

Monster Hunter's Handbook

Foreword

It is my sincere wish that any soul who comes into possession of this booklet may employ the dearly bought wisdom herein to strike at the heart of monstrous villainy wherever it arises. Make no mistake: it is a bloody business, and not for the faint of heart. Often, it is those of us familiar with tragedy who can best pierce the darkness. We hunt monsters so the innocent does not have to.

- Rudolph Van Richten

Preface: Light Up the Darkness

Always remember monsters are creatures of darkness. Darkness is their ally, not yours. Those steeped in conventional wisdom might take shelter in the shadows when they sense danger lurking, thinking themselves safe or hidden from prying eyes. With monsters, this is not always the case.

My advice? Always carry light with you. No matter where you encounter these creatures, do your best to ensure the area is lit. Daylight is ideal, but for obvious reasons, this cannot always be managed.

Think about light and darkness as a general think about battlefields. Your enemy is familiar with and comfortable in the darkness; but in the light, they are fighting on your terms.

Chapter 1: Fiends

Demons

Spawned in the Infinite Layers of the Abyss, **demons** are the embodiment of chaos and evil — engines of destruction barely contained in monstrous form. Possessing no compassion, empathy, or mercy, they exist only to destroy.

Devils

Devils personify tyranny, with a totalitarian society dedicated to the domination of mortal life. The shadow of the Nine Hells of Baator extends far across the multiverse, and Asmodeus, the dark lord of Nessus, strives to subjugate the cosmos to satisfy his thirst for power. To do so, he must continually expand his infernal armies, sending his servants to the mortal realm to corrupt the souls from which new devils are spawned.

Van Richten's Advice

Never trust a demon. Never trust a devil, either, but at least they can be reasoned with. Alchemical silver will help you against devils, but only magic weapons are effective against demons.

All fiends are native to the evil demesnes of the Lower Planes, so a scroll of banishment is always worth having on hand. Banishing a fiend is often the best that you can hope for; you would be wise to consider it a victory.

Chapter 2: Hags & Witches

Witches

Mad women and men sometimes forge pacts with dark powers in exchange for magic and longevity. These **witches** prefer to live in the shadows and can see in the dark. When traveling in the open, they often use spells to assume less conspicuous forms. Entirely unscrupulous, they will deal with anyone in return for power. They will also betray anyone for the same reason.

Witches are obsessive collectors, each believing that almost anything found — a piece of broken bone, a dead rodent, a handful of dust, or some other worthless item or substance — could be valuable or useful as a spell component, a ritual object, or a potion ingredient.

Keep an eye out for vermin. Witches are particularly fond of cats, snakes, and toads.

Hags

Ancient beings with origins in the Feywild, **hags** are cankers on the mortal world. Their withered faces are

framed by long, frayed hair, horrid moles and warts dot their blotchy skin, and their long, skinny fingers are tipped by claws that can slice open flesh with a touch. Though they resemble withered crones, there is nothing mortal about these monstrous creatures.

All hags possess magical powers, and some have an affinity for spellcasting.

Hags propagate by snatching and devouring human infants. After stealing a baby from its cradle or its mother's womb, the hag consumes the poor child. A week later, the hag gives birth to a daughter who looks human until her thirteenth birthday, whereupon the child transforms into the spitting image of her hag mother.

Hags sometimes raise the daughters they spawn, creating powerful covens. A hag might also return the child to its grieving parents, only to watch from the shadows as the child grows up to become a horror.

Arrogant to a fault, hags believe themselves to be the most cunning of creatures, and they treat all others as inferior. Even so, a hag is opened to dealing with mortals if those mortals show the proper respect and deference. Over their long lives, hags accumulate much knowledge of local lore, dark creatures, and magic, which they are pleased to sell.

Hags enjoy watching mortals bring about their own downfall. A bargain with a hag, though often necessary, is always dangerous.

Van Richten's Advice

Witches are rarely more dangerous than a typical mage, though that is dangerous enough to warrant caution. A lone witch is craven and easily cowed; a show of force may be enough to extract information or drive her away. Witches are emboldened by allies and are more likely to fight to the death in a group.

Hags are despicable to the last, but their schemes and goals vary widely. A hag's knowledge and power are no small thing. If a hag is willing to bargain for information, sell goods or services, or ally herself to you in any way, you would be wise to consider it. Far better to cautiously enjoy a hag's good graces than to be the subject of her wrath. I have destroyed scores of monsters with information obtained from hags.

Chapter 3: Lycanthropes

One of the most ancient and feared of all curses, lycanthropy can transform the most civilized humanoid into a ravening beast. In its natural humanoid form, a creature cursed by lycanthropy appears as its normal self. In its animal form, a **lycanthrope** resembles a powerful version of a normal animal. On close inspection, its eyes show a faint spark of unnatural intelligence and might glow red in the dark.

Evil lycanthropes hide among normal folk, emerging in animal form at night to spread terror and bloodshed, especially under a full moon. Good lycanthropes are reclusive and uncomfortable around other civilized creatures, often living alone in wilderness areas far from villages and towns.

A humanoid creature can be afflicted with the curse of lycanthropy after being wounded by a lycanthrope, or if one or both of its parents are lycanthropes. A remove curse spell can rid an afflicted lycanthrope of the curse, but only enormously powerful magic can free a natural born lycanthrope of its curse.

There are many varieties of lycanthropes, but my experience is limited to werewolves.

Werewolves

A **werewolf** is a savage predator. In its humanoid form, a werewolf has heightened senses, a fiery temper, and a tendency to eat rare meat. Its wolf form is a fearsome predator, but its hybrid form is more terrifying by far — a furred, and well-muscled humanoid body topped by a ravening wolf's head. A werewolf can wield weapons in hybrid form, though it prefers to tear foes apart with its powerful claws and bite.



Most werewolves flee civilized lands not long after becoming afflicted. Those that reject the curse fear what will happen if they remain among their friends and family. Those that embrace the curse fear discovery and the consequences of their murderous acts. In the wild, werewolves form packs that also include wolves and dire wolves.

Van Richten's Advice

Anyone could be a werewolf. Unlike vampires, a werewolf's signs are more difficult to detect, especially if it wishes to remain hidden. All this changes at the full moon, of course.

During the rest of the year, rooting out werewolves involves some investigative work, usually following a trail of bodies. Werewolves get decidedly nervous around silver, and a werewolf in human form will hesitate to attack even a lone victim if they suspect they have a silvered weapon on them.

Chapter 4: Undead

Undead are once-living creatures brought to a horrifying state of undeath through the practice of necromantic magic or some unholy curse. Undead include walking corpses, such as vampires and zombies, as well as bodiless spirits, such as ghosts and specters.

Van Richten's Advice

If you venture into ancient, wild, or accursed places, you are quite likely to encounter undead. Skeletons, zombies, and ghosts are practically an occupational hazard for grave-robbers; not even the dead take kindly to a thief.

Never be without plenty of holy water when hunting undead. Cost can be rather prohibitive in general shops; I recommend making friends with a local priest who can keep you well-stocked. Some undead are unable to regenerate when they are splashed with it, and all undead are harmed by it. If you are not constantly running out of holy water, you are doing something wrong.

When there is no holy magic handy, you will have to resort to weapons. Breaking a bone is easier than cutting it; I would recommend a good, stout hammer or club in lieu of a sword when facing a horde of skeletons.

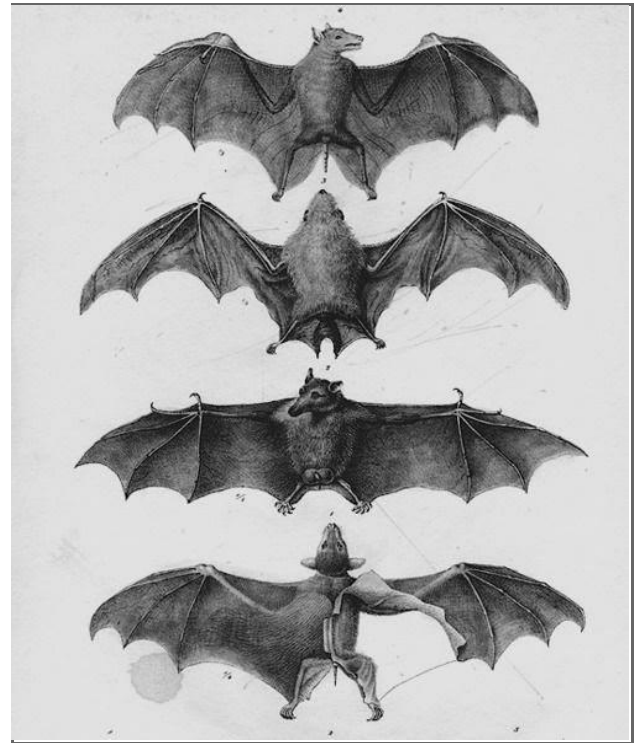
If you are expecting to encounter ghosts, never do so alone. If you become possessed without help, you are as good as dead. If you can, make sure that you have one or more scrolls of *dispel evil and good* in case it becomes necessary to perform an exorcism. If a ghost causes you to age rapidly, get help before the effects become permanent.

Chapter 5: Vampires

Awakened to an endless night, vampires' hunger for the life they have lost and sate that hunger by drinking the blood of the living. Vampires abhor sunlight, for its touch burns them. They never cast shadows or reflections, and any vampire wishing to move unnoticed among the living keeps to the darkness and far from reflective surfaces.

Whether or not a vampire retains any memories from its former life, its emotional attachments wither as once-pure feelings become twisted by undeath. Love turns into hungry obsession, while friendship becomes bitter jealousy. In place of emotion, vampires pursue physical symbols of what they crave, so that a vampire seeking love might fixate on a young beauty. A child might become an object of fascination for a vampire obsessed with youth and potential. Others surround themselves with art, books, or sinister items such as torture devices or trophies from creatures they have killed.

Most of a vampire's victims become vampire spawn — ravenous creatures with a vampire's hunger for blood, but under the control of the vampire that created them. If a true vampire allows a spawn to draw blood from its own body, the spawn transforms into a true vampire no longer under its master's control. Few vampires are willing to relinquish their control in this manner. Vampire spawn become free-willed when their creator dies.



Every vampire remains bound to its coffin, crypt, or grave site, where it must rest by day. If a vampire did not receive a formal burial, it must lie beneath a foot of earth at the place of its transition to undeath. A vampire can move its place of burial by transporting its coffin or a significant amount of grave dirt to another location. Some vampires set up multiple resting places this way.

Van Richten's Advice

If you are hunting a vampire, the first thing you should do is put your affairs in order. I have spent a lifetime studying how to destroy their kind and the most important thing I have learned is that such knowledge should never replace your terror.

Falling prey to a vampire is a fate worse than death. If you are not willing to risk eternal damnation, turn back now.

If you are still intent on facing a vampire, you would do well to acquaint yourself with its weaknesses...

A vampire cannot enter a residence without an invitation from one of the occupants. Beware, for even those you trust are not immune to a vampire's charm.

Running water is like acid to a vampire.

Wooden stakes (or any piercing implements made of wood) are only useful if the vampire is subdued and in its resting place. Under these circumstances, driving the stake into its heart will paralyze it until the stake is removed.

Above all, vampires abhor sunlight. It burns their skin, causes grievous harm, and doubles them over in agony. Holy water produces similar effects and temporarily prevents the vampire from regenerating.

Chapter 6: Vistani

By far the most wicked and despicable of all civilized people are the Vistani. The nomadic people are easily recognized by their brightly colored dress and jovial nature. They laugh often and drink heartily but believe me when I say that they are villains.

Unlike the poor souls in Barovia, the Vistani can leave the dreadful valley whenever they please and are not damned to spend eternity there. They claim to come and go with the aid of a special potion, but this is a lie. The greedy charlatans sell this “elixir of the mists” to take advantage of the vulnerable and desperate. Anyone hoping to escape Barovia is not long for the world, so the Vistani use their ruse to lighten the purse of these doomed souls before their gold is out of their reach.

This scam is just one of their many crimes. Mark my words: never trust a Vistani. The truth behind their immunity to the cloying fog is proof enough. They are friends of Strahd von Zarovich, the dark lord of that cursed realm, and you would do well not to forget that. No matter how kind or seemingly helpful a Vistani appears, remember that Strahd chooses to treat them all with something resembling kindness — repayment for an ancient debt, if you believe their legends. They do not — indeed, they cannot — share our fear and hatred of such monsters. Many of them even serve as the vampire's spies.

They are lazy and irresponsible, yet quick to act when their lives or traditions are threatened. They are lawless and merciless to outsiders — horse thieves, kidnappers, pickpockets, murderers. They celebrate and approve of such things if they benefit their people and support their

sensuous lifestyle. However, Vistani who knowingly bring harm or misfortune to others of their kind are banished — the worst punishment a Vistani can imagine, even worse than death.

They also earn money by telling fortunes and selling information. This, at least, is not always a ruse, though a cryptic truth is often as deceptive as a lie. I myself have known a Vistani seer whose second sight proved quite useful and unquestionably prescient.

Each family or clan of Vistani is its own little gerontocracy, with the oldest member ruling the roost. This elder carries the bulk of the responsibility for enforcing traditions, settling disputes, setting the course for the group's travels, and preserving the Vistani way of life. Vistani elders make all the important decisions.

Perhaps you think I am being harsh or that I simply mistake cultural differences for villainy. To that I ask, what kindly folk do you know who possess the Evil Eye? A Vistani, regardless of age, can bestow a terrible curse with a mere look or utterance. Such curses can be provoked by no more than a perceived slight or their perverted view of justice.

The Vistani are wicked charlatans and spies and they will not hesitate to destroy what you hold most dear. I know better than most.

Van Richten's Advice

Never trust the Vistani. Deal with them if you must but expect treachery and deceit at every turn. And whatever you do, do not buy their worthless potions.

The mystic foresight of a Vistani fortune-teller can be a great asset to a monster hunter — that is, if you can find a trustworthy Vistani. You might as well try to tackle a displacer beast.

If you must strike a deal with a Vistani, only do so with an elder. Their responsibility to protect their people approaches something a cynical man might call virtue, and it is the closest they come to honor.

If you are subjected to a Vistani curse, you have my sincerest condolences. Do not take such a thing lightly. Find a priest, a wizard, or even a hag if you must — some way, anyway, to remove the curse as soon as possible. If you are lucky, your curse will not haunt the rest of your days. If you are unlucky... vengeance is perhaps the best you can hope for.

Monster Hunter Tactics

I cannot promise you that the following will hold true for every monster you encounter. What I *can* tell you is that the tactics outlined in this guide have saved my life more times than I care to count.

Resistances	Demons	Devils	Hags	Lycanthropes	Undead	Vampires
<i>Magic</i>	✓	✓	?			
<i>Nonmagical weapons</i>	✓	✓	?	✓	?	✓
<i>Non-silvered weapons</i>		✓	?	✓		
Acid						
Cold	✓	?	?			
Fire	✓	✓	?			
Force						
Lightning	✓					
Necrotic					✓	✓
Poison	✓	✓			✓	
Psychic						
Radiant						
Thunder						

Tactics	Demons	Devils	Hags	Lycanthropes	Undead	Vampires
Diplomacy		✓	✓	✓	?	✓
Magic weapons	✓	✓	?	✓	?	✓
Silvered weapons		✓	?	✓		
Banishment	✓	✓	✓			
Holy Water	✓	✓			✓	✓
Sunlight					✓	✓
Running Water						✓