beings’ constant struggle and that of their allies, who were lesser divinities and lesser demons. Some Scion historians suspect Zoroaster was an incredibly charismatic and intelligent Scion of Ahura Mazda — he was able to sway the minds and opinions of those who met him, and his words still carried the essence of his potent wisdom when transcribed. Zoroaster himself never took control of any territory, instead becoming mentor and advisor to leaders of the ancient Iranian plateau. As a result of Zoroaster’s actions, Ahura Mazda rose to ascendance in the region and became the head of the previously disorganized but egalitarian pantheon.

The newly purposeful Yazata, with Ahura Mazda at their head, fought Ahriman and his minions in a series of stalemates. *Deebs* and *drujs*, a race of titanspawn subservient to Ahriman, opposed the Scions of the Yazata at every turn — the *deebs* physically powerful and the *drujs* alluring and persuasive. Ahriman’s own son, a hugely powerful *deev*, slew a favored Scion of Ahura Mazda, Siyamak, before being slain by the Scion’s son in turn. Later, Ahriman unleashed the great dragon-beast, Azi Dahaka, who ravaged much of the land before being subdued and bound beneath a mountain.

Such conflicts ranged back and forth, with each side raising up champions to oppose the other. The

Yazata slowly gained the edge with heroes such as Sam, Zal, and Rustam, who became the greatest hero of the Yazata. Rustam fought every kind of monster that threatened ancient Iran, crushed enemy armies, and outmuscled and outwitted titanspawn. Once, Rustam was pitted against one of the most powerful *deebs*, and he made its skull into a helmet. Nevertheless, the Titans always found a way to subvert the victories of the Yazata and their Scions. Through their machinations, Rustam unknowingly killed his own son. He later killed Esfandiyar, another champion and Scion of the Yazata, before finally being mortally wounded through the betrayal of both his brother and his king.

However, the Yazata gained momentum in their war, winning more often and with respites lasting longer and longer. At some point during this time, Ahura Mazda disappeared from both the World and the Overworld. It wasn’t obvious at first, as the head of the pantheon had always been prone to disappear for a time tending to whatever matters he deemed most needed his attention. Now, centuries later, no one knows exactly what the disappearance means, although the theories regarding it are manifold. Even Mithra (who often acted as Ahura Mazda’s right hand) has been accused of turning against his mentor in a plot to have his own worship spread by the Romans even as far as Britain.

Though the eternal combat has slowed, many titanspawn still exert their malign influence where they can. The Scions of the Yazata throughout the ages have had to combat them, trying to keep the creatures from gaining a victory from the ashes of their ancient defeats.

Relationships with Other Pantheons

The Yazata’s relations with other pantheons have never been particularly amicable. When Cyrus the Great, one of their early worshippers, created the first “empire of the known world,” the Yazatas collided with many other pantheons.

For centuries, the Dodekathemon and the Yazata played a game of one-upmanship through their mortal followers: the invasion and conquest of Ionian Greece by the Persian Empire, the halting of the Persian invasion at Marathon and Thermopylae, the invasion of Persia by Alexander of Macedon, the Parthian destruction of the Seleucids, and so on. Even the invasion of Persia by Alexander the Great, the greatest blow the Dodekathemon struck against the Yazata, was marred by Alexander’s adoption of many aspects of

Persian culture. Some divine historians muse that his untimely death was punishment for not holding his Hellenistic culture above the Persians. Of course, the game still continues, with the Dodekathemon contesting their vast influence on later cultures and the Yazata countering that their worship far outlasted the Dodekathemon's and their influence persists as a living thing.

On the other hand, another pantheon the Yazata came into conflict with led to friendly relations that persist to this day. When the Persian Empire conquered Egypt, the Persian emperor had himself sanctioned as a pharaoh instead of coming in as a foreign conqueror, and worship of the Pesedjet was accepted under the theory that they were allies of the Yazata.

The Yazata have had a hard time dealing with some of the other pantheons, especially the Atzlanti, whose excessively (as the Yazata see it) gory practices seem pointless and petty. The Loa, being far away and very strange to the Yazata's sensibilities, are given polite (if cold) respect for having carved out a space in the Overworld. However, the Loa's focus on harmony, one place at a time, seems a little narrow-visioned to some of the Yazata, particularly Mithra.

The Aesir and the Amatsukami were close enough to come into occasional contact with the Yazata, but far enough that the contact was never very significant. The Yazata may not approve of some of the more bloodthirsty traditions the Aesir espouse, but they do appreciate the value placed on the rights and honor of their worshippers. The Amatsukami don't interact much with the Yazata; dealings with them have been positive, if limited.

Enemies and Allies of the Pantheon

The main enemies of the Yazata are the *deevs* and *drujs*, titanspawn that serve Ahriman. The *deevs* are often large, hairy and muscular, with extra limbs or heads and mouths with protruding tusks and sharp teeth. The *drujs*, on the other hand, can often appear as incredibly attractive women and tend to entice others to their downfall. The most powerful of the *deevs* and *drujs* act as lieutenants to Ahriman. They are ruthless to an extreme, with a sociopathic lack of compassion — nothing has value but themselves, and everyone else is a pawn or an obstacle.

The Yazata tend to have good relationships with all the minor divinities, demigods, and lesser immortals within their territory. Even in their heyday, the Yazata (at Ahura Mazda's insistence) never went out to displace local Gods, even when their worshippers conquered larger and larger portions of the world. Instead, other deities, lesser and greater, were accepted as allies and left to be worshipped without harassment. In fact, mimicking the mortals' division of ancient Persia into satrapies, the Yazata subdivided their territory in a similar manner, letting the local Gods remain so long as they maintained Yazata standards. The benefits of their ancient actions are coming to fruition; even now, the Yazata often find friends in strange places, due to historic courtesy. For their Scions, the same benefit applies, as all across Asia and into Europe, many immortals remember the fair treatment they received and are willing or at least more easily convinced to aid the Yazata and their Scions.

The Pantheon

Virtues: Conviction, Duty, Expression, Valor.

The Yazata have existed in their current forms for at least four thousand years, and claim earlier origins. They concern themselves primarily with the concept of transcendence. As much as doing right by the World is necessary, everything is a part of the effort toward transcendence, individually or communally. Where others may focus on continuity of the World, social justice, individuality or other virtues, the Yazata are arrayed towards the uplifting of the World to a more righteous state.

Ahura Mazda, the supreme deity of the pantheon, accepts all other Gods that struggle against the Titan Ahriman as brothers in arms, at least nominally. On the other hand, no one has seen Ahura Mazda in over a thousand years. Some Yazata say he has withdrawn from the current struggle to more fiercely counterpose Ahriman, an essential task now that

the rest of the Titans are on the loose. Others claim Ahriman has won that engagement decisively, as Ahriman remains active.

The greatest weakness of the Yazata is their self-righteousness. More than any other pantheon, the Yazata hold that theirs is *the* way (even though each member has a slightly different interpretation of just what that way is). This arrogant inflexibility has often made it difficult for the Yazata to work with other pantheons even as they need allies the most. This has led to a delicate balancing act of their ideals against the practicalities of the war against the Titans. But like all true idealists, sometimes they (and their Scions) sacrifice practicality in favor of what is "right."

The Yazata's Scions spend most of their time tracking down titanspawn in places of social disorder and moral decay. Inner-city ganglands, drug-lord territory, and civil-war torn nations are favored places