



Religion in the Wood



In the beginning, there was only the sound of wings. Faint at first, the distant beats were easy to miss, but as time passed they grew stronger, faster, until they could be heard across the great unending dark. Then, with a single flap, creation burst forth: fire, ice, air, water, soil and sky, all came from the sound of feathers that resonated throughout the cosmos. This is the Great Rhythm, and by the Great Rhythm are all things moved. The Rhythm tells the sun when to set, and the moon when to rise. The Rhythm tells the seeds when to flower, the trees when to shed their leaves, and the snows when to fall. The essence of everything there is comes from the Great Rhythm. One day, the Rhythm may cue the end of creation—but there will be no end to the Rhythm itself.

As every downbeat has an upbeat to follow it, so too will the cycles of nature eventually start again—for even though the Rhythm can be faint at times, it is everlasting and eternal.

Every denizen of the forest, from the large to the small, from predator to prey, knows of The Great Rhythm: the beating force that is the pulse of life itself. To the birdfolk, the Rhythm began with the sound of beating wings, but other folk of the Wood tell that it began with the thundering of hooves, the padding of paws, or with a tiny heartbeat. Birdfolk believe that two great spirits emerged from the Rhythm. They were the first Amaranthine: Ardea, whose wings usher in the dawn, and Tyton, whose wings are the shadow of night. They are the avatars of life and death, and keepers of the Rhythm.

The Amaranthine



JUST AS WE NEED A HEART TO MAKE OUR PULSE POUND, SO TOO DOES THE RHYTHM REQUIRE A DRUMMER. THE HEART OF THE RHYTHM LIES WITHIN THE AMARANTHINE. THEY ARE THE IMMORTALS, WHO HAVE BEEN GIVEN NEW LIFE BY THE RHYTHM, AND ACT AS ITS GUARDIANS, MAINTAINING THE BALANCE OF NATURE.

The Amaranthine are the gods of Everden. They are entrusted with maintaining the cosmic balance known as the Great Rhythm. Unlike gods in other settings, the Amaranthine rarely squabble with one another, for any strife between the Amaranthine is a threat to the balance of nature itself. The Amaranthine tend to keep to themselves, and rarely meddle in each other's affairs.

Though each Amaranthine is a powerful being in their own right, holding a great degree of autonomy over their dominion, each understands that they are but a small part of a greater whole. Like the themes of a concerto, the Amaranthine are the harmonies that create the Great Rhythm.

BIRDFOLK VS. HUMBLEFOLK AMARANTHINE

The Amaranthine are venerated by all races of Humblewood, although birdfolk and humblefolk worship them differently. The five whose origins are described in the “Tales of the Amaranthine” (Altus, Clhuran, Gesme, Reya, and Hanera), are primarily worshiped by birdfolk, and they (along with Ardea and Tyton) form the most common pantheon worshiped across the Wood.

While humblefolk still recognize the birdfolk pantheon, most worship Amaranthine specific to their culture and

heritage. Belief in these Amaranthine is not as widespread, but their power is just as real.

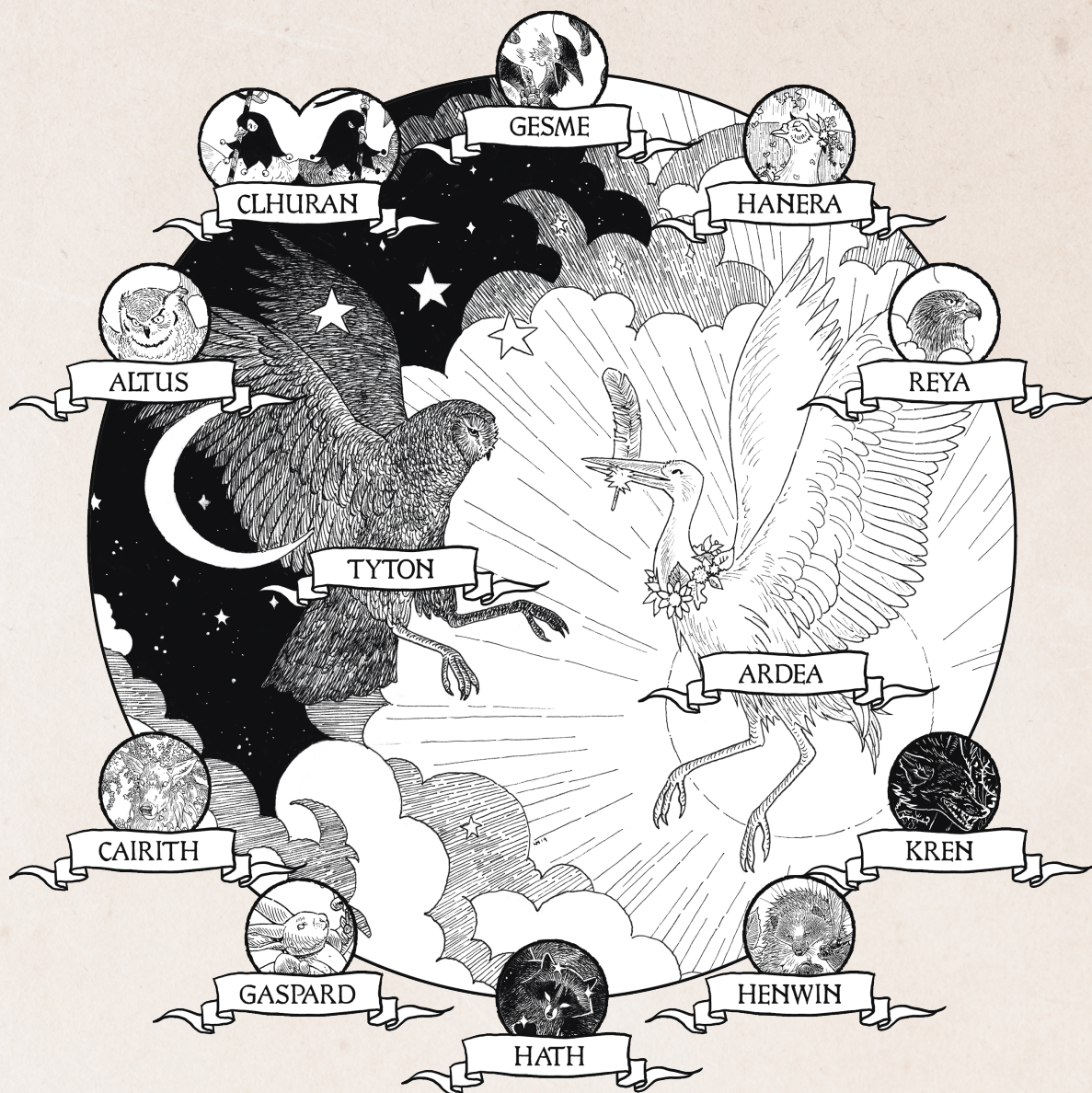
The humblefolk Amaranthine are less cohesive, with each having varied tales, origin myths, rather than a single origin story. Many fables are told of the humblefolk Amaranthine, such as the time Kren tricked Gesme into dropping her flaming staff to flush game out of a bush, or when Henwin sheltered Gaspard from a great monster.

To humblefolk who live outside of birdfolk perches, Ardea and Tyton are known as Dawnmother and Nightfather. They are depicted in forms that closely resemble the features of the humblefolk who worship them.

In the perches, humblefolk Amaranthine tend to be viewed as a folk religion alongside the primary birdfolk pantheon. Occasionally, perch-dwelling humblefolk will have small shrines in their homes, or in their shops dedicated to their Amaranthine.

While these Amaranthine go largely overlooked by most birdfolk, some who have taken the time to learn their legends pay homage to the featherless Amaranthine. This bothers a few humblefolk, but the priests of these Amaranthine understand that each one is but a reflection of the Great Rhythm, and welcome any birdfolk to learn from them.

BIRDFOLK AMARANTHINE



HUMBLEFOLK AMARANTHINE

Amaranthine	Alignment	Race	Domains	Symbol
Altus, the Enduring	CG	Strig	Tempest, War	An ornate wooden chalice, out of which pour storm clouds
Ardea, the Dawnmother	NG	—	Life, Light	A radiant sun with two golden feathers
Cairith, the Resolute	LN	Cervan	Life	A pair of white antlers wrapped in flowering vines
Clhuran, the Fickle	CN	Luma	Arcana, Trickery	Two birds, one singing, the other crowing
Gaspard, the Champion	NG	Jerbeen	Community	Three rapiers, tied together by a pink ribbon
Gesme, the Brilliant	N	Corvum	Knowledge, The Forge	A gnarled oak branch, burning at one end
Hanera, the Provider	LG	Gallus	Community, Nature	A bird with plants for tail feathers
Hath, the Whisperer	CN	Mapach	Night	A raccoon mask with a single star above it
Reya, the Explorer	CN	Raptor	Nature, Tempest	Four arrows, in a circle of ivy, forming a compass
Henwin, the Kind	NG	Hedge	Nature	A blooming yellow rose, flecked with dew
Kren, the Sly	NE	Vulpin	Trickery	An eye wreathed in fangs
Tyton, the Nightfather	LN	—	Grave, Night	A wing containing three stars and a crescent moon

Ardea

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ALIGNMENT

Neutral Good

DOMAIN

Life, Light

DOGMA

All life, great and small,
is equal and sacred.
Protect life, and be kind
to all living beings.

HOLY SYMBOL

A radiant sun with two
golden feathers



Ardea is depicted as a great stork with shining golden feathers, wreathed in flowers or other plant life. She is the Amaranthine of the sun who watches over the flora and fauna of Everden and provides them with light and energy to grow.

Ardea's light is present in all living things, from the tiniest sprouting seed to the mightiest beast. Her light also represents love and kindness, which every creature is believed to possess. All birdfolk are said to be Ardea's children, and many think she appears as a stork to demonstrate her maternal love for them—although she is speculated to appear in a different form to each woodland race.

When she vacates the sky she rests in a plane of pure light and life. There, great celestial storks carry out her will, and act as her messengers in the mortal world. An old folk story relates that Ardea sends these storks to fly unnoticed into Everden, where they place her animating light into unhatched eggs. This is why birdfolk often refer to her as "Mother Stork".

She is worshiped by good aligned characters of every sort: poets write of the love she has bestowed upon the world, priests ask her to watch over the newly born, and farmers pray to her for good harvests and light winters.



Tyton

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ALIGNMENT

Lawful Neutral

DOMAIN

Grave, Night

DOGMA

As day turns to night,
so must all things end.
Respect the power of death,
but fear not the end, for it is
part of the Rhythm.

HOLY SYMBOL

A wing containing three stars
and a crescent moon



Tyton is depicted as an immense black barn owl. It is believed he ushers the night in by spreading his wings over the sky. Tyton also governs time, memory, and death. As the sun must set, so too must the light of life give way to the darkness of the grave. Rather than being seen as a frightful figure, Tyton is looked upon as kind; he greets the old, the frail, and those at the end of their lives as familiar friends, guiding their souls peacefully back into the Great Rhythm, where they will be reborn, in time.

When not occupying the sky, it is believed Tyton resides in the lands of death. Not an afterlife, rather this is a part of the Great Rhythm where everything is cold, dark, and eternally still. His abode lies beyond the parts of the Rhythm associated with life, a divide impossible for mortals to cross. Even other Amaranthine find travel to the lands of death difficult, except

for Altus, who resides there with Tyton for most of the year, only leaving to bring winter storms across the land.

In addition to guiding the souls of the dead, Tyton is associated with the coming of old age, and the keeping of memory. When Tyton is invoked at funerals, it is to remember those who have passed, and to recall their lives and deeds. He watches the living, patiently observing all beneath him. Tyton can learn all there is to know of your life by watching your dreams. Because Tyton watches the living from birth to death, he is known as "Father Owl".

Tyton frowns upon those who would seek to enslave the souls of the dead using necromantic magics, and those who would desecrate the tombs of the deceased, as these actions corrupt the natural cycle.

Altus

ALTUS

ALIGNMENT

Chaotic Good

DOMAIN

War, Tempest

DOGMA

Challenge yourself.
Endurance brings change,
change brings growth, and
growth brings strength!

HOLY SYMBOL

An ornate wooden
chalice, out of which
pour storm clouds



Altus is depicted as a powerful horned owl with white feathers, who rides across the sky pouring thunderheads from his chalice. Altus is a pragmatic Amaranthine, believing that strength is cultivated through enduring hardships, overcoming challenges, and testing mortal limitations. Stories of Altus' tenacity and endurance abound, including the time he captured the moon as a gift to Ardea, and the time he made the mountains by lifting the earth. Themes of bravery and strength are common in his myths.

Altus resides with Tyton in the lands of death. Legend says that every year Altus makes the long and arduous journey to bring winter storms and foul weather. According to myth, this is as much to test the endurance of his people as it is to test himself by crossing the divide between life and death, which

binds the Great Rhythm. Summers with especially bad weather are credited to Altus, who made the trip early to keep his people strong and vigilant.

Altus is the patron Amaranthine of the strig, and is celebrated by them annually in a great winter festival. Games and activities during this festival challenge entrants with feats of strength and endurance. No official winner is declared, and all who participate are lauded for their courage and given a special place at the feasting table.

Altus usually finds veneration among warriors or athletes, but also among common people who pray for strength to withstand personal hardships, bad harvests, and natural disasters.



Clhuran

CLHURAN

ALIGNMENT

Chaotic Neutral

DOMAIN

Arcana, Trickery

DOGMA

Fortune will not always favour you, but live each moment to the fullest, for it is where you are meant to be.

HOLY SYMBOL

Two birds, one singing, the other crowing



Fickle and unpredictable, Clhuran is the Amaranthine of fortune, magic, and fate. He is commonly represented in dual profile: on one side as a jester with bangles and bells, carrying a marotte, and on the other as an executioner, wielding an axe. Clhuran's double profile illustrates his fickle nature, and the nature of fate. Clhuran's tales are of his luck, mirth, and jest, though he is also known to be a capricious Amaranthine. His normally pleasant demeanor can shift at a moment's notice to melancholy or jealousy.

Clhuran teaches that everyone is tied to the web of fate by invisible strands. Each thread extends out into the cosmos, darting and weaving as it moves to the Rhythm. Clhuran's wisdom is to allow yourself to be moved by the threads of fate, to feel the pull of possibility around you, and to act in

accordance with their whims. Even misfortune may lead one to an important place, or so Clhuran says. Good times and bad times are all part of the tapestry of fate, and there is a strength that can be drawn from accepting one's destiny. According to his teachings, good luck is nothing more than being open to change, and following the will of the universe.

Lumas are seen to be Clhuran's chosen, because of their connection to the threads of fate, which manifests as a natural magical talent. Arcane spellcasters, seers, and fortune tellers pray to Clhuran for insight into the will of the universe. Bards, artists, and writers also pay homage to Clhuran, because of his wild moods and connection to emotion. They hope to follow their fate to events of great import, which may be immortalized by their art.

Gesme



ALIGNMENT

Neutral

DOMAIN

Knowledge, The Forge

DOGMA

Learn, create, and discover.
Sometimes the old ways
must burn to make way
for the new.

HOLY SYMBOL

A gnarled oak branch,
burning at one end



Gn enigmatic figure, Gesme is the Amaranthine who governs knowledge, insight, and inspiration. She represents fire, the spark which both inspires and destroys. She acknowledges that delving into the unknown requires the courage to be burned.

Gesme is depicted as a raven, whose body is alight with the flames of knowledge. In her talons she carries a staff of burning oak which lights the way for scholars. Gesme is best known for stealing fire from Ardea's sun and bringing it to Everden, burning her feathers black in the process.

Her stolen flame brought fire and the light of reason to the world. While this act earned her a place among the Amaranthine, many feel it was a folly to give fire to mortals.

She is the patron spirit of the corvums. Legend has it that all corvums have at least one black feather, symbolic of Gesme's seared plumage.

Gesme teaches that chaos and innovation are part of a great cycle. Each discovery spawns a new mystery, which leads to further discovery in a never-ending loop, in which the old becomes fodder for the new. She is a symbol of all that birdfolk can achieve if they dare to push boundaries and harness their creativity.

First among her followers are those who study the arcane arts or experiment with magical forces, such as scholars and mages. She is also revered by artisans, and craftspeople of every kind. Blacksmiths in particular understand the danger and power of working directly with flames and pay her special reverence. Her followers pray to her for the spark of creativity that will ignite the fires of creation.



Hanera

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ALIGNMENT

Lawful Good

DOMAIN

Nature, Community

DOGMA

Respect the earth and her gifts, share what you can with those in need, and always live with compassion in your heart.

HOLY SYMBOL

A bird with plants for tail feathers



Hanera is the birdfolk Amaranthine closest to nature. She holds dominion over all things that grow within the earth. While Ardea is the animating force of life, Hanera is the guiding heart that gives life purpose and meaning. She encourages birdfolk to see the world not only from the treetops, but from the loam and all the tiny living things beneath. Everything, Hanera teaches, is connected as part of a vast continuum of life stretching back to the earliest ancestors.

Hanera is depicted as a pheasant with feathers that fade to green as they morph into plants and flowers. She is the patron Amaranthine of the gallus, and is invoked when growing anything from the soil.

As a spirit of both earth and hearth, Hanera governs the bonds that connect people to one another and to nature.

She is celebrated at feasts, and during ceremonies involving the sharing of food.

Her generosity and kindness are renowned, as is her intolerance for evil. It is Hanera's will that evil be challenged wherever it is found. Not with violence, but with acts of compassion. Those who harbor darkness in their hearts require the warmth of friends, family, and shelter to heal, and so Hanera teaches birdfolk never to give up on each other. Even the most wicked among us can be healed with love.

Hanera is worshiped by farmers and druids, but many clerics tend shrines in her honor, mostly in modest woodland villages. Her holy symbol is often hung above the doorway, inside a home, to bless the dwelling and all those within.

Reya

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ALIGNMENT

Chaotic Neutral

DOMAIN

Nature, Tempest

DOGMA

Seek out unknown horizons. Your skills can take you anywhere if properly harnessed.

HOLY SYMBOL

Four arrows, in a circle of ivy, forming a compass



Reya, the Amaranthine of wind, is depicted as a great hawk wrapped in a cloak of swirling clouds, wielding a great longbow in her talons. She is the patron of the raptors, and is believed to have endowed them with their superior senses.

The wind is free, streaming unimpeded across land and sea. Reya embodies this freedom. Her spirit glides through trees, over mountains, and out to the four corners of the world. She is the Amaranthine of exploration; her holy symbol forms a compass. Free-spirited folk who feel an insatiable urge to wander and roam the lands have been touched by her winds.

Reya is a skilled hunter, credited with the invention of the bow, a gift she passed down to the birdfolk. She is also honored for her skills in navigating wild country and surviving off the land. Travelers undertaking long journeys pray to be blessed by a portion of her talents, to assist them in the perilous wilderness. Reya watches over those who embark on daring expeditions, protecting travelers and presenting them with challenges to make their journey all the more memorable.

Reya is worshiped by hunters, travelers, sailors, and explorers. She is revered by wandering bards, who carry their journeys home in the form of songs and tales.



Cairith

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ALIGNMENT

Lawful Neutral

DOMAIN

Life

DOGMA

The way of nature is growth.
Let nothing stifle you, and
you will flourish.

HOLY SYMBOL

A pair of white antlers
wrapped in flowering vines



Cn Amaranthine of vigor and strength, Cairith is the patron spirit of the cervans. The energy that Cairith oversees is the cause of slow, steady growth and longevity. In living beings, this force manifests as the ability to run, jump, grow, and become strong. Ancient forests, where plants cover the tree trunks and giant beasts endowed with the intelligence to speak, are seen as signs of Cairith's blessing. Cairith teaches that adversity brings strength, but his teachings differ from those of Altus. Altus encourages his followers to seek out challenges, where Cairith sees life itself as a perpetual struggle. The true test of survival is always against oneself and one's own limits. By persevering in spite of these limits, Cairith counsels his adherents to triumph over the forces of death. This struggle must one day end, of course, and so the followers of Cairith seek to honor the daily triumphs of life as they happen. An existence is considered well-spent if it was lived unflinchingly, even in the face of sorrows and hardships. Cairith adamantly opposes necromancy as those made undead truly cannot appreciate life's struggles.

Cairith is described as a mighty stag with antlers covered in moss and flowering vines. He is massively tall, and wherever he walks plants sprout from the earth. Where others see a tangle of vegetation, Cairith sees the plan of nature unfolding. All cervans profess a kinship to Cairith. But rather than claiming him as a direct ancestor, he is seen as a guardian spirit. Some say he was the first to be born from the land when the Dawn-mother gave Everden life.

Cairith guided the first cervans, and blessed them with many gifts so that they might survive in the primitive forest. One of these gifts, the power of The Sight, is attributed to Cairith. Certain cervans are gifted with The Sight, and this allows them to glimpse events that have occurred in the past, present, and future.

Cairith finds reverence among rangers, druids, healers, and community leaders. Paladins invoke his dogma to give heart to those they defend. Cervan diviners gifted with the Sight call upon Cairith in their rituals. Cairith also has many followers among common people, especially humblefolk who have suffered hardships.

Gaspard

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ALIGNMENT

Neutral Good

DOMAIN

Community

DOGMA

With courage and conviction, the least among us can inspire the greatest.

HOLY SYMBOL

Three rapiers, tied together by a pink ribbon



Gn Amaranthine of heroism and valor, Gaspard is “The Champion”. In life, Gaspard was a great jerbeen leader. Upon his death, the Great Rhythm took him, and his spirit ascended as an Amaranthine. It is believed he was chosen to serve as an example of greatness, one to inspire others for generations to come. Tales of his mortal adventures have earned him renown. He traveled the whole of Everden, with his closest companions, slaying monsters, unseating tyrants, and bringing peace and prosperity wherever he roamed.

Gaspard’s followers believe the actions of an individual ripple outwards, affecting those around us, which in turn can embolden anyone to achieve greatness. The example of Gaspard teaches jerbeen to affect others with acts of courage, heroism, and kindness.

At times, Gaspard has been at odds with other Amaranthine. Before he ascended, there is a tale of him meeting Kren, where he was forced to show no sign of fear, lest she eat him and his companions. Thankfully, his composure kept his group strong, and in turn their bravery kept him strong. They escaped with their lives.

Gaspard’s example has lead many to heed the paladin’s call. Gaspard is worshiped by warriors who seek to match his exploits, as well as bards who seek to inspire others through the telling of heroic tales.

Humblefolk hold summer festivals in his honor. These holidays include storytelling, puppet shows, and magnificent jousts where armored jerbeens mounted on tamed wolves put on a spectacle of courage and daring before the crowds.



Hath

HATH

ALIGNMENT

Chaotic Neutral

DOMAIN

Night

DOGMA

Be crafty, be cunning, be careful. Death is everywhere, but heed my words, and you can evade its grasp.

HOLY SYMBOL

A raccoon mask with a single star above it



Known as “The Uncaring”, “The All-Knowing Stars”, and “The Whisperer”, Hath is an Amaranthine that humblefolk and birdfolk alike struggle to understand. In spite of this conflict, Hath is revered by the mapach. According to them, Hath was a constellation of stars who listened carefully to the Nightfather. In ancient times, the Nightfather spoke and spread his vast wisdom across the primordial darkness. He spoke of night, of time, and of the worlds beyond life. The constellation listened and grew wise, too wise to remain as stars. Thus, it became a part of the Great Rhythm as the Amaranthine of fear, doubt, and secrets. This is why, the tellers say, the Nightfather no longer speaks.

Ever since, Hath has whispered its unsettling secrets to the creatures below, speaking quietly so the other stars cannot hear. Mapachs were not the first to hear its voice, but they claim to be the first to truly make use of its secrets. While priests of Hath do not necessarily “hear” the words of the stars, mapachs believe that Hath speaks in subtle ways. Those frightened while traveling at night or caught in dangerous situations

are bestowed with cautious and crafty thoughts by Hath. If heeded, one may survive. If ignored, one may die. Either way, Hath, The Uncaring, is apathetic.

The stars teach the importance of trusting in oneself and keeping your wits about you, even in dire situations. When a mapach gets a shiver of premonition, something they could never have known, it is said to be the whispers of Hath they have heard.

Hath has few followers, and most are mapachs. Rangers and travelers passing through dangerous parts of the Wood at night often pay homage to the All-Knowing Stars. While some pray to this Amaranthine for guidance, others hope not to hear Hath’s voice, as the stars only whisper to those in peril. Warlocks make pacts with this Amaranthine for knowledge of the worlds beyond life. Most consider this practice to be rather reckless—The Uncaring is known to exact a terrible price for such secrets. Some lose their mind delving into the vast reservoir of knowledge that Hath is all too eager to supply.

Henwin

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ALIGNMENT

Neutral Good

DOMAIN

Nature

DOGMA

The rose only blooms thanks to the many kindnesses of the soil.

HOLY SYMBOL

A blooming yellow rose, flecked with dew



Henwin, the patron spirit of hedges, is venerated by humblefolk of all kinds. They are the Amaranthine of balance, and teach that all things in the forest must be respected, as all are connected in a great web of kindness. It is thanks to the sun that the plants grow, and because the plants grow, all living things have food. Decayed food turns into soil, which nourishes more life. The teachings of Henwin asks followers to take into consideration the many kindnesses which brought each of them into being and nourished them throughout their lives.

It is only fitting, then, that Henwin is said to be a hedgehog who spends their life in the forest. Storytellers say that they reside in an ancient part of the world, hidden from the eyes of most mortals, where they inhabit a tangle of roots from every forest that has ever grown. Here they tend to a garden of moss, fungi, and insects, helping to keep the living roots healthy. Henwin ensures that even the husks of withered plants can provide for the vegetation and creatures who rely on dead things for sustenance.

Unlike other Amaranthine, Henwin is not described as male or female. Being a spirit of balance, they are considered to

possess traits of all genders. They are often depicted carrying a yellow rose, which is their symbol. When a yellow rose blooms, it is said to be Henwin, blessing a forest with the beauty of their quiet grace. These roses are often given as tokens of friendship.

Henwin teaches understanding, and respect for the web of kindness that connects all life. If death is dealt indiscriminately, the web may become damaged. Although it is resilient, the web is still as fragile as one made from spider's silk. It is the duty of all who follow Henwin to strengthen the web and to help maintain the balance which supports all living things.

Henwin is followed by druids, who take the message of nature's web of kindness to heart. Henwin's druids can be found protecting groves and leading communities, keeping both safe from those with harmful intentions. Priests of Henwin often invoke the Amaranthine Henwin's name to protect the fauna, flora, and folk under their care. Gardeners honor Henwin by keeping plots filled with a diverse array of complementary plant and insect life.



Kren



ALIGNMENT

Neutral Evil

DOMAIN

Trickery

DOGMA

Guile is the greatest weapon at your disposal. Hone it, use it, and your fangs will always find their mark.

HOLY SYMBOL

An eye wreathed in fangs



The Amaranthine of predation and guile, Kren is portrayed as a great fox-like beast, whose form is usually obscured by shadows. The only known parts of her form are her fangs and her eyes, glinting as they catch the light. Kren appears in many tales, as often a villain as a hero, and even then it is rare that her motives are laudable. Yet, one can learn from Kren, for her stories often demonstrate how hubris can be exploited, how heroes can be laid low, and how there is no weapon so deadly as flattery.

The patron spirit of the vulpin, Kren teaches them to walk the line between savagery and sophistication, and how and when each should be used. For many other humblefolk she demonstrates the value of cunning, showing that no creature is so wise or mighty that they cannot be taken advantage of.

Stories of her origin are often vague and contradictory. A popular vulpin myth tells that Kren came from a time before life existed on Everden. That she was an ancient force, ready to feast on a world full of new and fresh meat, who

simply awoke when the Dawnmother and Nightfather set creation in motion. Others believe she was the first vulpin, who ascended from an ordinary fox. As the story goes, Kren tricked the Dawnmother into allowing her to watch over the Amaranthine's two divine feathers. Kren ate a single feather and became the Amaranthine of guile. This is why the Dawnmother only carries one feather in her beak.

Kren isn't worshiped in the same way as other Amaranthine. Rather, Kren is invoked in stories to teach the dangers of vainglory. Many outlaws keep shrines to her patronage. These individuals include thieves, smugglers, and purveyors of black market goods. Priests of Kren use her stories to teach others how to be crafty and cunning, but also to be cautious of the wiles of others. There are those, however, who invoke Kren for dark rites and rituals to gain power for themselves. Kren is always ready to make bargains with such supplicants, but all who do are fated to be devoured by her when their lives finally come to an end.

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THE BIRDFOLK HAVE A MYTH THAT TELLS OF THE ORIGINS OF THE AMARANTHINE AND OF THE FIVE BIRDFOLK RACES. WHILE HUMBLFOLK TELL THEIR OWN STORIES ABOUT HOW THE WOOD AND ITS PEOPLE CAME TO BE, THESE TALES ARE KNOWN THROUGHOUT HUMBLEWOOD, AND ARE GENERALLY BELIEVED TO BE TRUE BY ALL BIRDFOLK.



ARDEA AND TYTON

With the birth of Ardea and Tyton, the world was set into motion. Where once there was nothing but barrens, the land came alive with the coming of the Amaranthine, and the world began its endless cycle of life and death. Their arrival split the formless sky into day and night. They created the sun and the moon, and the succession of light and dark which emerged from their movement across the heavens told all life when to act and when to rest. Ardea and Tyton were born from opposite parts of the Great Rhythm. Each knows of the other's existence, but they keep to their separate spheres, meeting only in the early hours of dawn and the late hours of dusk to exchange dominion over the sky. In seasons of warmth, Ardea has a greater reign over the sky, while in seasons of bitter cold, Tyton's power increases.

The two Amaranthine created much of the life in Humblewood. Ardea suffused the days with sun-loving flowers, plants, and animals, while Tyton baptized the night with insects and animals that embrace the dark. They birthed sentient races, and from them originate all birdfolk, the first of their children, followed shortly after by the humblefolk.

Originally, all birdfolk were the same. It was difficult to distinguish them from the birds of the forest, as they even possessed the ability to fly. One day, the entire flock of birdfolk decided on a grand contest of gift-giving, to prove which of them was the most worthy to lead. Ardea agreed to act as judge; whoever could present her with the greatest gift would become leaders among her children. For an entire season, birdfolk searched and scrounged, gathered and hunted, returning with trinkets, baubles, gifts great and small. Though Ardea commended all her children for their gifts, only five were truly deserving of her boon.

Gesme, Reya, Hanera, Altus, and Clhuran: these five became leaders of the birdfolk. They inspired tales, devotion, and gave the birdfolk races their distinct forms and skills. These great ones went on to become part of the Great Rhythm as keepers of nature's balance and protectors of birdfolk across Everden, eventually ascending and joining the Amaranthine. The followers of each of the five were granted new forms and great gifts, to match their leader's exploits. Yet, to accept these gifts, something needed to be lost. This is why the birdfolk of today can only glide: their gift of flight was taken as the price for becoming something new.

THE TALE OF GESME, THE BRILLIANT

The first to present Ardea with a worthy gift was Gesme, a clever birdfolk who saw potential in the world that her kin could scarcely imagine. She had observed the great orb of fire that Ardea had placed high in the sky, and how Ardea had positioned it a great distance from the land and its creatures, so it would warm them gently without burning them. But Gesme also saw that the sun vanished with the coming of night, when the creatures of the dark began to prowl, and thought: "How remarkable would it be to have some of that fire in the world?"

Other birdfolk laughed at Gesme as she spent days plotting, and reading the sky. She examined every tree, from the great ash to the supple willow. Each day she carried a new branch in her beak, dropping many in frustration. The birdfolk were puzzled, but dismissed her actions. Then, one day at dawn, when the sun was at its lowest point in the sky, Gesme appeared with an oak branch in her beak. Without a word, she took off straight into the horizon. She flew for what seemed like ages, but the oak branch was light and did not trouble her. As she neared the sun her feathers, talons, and beak began to blacken in the heat. Still, she persisted. The oak was hardy and spry, and did not wither. Finally, she stuck the tip of the branch into the sun, igniting it. Hastily she flew back toward the ground, with the branch burning bright in her talons. The oak was patient, and did not burn up, keeping the flame steady as Gesme returned from the sky.

"See what I have brought here!" she bragged, as the astounded birdfolk looked upon her scorched feathers. "This will keep us warm on the cold days of winter, and safe through the long nights!"

Ardea was at first concerned at the presence of fire in the world, for she knew the forests could burn, and that misuse of the fire would bring harm to Everden. But, when she saw the birdfolk gather around the fires, and felt the gentle warmth a small flame could provide to her children, she was overcome with happiness.

"This," she declared, "is worthy of a boon."

And thus was Gesme changed. Set ablaze with the flames of knowledge and creativity, she became an Amaranthine. The forms of her followers changed too, and they became the first corvums. They were gifted with a bit of her cleverness and foresight, but Ardea gave them all black talons, feathers, and beaks as a reminder of the price Gesme paid to bring fire into the world.

THE TALE OF REYA, THE EXPLORER

The second to present a worthy gift was Reya, whose hunting skills were second to none. Though she was small, she was nimble, swift, and wise in the ways of the forest. Reya was capable and reliable, but birdfolk deemed her too independent to be a leader. She would travel the length and breadth of the land on her hunts, sometimes not returning for weeks at a time.

During one of her journeys Reya encountered a stranger. The traveler's true form was hidden under a cloak, but they could fly and clearly felt as comfortable in the trees as any birdfolk. They had heard of Reya's skill in racing, hunting, and navigating the forest, and proposed three challenges, to which Reya agreed.

For the first event, the pair moved to a patch of open sky overlooking rugged plains. There was a rocky outcropping in the distance; whoever flew there first would be the winner. The race began, and Reya immediately fell behind, the cloaked figure moving faster than Reya had ever seen.

Reya summoned all her strength to keep up, beating her wings like never before. Yet the traveler kept inching forward, and she was unable to close the gap in time.

Reya steeled herself for the next challenge. They flew to the meadows, where small creatures grazed, and it was decided that the first to catch five hares would be the winner. Reya moved with purpose, confident no one could best her skills with a bow, a tool of her own creation. Each of her shots found its mark, until she had but a single hare left to catch. But when Reya looked over at the traveler, she was shocked to see them waiting impatiently with a full complement.

For the third and final event, the pair flew to the center of the forest. The first to emerge into the open fields beyond would be the victor. These were forests Reya knew well, and she was certain she would win. As soon as they had started though, Reya saw the traveler alight, darting through the trees as if weightless. Reya kept pace, using every trick she could to give herself an advantage. Still the traveler pulled ahead, if only by inches, and emerged victorious.

Reya landed on a nearby branch and cursed her lack of skill. After a moment of pause however, she regained her composure, and thanked her competitor. Yet the traveler laughed, a sound so familiar, Reya wondered why she hadn't noticed before.

"You have nothing to be ashamed of, birdfolk. I see your skills are real. You are the first to so nearly best me in every event, and this is no easy feat." The traveler removed their cloak, and Reya could not believe her eyes. She had been challenged by the wind itself.

It swirled, spinning a cloak out of the very clouds, which it placed around Reya. "Consider this a gift, for providing me with such sport." Reya thanked the wind, and with that, it departed, caressing Reya's feathers in a familiar breeze.

When the time came to present a gift, Reya offered Ardea her cloak of clouds, along with the story of her adventure. As Reya told her tale, Ardea could see the eyes of the other birdfolk light up with excitement. When Reya had finished, Ardea returned Reya's cloak to her, saying the story of her adventure was the rarer gift. Reya was changed, and became the Amaranthine of wind, archery, and exploration. Those she inspired became the first raptors. They began to take on a nomadic lifestyle, finding their fortune day by day as Reya once did and told tales of their own adventures by the light of the campfire.

THE TALE OF HANERA, THE PROVIDER

The third to present a precious gift was Hanera, a gentle birdfolk and the first to shift her focus away from the sky. Rather than live in the trees with other birdfolk, Hanera made a home for herself below the canopy. She cared for the soil and the earth, and in return the earth gifted her with wisdom. From the earth, Hanera learned to speak with plants—knowledge she used to better care for them. She soon earned fame among the birdfolk, as one who grew the largest and best-tasting crops.

"These crops," Hanera thought, "are the finest gift I could offer to our Mother." And so she set about planting a large garden, its bounty reserved for Ardea.

One day, while tending to her garden, Hanera saw a family of haggard travelers making their way out of the woods. When they saw Hanera, the mother begged her for aid.

"Please, kind sister, we are in great need. We were traveling through the forest when a creature attacked me and wounded my wing. We escaped, but I cannot fly. Please, help us, we are terribly hungry."

Hanera knew that she couldn't feed herself and this family while storing crops for Ardea. Even still, she could not turn them away in their desperate state. She offered to share her home and her food for as long as the travelers needed, making sure their needs were met before saving any food for Ardea.

The travelers stayed with Hanera for many nights while the mother healed. Each day, Hanera would prepare the family meals, telling the plants of their plight. The plants understood, and were honored to nourish the weary and wounded birdfolk. In return, Hanera ensured their seeds were saved and planted again, so their lives would continue indefinitely.

At night, Hanera applied medicine to the mother's wound made from the leaves of kindly herbs. By the end of the season the mother had healed, the family was in good health, and they gratefully flew away.

When the day finally came for birdfolk to present their gifts, all Hanera could offer Ardea was a few fruits and vegetables. She wove them together along with flowers she had grown, attempting to make her offering look more cheerful.

"I'm sorry, Mother Stork," Hanera said. "I had meant to present you with a great harvest, but this is all I could provide."

Ardea took the wreath, and spoke gladly: "You have given me more than enough, for you see my child, I received your compassion for an entire season." As Ardea spoke, celestial messengers appeared by her side, and together they transformed into the birdfolk family Hanera had so tenderly cared for.

For her charity, Hanera received the Amaranthine's boon: her feathers turned green and grew into vines and shoots, adorned with the most beautiful flowers. Other birdfolk stared in awe, and those who followed Hanera became the first gallus, blessed with her inspiring kindness, as well as her closeness with the earth and all growing things.

THE TALE OF ALTUS, THE ENDURING

The fourth to present a commendable gift was Altus, whose hunting skills were second only to Reya's, though Altus journeyed the Wood to test his limits rather than explore as Reya did. Altus felt pure joy when overcoming obstacles. He loved the cold seasons and challenged himself by hunting at night. His nocturnal existence granted Altus a perspective other birdfolk lacked.

"What if I gifted Ardea something she has never seen before?" he thought. "Yes! I shall hunt the moon, and present it to her, so that she may see its lovely glow." This would be

unthinkable to any other birdfolk, but Altus was resolute, confident his gift would please Ardea.

However, he was neither as skilled or nimble as Reya, nor as clever or cunning as Gesme. His arrows would not scratch the moon, and despite his great strength, he could not move it. But Altus was stubborn, for many nights he tried and failed to bring down his quarry. The more he tried, the more frustrated he became. Altus even thought he could hear the moon's laughter reflected in the babbling brooks and rippling ponds, mocking his futile efforts. Still, Altus remained determined.

Tyton, intrigued, observed Altus as he struggled. "Why do you persist in this task, my child?" the Amaranthine of night asked. "You must know you will not succeed."

Altus replied, "If I did not try, then I would never know for certain if I could. But you may be right. For all my strength, I can never best the moon, and only a fool refuses to acknowledge when he has been bested." Altus paused, letting out a sigh. "Pity, it would have made a lovely gift for Ardea."

Tyton was touched, not just by the sentiment but by the incredible will of this birdfolk.

"Your resolve does you credit" Tyton said. "To capture the moon, you will require this." He said producing a lidded chalice, intricately carved from the wood of an alder tree. Tyton gave it to Altus, then the Amaranthine of night disappeared.

Altus was puzzled, until the moon appeared from behind a cloud. He heard its laughter in the pond behind him. When he turned, he saw it: the moon's reflection set perfectly in the still, clear waters. Without delay, Altus filled the chalice with water. With the moon clearly reflected within the chalice, he quickly shut the lid. The moon was caught.

As dawn began to break over the horizon, Tyton appeared once again before Altus, "Let my sister gaze upon my creation, but return it by day's end. The night has need of it," old Father Owl said, before departing for the lands beyond life.

And so it was that Altus presented Ardea with the moon. He became the first strig, and his people were gifted with his great strength and indomitable will. He kept his oath to Tyton, returning the moon that very evening. For this, Tyton gifted all strigs with the ability to see clearly under its light. Tyton welcomed Altus as a guest in his home, deep within the lands of death. Altus found the cold there bracing, and decided to share it with the people of Everden. This is why the weather is so inclement in winter; Altus returns each year, carrying storms of sleet and snow in his chalice, to test the birdfolk's endurance.



THE TALE OF CLHURAN, THE FICKLE

The last to present a worthy gift was Clhuran, who seemed an odd choice for a leader. Clhuran had no desire to lead. He was whimsical and impulsive. He had wild moods, and was never able to focus on one task for too long. He also had incredible luck. Most saw him as little more than a bumbler, someone who floated their way through life. In truth, Clhuran was full of mirth and cunning. "Where I am," he oft remarked, "is simply where I am meant to be. I follow the flow of the universe."

For all his mirth, Clhuran was notoriously fickle; he was a trickster, who delighted in humbling birdfolk who boasted about their cleverness. This earned him many admirers, and just as many enemies.

Clhuran never intended to compete in the gift-giving contest.

"What should I care what others think of me," he harrumphed, "So long as I am happy?" Some birdfolk, bitter at having been fooled by him, claimed Clhuran could never hope to win such a contest. Clhuran tried to pay them no heed, in his heart he felt the barbs hit their mark.

"Who am I kidding," Clhuran sighed. "I am not strong, nor smart, nor skilled, nor leaderly...I couldn't possibly produce a gift worthy of Ardea." With this last thought he sank into a bitter melancholy.

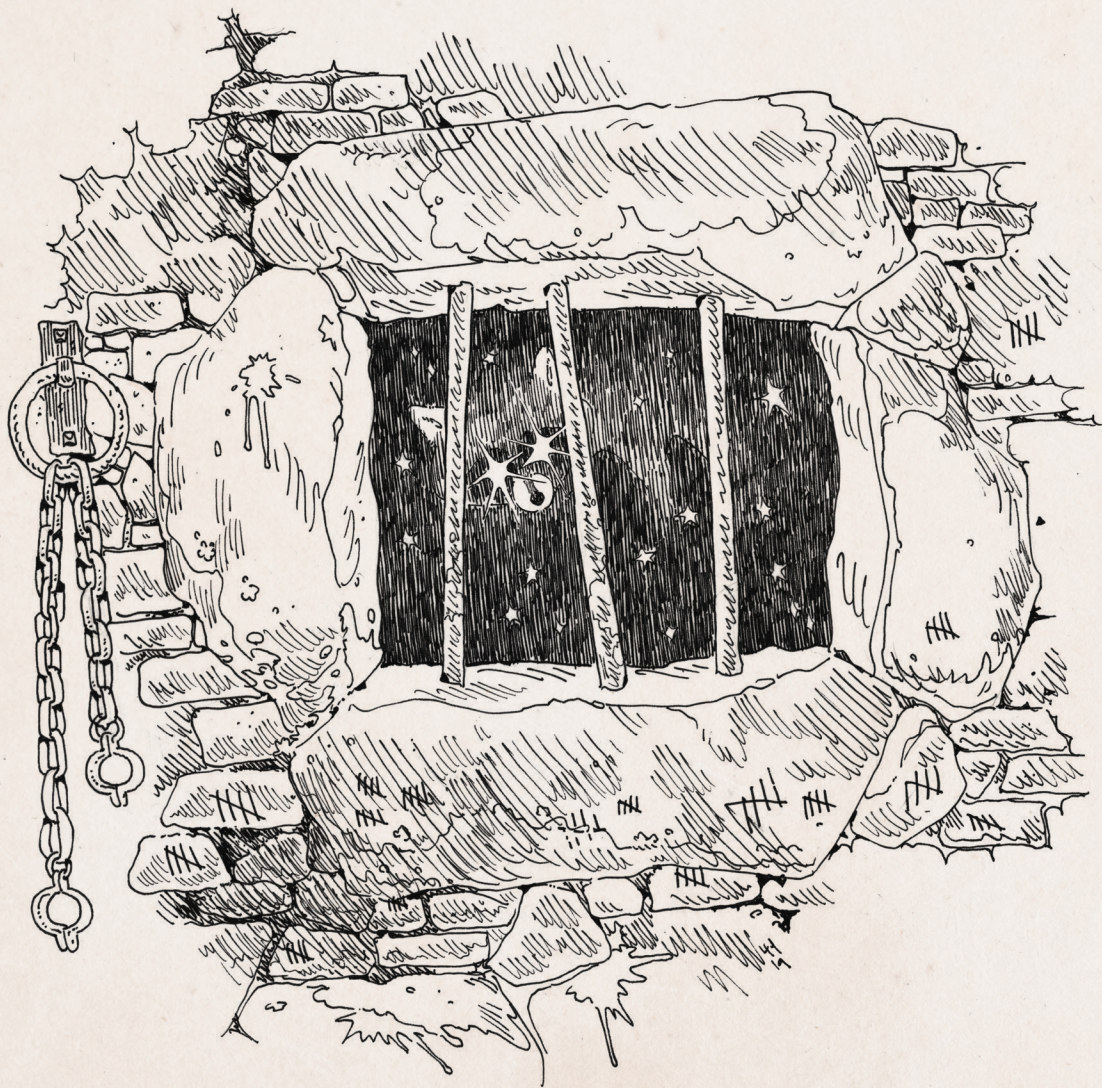
It was only when a young boy approached him that he regained his confidence. "Please Clhuran, won't you show us what you can do?" the small birdfolk said. "Many of us love your tricks, and your jokes. You bring joy to all birdfolk! Surely if you try you can do it!"

Clhuran saw the sincerity in the boy's eyes, and suddenly he knew what to do. "Fine, fine," he exclaimed in mock annoyance. "I suppose I shall entertain you."

With newfound confidence, he approached Ardea. All of the birdfolk were gathered, and when Clhuran looked upon the crowd he saw both enemies and friends. Thoughts of those friendships allowed Clhuran to reach deep within himself, and from the depths of his soul he felt a beat, like the Great Rhythm itself. Channeling this energy, Clhuran opened his beak and brought forth a most beautiful gift: a song.

It was a song so perfect, so harmonious, that no birdfolk could deny its charm. Ardea beamed. "My child, you have within you a rare gift. May all of your kin be blessed by it." With those words, Clhuran became the first luma, the Amaranthine of all fortune, good or ill. His peculiar connection to fate is shared by all his kin.

Ever since Clhuran's performance all birds sing, hoping that they might imitate the perfect song he sang to Ardea. While some sing pleasantly, Clhuran made it so those who mocked him can only trill, shriek, or caw artlessly. This is why it is always important to show respect for others, no matter how odd they may seem.



*"O, seeing stars, hear my words and part the veil of night,
Gift me thoughts of strategy, bless me with your sight.
If this trial I do survive, with plans and actions shrewd,
I pledge undying loyalty, for wisdom you imbued."*

- A mapach prayer to Hath

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